

## Teaching Little Wandle Handwriting in Reception

Little Wandle Handwriting lessons in Reception focus on:

- correct pencil grip
- correct starting point for each letter
- letter formation and orientation
- families of letters
- capital letters
- reinforcing the link between letters and sounds.

The correct formation of lower-case letters is the key priority in Reception handwriting. Lower-case letter formation is taught in letter families in Units 2 to 5. It is then practised in Unit 6, when capital letters are introduced, and further embedded in Unit 7 by practising with digraphs and trigraphs.

### Little Wandle Handwriting programme expectations for Reception

By the end of Reception, children should be able to hold their pencil with correct pencil grip, form lower-case letters beginning at the correct starting point and follow the correct direction. They should be beginning to form capital letters correctly.

### Lesson organisation in Reception

Handwriting lessons need to be timetabled and prioritised in Reception. We recommend four short lessons of 15 minutes each. There are different options for the way lessons can be organised.

#### Option 1

Handwriting is taught in a small group of approximately six children of similar ability at a table, with a teacher or teaching assistant who has been fully trained, enabling close monitoring and intervention to ensure the children develop the correct habits right from the start.

Suggested time: 15 minutes at tables.

## Option 2

The 'Revisit and review' and 'Teach and practise' parts of the lesson are taught to half the class, with the children sitting at tables. The teacher circulates to support the children during the 'Practise and apply' part of the lesson.

Suggested time: 15 minutes at tables.

## Option 3

The 'Revisit and review' and 'Teach and practise' parts of the lesson are taught to the whole class. The teacher then works with one group at a time, seated at the table, revisiting the modelling and guiding the children in the 'Practise and apply' part of the lesson, while closely observing and providing support as needed.

Suggested time: 10 minutes on the carpet; 5 minutes for each group at tables.

## Option 4

A whole-class lesson with children seated at tables, supported where possible by a teaching assistant or additional adult to help correct pencil grip and letter formation as needed.

Suggested time: 15 minutes at tables.

## Teaching routines for handwriting

Consistent routines and expectations for behaviour need to be established and reinforced right from the beginning of Reception. This includes listening carefully, returning to the table promptly, lining up quietly, following instructions, and handling resources responsibly.

You may wish to practise the four Ps in the 'Ready to write' checklist before you begin handwriting lessons – see the information in the Handwriting document 'Little Wandle Handwriting' and watch the videos 'Posture' and 'Pencil grip'.

It is especially important that children develop the correct pencil grip from the start so that bad habits are not allowed to form. Establishing correct habits early helps prevent the formation of poor writing habits and promotes consistency and confidence from the outset.

Use the Little Wandle Handwriting programme 'Ready to write' rhyme as part of your preparation for teaching and in handwriting lessons:

### 'Ready to write' rhyme

Let's sit up straight, feet nice and flat,  
Tilt your paper – just like that!  
Pinch your pencil, give it a flip,  
Check your hold and then your grip.  
Now we can begin to write,  
But not too hard and not too light.



## Using the pupil workbooks

There are four pupil workbooks to support the Handwriting lessons in Reception.

- Workbook 1: Patterns
- Workbook 2: Lower-case letters
- Workbook 3: Capital letters
- Workbook 4: Digraphs and trigraphs

Children enter school with varying motor skill proficiency and develop handwriting skills at different rates. The workbooks are thoughtfully designed to be flexible, to accommodate children's needs. **For children needing extra support, scaffolding is provided through tracing letters before progressing to independent writing. Children with more advanced pencil control and letter formation skills can bypass tracing and practise forming letters independently after teacher modelling.** Additionally, the blank lined pages at the back of the workbook and the **Letter formation practice sheets** from the Little Wandle website can be used to provide further guidance and modelled examples.

The workbooks contain line guides to support children and to demonstrate appropriate letter size and correct positioning. The darker baselines will support children with positioning the letters on the line. There are fainter lines to further guide children who are at the stage of being able to control the size of their letters. However, in Reception, the main emphasis should be on ensuring children start their letters in the right place and follow the correct direction to form each letter accurately. There will be a greater focus on sizing and spacing of letters in Year 1.

## Practising patterns

Unit 1 of the programme prepares Reception children for letter formation through carefully planned motor development activities and practice of patterns. This will give the children the chance to develop the correct pencil grip, develop pressure on the page and the flow of writing. Children will practise the different types of strokes and curves they will need to use in letter formation, including horizontal and vertical lines, up and down curves, crosses and zig-zags. See the Handwriting document 'Unit guidance: Practising patterns' for further information about the aims of each pattern type.

## Teaching letter families

Once the children have completed the Unit 1 lessons, learned how to hold their pencil correctly and can demonstrate control with tracing over and copying a pattern, they can begin Unit 2. In Units 2 to 5, letters are taught in families based on similar movement patterns, starting with curly letters, followed by long letters, bouncy letters and ending with zig-zag letters. More detail is given in the progression table in the Handwriting document 'Pace and progression'.

## Links to phonics lessons

The Little Wandle Handwriting programme uses the familiar formation phrases from Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised to help the children to remember the direction of the letter (see the Handwriting documents 'Lower case letter formation phrases' and 'Capital letter formation phrases'). Letters in the workbooks are set in the familiar Sassoon Infant font from the Little Wandle phonics programme, with dots to show the starting point and arrows to show a directional stroke. There are flicks at the end of some letters to prepare the children for joining in Year 2.

It is preferable for children to have learned letters and their corresponding phonemes in phonics lessons before they are taught them in handwriting lessons. Children on track with the Little Wandle core programme progression and starting the Handwriting programme in Reception Autumn 1 will have been taught all of the graphemes before they encounter them in handwriting, with the exception of 'q'. For the letter 'q', we suggest that you introduce the sound briefly (kw) and explain that the grapheme will be covered in an upcoming phonics lesson.

## Resources for teaching

To maximise time efficiency, all resources should be prepared in advance of the lesson and easily accessible. To teach the handwriting lessons, you will need:

- a lined tripod whiteboard and marker
- sharpened pencils
- pencil grips if needed
- pupil workbooks
- the large Phase 2 grapheme card for the letters being taught and reviewed (Units 2 to 5)
- the large grapheme card for the letters being taught or reviewed (for Units 2 to 5)
- the lesson template for the lesson type being taught
- lower-case letter formation phrases (Unit 2 onwards)
- capital letter formation phrases (for Unit 6)
- unit guidance (Unit 2 onwards).

We also recommend the **Little Wandle Wall Frieze for Reception: Phase 2** (available from Collins) which shows the lower-case and capital letters.

# Engaging parents

## Home learning

Handwriting can be effectively reinforced at home but it is essential that parents are guided to support and reinforce the letter formation taught in school. Some children will come to school able to write their names but may have poor pencil grip and poor letter formation. It is important that these are corrected straight away. (See also the paragraph 'Writing names' on page 3 of the Handwriting document 'Introduction to teaching handwriting').

Consider organising parent workshops to introduce the handwriting approach used and to demonstrate correct letter formation. You could include a section on handwriting in phonics workshops for parents. However, it is important to tell parents that handwriting is taught in letter families and the reason for this. (It is easier for children to learn correct letter formation when letters with similar shapes and strokes are taught in groups.) The Little Wandle **Letter formation practice sheets** can also be sent home to further support correct letter formation.