



St Michael's
C.E. Primary School

Handwriting Progression

Last reviewed: September 2026
Next review due: September 2027



"Courage to Flourish in the Love of God"

Our Theologically Rooted Christian Vision



Courage to Flourish in the Love of God

"I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10)



*"Be strong and courageous... the Lord your God will be with you
wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)*

These biblical texts underpin our vision summary, 'Courage to Flourish in the Love of God'. Jesus' words from the New Testament describe his desire for everyone to be a full and flourishing version of their created selves, experiencing life in all its vibrant fullness, individually and in community. Our ambition is for everyone to encounter this fullness through the life and work of the school, whatever their background, beliefs or circumstances. God's words to Joshua from the Old Testament illustrate how life, and learning, can be challenging, bringing setbacks and discouragement. These words inspire us to keep on going in those circumstances, confident that God watches over us and walks beside us.

The joining of these biblical texts is meaningful for the particular circumstances of our school community. It gives coherence to our aspirational vision that will grow courage and resilience as enablers of 'life in all its fullness' for everyone. To support our vision, we have seven overarching Christian values:

COURAGE



Phillippians 4:13

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

HOPE



John 1:5

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

LOVE



1 Corinthians 13:4-8

"Love is patient and kind... it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth."

FORGIVENESS



1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us"

TRUST



Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

COMMUNITY



Hebrews 10:24

"Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good."

THANKFULNESS



1 Thessalonians 5:18

"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you"

Handwriting Progression

At St Michaels CE Primary School we believe that the ability to write legibly and appropriately is a skill children need to be able to reach and demonstrate their true potential. Through carefully structured lessons, including the Little Wandle Handwriting scheme in Reception to Year 1 and, we aim for all pupils to achieve an individual style of fluent and legible handwriting. We encourage pupils to strive to do their best and take pride in their finished work. Our intention is to make handwriting an automatic process that does not interfere with creative and mental thinking.

Handwriting is a basic skill that influences the quality of work throughout the curriculum. By the end of Key Stage 2 all pupils should have the ability to produce fluent, legible and, eventually, speedy joined-up handwriting, and to understand the different forms of handwriting used for different purposes.

EYFS

Prior to and working alongside the development of letter formation, children in the EYFS will have access to both fine and gross motor skill activities, that are both child initiated and adult supported. Nursery accelerates handwriting readiness by following a well planned curriculum that utilises Little Wandle, high quality texts and nursery rhymes. Children have fun making marks and patterns with a range of tools. The movement-based pedagogy is founded on the principle that children learn best through joyful, purposeful movement and fuses large physical movements with mark-making, helping children build the gross and fine motor strength essential for writing.

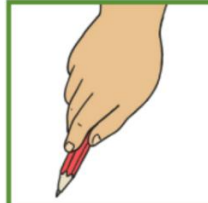
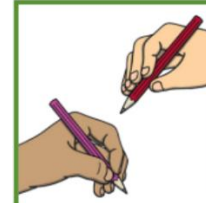
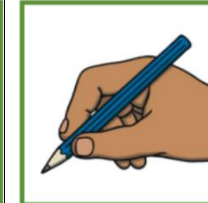
Pencil Control

Before children are explicitly taught how to form the letters of the alphabet, they develop pencil control concepts which underpin handwriting. These concepts are the different aspects which underpin the way in which children hold and manoeuvre the pencil on the page in a purposeful manner including hand preference, directionality, pressure control and shape manipulation. Practitioners use guidance from 'Let's Get Physical' to develop these skills.

Pencil Grip

How a child holds a pencil is very important when it comes to letter formation and learning to write, as a functional pencil grip will lead to efficient handwriting. The development of a child's pencil grip, however, is a gradual process as the child grows. Children in EYFS are provided with a range of mark making and writing opportunities that are both adult supported and child initiated. The children are supported to achieve an appropriate pencil grip for their level of development, leading to improved and accurate letter formation. Throughout the year, practitioners will assess the children through observation and they will identify children who may need intervention for fine motor support. Below you will find a progression grid for pencil grip development.

Grip type	Palmar Supinate Grip (fisted grip)	Digital Pronate Grip	Splayed Four- Finger Grip	Static Tripod Grip	Dynamic Tripod Grip
-----------	--	-------------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------	------------------------

Typical Age	15 – 18 months	2 – 3 years	2 – 4 years	3 – 5 years	4 – 6 years
Description	Pencil is held by the full fist and makes light marks. Movement is from the shoulder pivot and uses the whole arm	Pencil is held by all the fingers but the palm faces down towards the page. Movement comes from the wrist and uses wrist, hand and fingers	The four fingers are held on the pencil, opposite the thumb. An arch is beginning to form between the thumb and index finger. Movement is coming from the wrist.	Pencil is held by three fingers and the movement comes from the wrist More intricate mark making can take place Several variations based on finger positioning	Pencil is stable in the traditional grip The thumb and fingers leave an open space Pencil moves efficiently and therefore mark making is more intricate
Visual					

Progression in EYFS

At St Michael's, progression is intentional, and knowledge and skills are mapped out within our curriculum. This ensures that children move from early fine-motor foundations in Nursery to more secure, refined and efficient early writing skills in Reception. We have also developed a Strong Foundations document which allows for teachers to assess where children are in their development of handwriting (fine motor and gross motor skills). This has been created using The Writing Framework (2025), Strong Foundations in the First Years of School (2024) and the BDMAT Teacher Assessment Framework for Writing (written by a team of experienced writing leads and an education consultant). The outcomes for each year group are listed below.

Nursery	Reception	Year 1
Touch each finger with their thumb. Use strong and mobile wrist movements when mark marking.	Form most lower-case letters correctly: - Start and finish in the right places. - Position most letters correctly on the line.	Form all lower-case letters correctly: - Start and finish in the right places. - Position all letters correctly on the line.

Perform a range of simple cross-body movements. Hold a pencil using a static tripod grip. Attempts to write their own name using letter type shapes. Use a range of tools for a short period of time with support.	Form some capital letters correctly, (including the capital used in own name). Form all digits 0-9 correctly. Write from left to right starting from the correct place e.g. margin. Use appropriate spacing between letters in words consistently	Form all capital letters correctly.
--	---	--

Our environment and resources are sequenced so that children meet the right level of challenge at the right time, supported by the Early Excellence model of continuous → enhanced → focus activities. We ensure we are moving children from broad early fine-motor foundations to increasingly precise grip, control, posture and tool use, supported through progressively challenging provision and high-quality adult interaction.

Fine Motor Progression (Scissors, Hand Strength, Tool Control)	
Nursery	In Nursery, provision focuses on strength, stability and early control, building the essential pre-writing foundations. Children access: • Large, chunky mark-making tools (crayons, chalks, paint sticks). • Early scissor snips using <i>loop scissors</i> or those with spring action to support weaker hand muscles. • Activities that build strength: playdough, squeezing, pegging, scooping, lifting, large construction, outdoor gross-motor play. • Opportunities to develop bilateral coordination (holding/steadying with one hand, cutting or manipulating with the other).
Reception	In Reception, children move towards greater precision and control, supported through: • Standard scissors and more precise cutting tasks (curves, shapes). • Smaller mark-making implements (pencils, fine felt tips) to refine control. • Planned fine-motor challenges in continuous provision (tweezers, threading, small construction, handwriting patterns). • Explicit modelling of grip and hand dominance during focus activities.
Year One	Children apply refined fine motor control with increasing independence and stamina:

	• Confident use of standard scissors to cut accurately along straight, curved and zig-zag lines. • Regular handwriting practice using standard HB pencils with consistent pressure and control. • Strengthening tasks remain available for children who need them: dough gym, finger strength trays, pegboards, and handwriting warm-ups. • Targeted interventions for children still developing core strength, bilateral coordination or hand stability. • Increased expectation for tool use accuracy: rulers for drawing lines, sharpeners, glue sticks, folding skills, and joining techniques.
--	---

Grip Development and Pencil Hold Progression	
Nursery	• Children are not expected to use a tripod grip. Instead, the aim is strengthening hands and enabling children to explore early grips. • Chunky tools support early palmar or whole-hand grasps. • Adults model appropriate grip <i>without over-correcting prematurely</i>. • Continuous provision resourcing is chosen to develop intrinsic hand muscles needed for later handwriting.
Reception	• Staff begin to refine grip towards the dynamic tripod grip, recognising individual developmental timelines. • Pencils are thinner than in Nursery to support mature grip. • Children practise mark patterns, letter formation and handwriting habits through focus activities and continuous provision. • Adults regularly scan the environment to model grip and respond in the “teachable moment,”
Year One	• Consistent expectation for a dynamic tripod grip, with support provided where children need more time. • Adults ensure grip, tension, wrist position and paper tilt are corrected through gentle coaching. • Children demonstrate correct formation of all lowercase and capital letters using a secure, comfortable pencil hold. • Awareness of handwriting habits: correct pressure, slow-to-fast control, and reduced fatigue over a full sentence. • Interventions provided for children who still use immature grips or demonstrate wrist/hand instability.

Posture, Body Strength and Writing Readiness	
Across Nursery → Reception → Year One, the curriculum is planned to develop the whole-body stability that underpins handwriting	
Nursery	• Lots of opportunities for climbing, pushing, pulling, crawling, balancing and outdoor play. • Mark-making in large scale: floor, easels, walls, outdoor chalking—supporting shoulder and core strength. • Children often write/mark-make at vertical or large surfaces.
Reception	• Increasing expectations for table-top posture: feet on the floor, stable torso, appropriate chair height.

	• More opportunities for seated, controlled writing in small groups (focus activities). • Warm-ups used before writing sessions to maintain flexibility and reduce tension.
Year One	• Children are expected to maintain appropriate writing posture for longer periods. • Adults reinforce good seating habits: feet down, hips back, non-writing hand stabilising paper. • Warm-ups used before writing sessions to maintain flexibility and reduce tension. • Increasing stamina for writing tasks, with breaks for movement as needed.

Tool Progression	
Nursery	• Larger, thicker tools requiring less refined control. • Early scissors with support mechanisms. • Heavy, stable tools that provide proprioceptive feedback.
Reception	• Thinner pencils and pens to enable refined grip. • Standard scissors. • More complex tools such as hole punchers, staplers, sharpeners, small tweezers, clipboards and fine-brush painting. • Adults introduce, model and support new tool use as part of enhanced and focus provision.
Year One	• Confident, independent use of a full range of classroom tools. • Accuracy when drawing with rulers and using sharpeners, gluesticks and joining materials. • Introduction to handwriting lines (two-line or three-line formats). • Regular practise using handwriting books with increasing control over letter size, height and spacing.

Writing Progression:	
From Mark-Making → Formation → Application	
Nursery	• Purposeful mark-making in play (lists, drawing maps, making signs). • Early symbolic marks: lines, circles, enclosed shapes. • Beginning to assign meaning to marks. • Modelling language (“You’re drawing big circles!”) supports cognitive links.
Reception	• Systematic teaching of phonics (Little Wandle programme) and application in writing.

	• Small-group focused writing sessions that teach formation, directionality, spacing and stamina. • Provision enhancements linked to the Vehicle Text (e.g., writing speech bubbles for Jack, signs for the beanstalk). • Secure knowledge of letter families (Curly letter family, Long letter family, Bouncy letter family, Zig-zag letter family). • Introduction of writing challenges in areas of provision.
Year One	• Children write simple sentences dictated or independently, using correctly formed letters. • Application of capital letters and full stops in writing. • Increasing consistency in size, spacing and orientation on handwriting lines. • Practice sessions blend: ➤ Direct handwriting instruction ➤ Application within writing lessons ➤ Fluency and stamina practice

How Assessment Drives Progression

The Observation → Assessment → Planning cycle is used to move children forward in fine-motor and writing skills.

- Staff observe grip, tool control and mark-making in continuous provision.
- These observations inform enhancements (e.g. adding threading for weaker fingers; adding stencils or scissors challenges).
- Focus activities are planned to target gaps—for individuals or groups.
- Progress is tracked termly against Birth to 5 Matters ranges.
- Open dialogue between KS1 and EYFS team ensures smooth transition and continuity of expectations.

Mark making

Some children will experiment with what has been called ‘emergent writing’. They will draw and make marks, perhaps beginning to write single letters, their name or whole words as they notice print in books and the wider world. Children in EYFS are encouraged to access both child initiated and adult directed marking making activities to develop a positive attitude towards the development of early handwriting skills. As part of this provision, children will be encouraged to make patterns that support the development of letter formation skills. They may start to think of themselves as ‘writers’ and enjoy the feeling of conveying their ideas on paper, even if no-one else can decipher what they have written or drawn.

Children will be encouraged to make marks and form letters on different writing formats for example, lines, plain paper and whiteboards. This is to consolidate and apply early writing skills. Most children will be forming letters correctly by the end of Reception using different writing formats, for example on plain paper, whiteboards and lined paper. Regardless of which format they are writing on, positive handwriting habits will be recognised and celebrated.

Foundation Letter/Shape formation

Children in EYFS are taught how to correctly form and orientate letters. Through the development of gross and fine motor skills, the development of mark making skills and the direct teaching of letter formation, by the end of Reception, most children will be able to form letters correctly. Some children may find achieving this expectation challenging. Those children will be supported with targeted and appropriate intervention. To support the teaching of correct formation of lower-case letters, letters are grouped into 'families' according to how they are formed:

- Curly letter family
- Long letter family
- Bouncy letter family
- Zig-zag letter family

Letter formation phrases are listed below in their families:

Unit 2: Curly letter family

Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase	Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase
	Curl around the cat.		Around the queen's face, down her robe and a flick at the end.
	Around the astronaut's helmet and down into space.		Around the elephant's eye and curl down its trunk.
	Around the duck's body, up to its head and down to its feet.		Down the snake from head to tail.
	Around the goat's face and curl under its chin.		Down the flamingo to its foot and across its wings.
	All around the octopus.		

Unit 3: Long letter family

Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase	Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase
	Down the lollipop stick.		Down the jellyfish and dot its head.
	Down the iguana and dot the leaf.		Down and around the umbrella and back to the ground.
	Down the tiger and across its neck.		Down, around the yo-yo and curl around the string.

Unit 4: Bouncy letter family

Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase	Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase
	Down, up and over the mouse's ears.		Down the bear's back, up and around its tummy.
	Down, up and over the net.		Down the penguin's back, up and around its head.
	From the cloud to the ground and over the rainbow.		Down, up and over the helicopter.

Unit 5: Zig-zag letter family

Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase	Letter mnemonic	Formation phrase
	Down to the bottom of the volcano and back up to the top.		Across the top of the zebra's head, zig-zag down its neck and along.
	Down and up and down and up the waves.		Down the kite, up to the top corner and down to the bottom corner.
	From the top, across the box to the bottom. From the top again, across the box to the bottom.		

Handwriting Position

The Little Wandle 'Ready to Write' checklist ensures children are well prepared to start handwriting with confidence and control. The children are taught and reminded of four elements prior to starting their handwriting lesson.

Posture	☒
Pencil grip	☒
Paper position	☒
Pressure	☒

Posture



- **Feet** are flat on the floor or supported on a wide, stable raised surface.
- **Knees** form a 90 degrees angle, with about two fingers' space behind the knees to prevent pressure on the lower thighs.
- **Hips** are positioned at approximately 90 degrees, with the back fully supported by the chair.
- **Seat** position with the back against the chair maintaining a small gap (about the width of a fist) between the stomach and the table, so there is sufficient space to breathe comfortably.

• **Table and chair height** should allow the forearms to rest comfortably on the surface – without leaning forward (too low) or raising the shoulders (too high).

• **Work surface** must be clean, smooth and clear of clutter to promote proper hand and arm placement and allow arms to move freely to write.

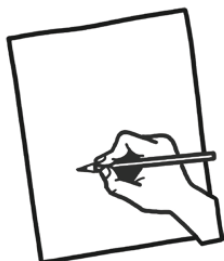
Pencil Grip



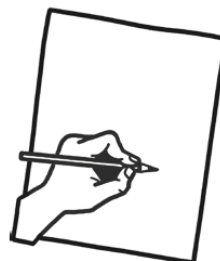
Children need to learn how to hold their pencil correctly from the outset, as grip affects the flow, speed and overall quality of handwriting. Without a proper grip, children's hands can tire more quickly, their writing can become harder to read and they may struggle to write for extended periods – an essential skill as they progress through school.

Paper Position

For right-handers: Position the paper slightly to the right. Tilt the paper so that the top left corner angles downward to the left.



For left-handers: Position the paper slightly to the left. Tilt the paper so that the top right corner angles downward to the right.



Pressure



As children learn to write, the pressure they apply with a pencil often varies based on their developmental stage and the nature of the task. With practice and experience, most children naturally figure out the appropriate amount of pressure to use. Excessive pencil pressure can cause hand fatigue and slow writing, while too little pressure can make handwriting faint and hard to read.

Supporting Left-Handed Writers

For left-handed children, mastering handwriting can present unique challenges, owing to the way they naturally position their hand and write across the page. Supporting left-handed children in handwriting is about understanding their challenges and providing practical, positive solutions. With thoughtful support and simple adjustments, left-handed children flourish in their handwriting skills. We support them by:

- Seating left-handed children on the left side of shared desks and ensuring they have enough elbow room.
- Support pupils to develop a comfortable and effective page position; paper placed to the left of the pupil and page slanted downwards to the right. This helps to ensure they can see their writing and avoid a hooked wrist.
- Teaching children to hold the pencil with their tripod grip slightly higher above the tip to enable visibility and reduce smudging.
- Provide suitable writing tools such as a left-handed scissors.
- Support good wrist and hand posture - teaching children to ensure their wrist is in a straight line following the line of their arm.

Letter Join Progression

Once children begin Year 2, Letter Join is introduced as a structured programme with a strong emphasis on consistent modelling and regular practice throughout. Pupils are taught to hold a pencil and form letters and numerals correctly from the very beginning. Building stamina, pupils learn to write with increasing confidence and speed while still taking pride in their presentation as they develop a clear, legible and fluent handwriting style.