

Appendix 4 Handwriting

On the hottest day of the year in 2013, we visited St George's Primary School in Battersea, a school that had been transformed from what had been described by Ofsted as "utterly woeful" to "outstanding". Certainly, all that we saw on that day was outstanding, not least the enthusiasm of the children for learning. One thing that had particularly impressed us was the quality of the children's handwriting by the end of their reception year, not just one child's but all the children's.

We were so impressed not just by the handwriting but by the children's joy in their achievement that we interviewed the reception teacher, Matt Custance, to find out the thinking behind their approach. He began by explaining the difference it has made to one girl:

We make sure that the handwriting is always outstanding. The reason for this is that now this child can go back and check her work. If her writing was not of a standard where she could read her work she wouldn't be able to check and correct and she would get a bit lost. But because it is so clear, and the finger spaces are so clear, she can correct it.

To make our writing outstanding we start in nursery, even though the children come in way below National averages, we make sure that the children start by forming the letters correctly right from the first day in September.

All the adults are on board and they are all trained in exactly the same way so that no one is showing them a different way of forming that sound as a letter. We then move on to tramlines showing children exactly where the letters sit on the lines.

The other thing that we do to make sure that they have got outstanding handwriting is family learning. So the parents are invited in and we actually teach the parents how to form those sounds, which they really enjoy, alongside their child.

As you can see, good handwriting is taught systematically throughout the early years so that it is not an issue later on as all the children have good cursive handwriting by the time they leave Year 1. This not only saves hours and hours of effort later on but also saves the children from getting into poor handwriting habits that can lead to permanent problems since practice of the wrong approach can make permanent not perfect. As the children's writing begins to develop in the reception class, they are given writing books with tramlines to support them, alongside A4 whiteboards with tramlines and matching tramlines on the flip chart paper. When we looked at where these were available from, we felt the price to be prohibitive. We have now managed to source them at a more reasonable price. Contact: Mark Oldershaw, mark@theprintsite.com, www.theprintsite.com, 07932 750989.

Many schools have found that using this approach has made a big difference quickly and that children who thought that they could not write neatly are finding that with a bit of systematic focus they can, which has greatly improved their sense of being able to write well and allows them to focus on content rather than process.