

Year 6 and above Handwriting Advice

Children in primary school should have been supported to develop effective handwriting skills in line with their learning abilities. If difficulties persist into Year 6 and secondary school despite targeted intervention, education staff should support young people to use an alternative recording method, such as typing or assistive technology such as, Clicker / Docs Plus, dictation and / or using a scribe.

Introducing an alternative recording method can empower children and young people to express themselves, evidence their learning and increase their overall confidence; it can have a direct impact on their educational achievement.

The National Handwriting Association have information and resources to support good practice in considering alternative recording methods: <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk>



Identifying the need for alternative recording methods

It is recommended that educators watch a child **copying using their best writing, copying at speed and free writing** about their own ideas. This will help identify difficulties with handwriting **legibility, speed** and / or **endurance**. Similar activities can be repeated with alternative recording methods and the results compared to handwriting performance.



A Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting 'DASH' can be used by education staff to identify whether a child's handwriting speed and legibility is appropriate for their age and learning abilities.



Agree with the child or young person, their parents and school when and how the alternative recording method should be used— consider different subjects, homework, test and exam situations.

Review regularly with the child or young person how the alternative recording method is working for them— initially this may need to be daily or weekly.

Typing as a viable recording method

Typing, dictating or using a scribe reduces the motor demands in the recording process, which can allow a child or young person to better use higher-order cognitive skills, for things like spelling and composition. Consider:

In order to **write a letter** we need to:

- Hold a pencil with a suitable grip,
- apply the correct amount of pressure to the pencil and on the paper,
- visualise what the letter looks like,
- remember the motor pattern that makes the letter,
- effectively use the small movements of the muscles of the wrist, fingers and thumb to draw the letter,
- monitor whether we have made the correct letter size, left the correct amount of space between letters and words and placed letters neatly on a line.

In order to **type a letter** we need to:

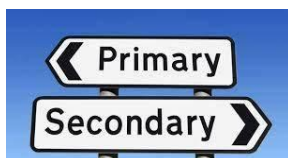
- Visualise what the letter looks like,
- locate the letter on the keyboard,
- isolate a finger,
- press the key.
- When typing the page doesn't move around, letters are always formed, spaced and placed on the line correctly.



As a general guide, when a student can **copy type at 30 words per minute** with 90% accuracy for 5 minutes, this can be viewed as an effective recording method for their work.

If a student can **free-type at 15-20 words per minute**, they should be able to keep up with their own thoughts and what their teacher is saying.

Supporting Typing Skills



It's important to develop skills like typing or general IT skills so that an alternative recording method is secure going into secondary - this means supporting skills practise and using the alternative recording method in class and at home.

Accessibility

Children and young people will need access to appropriate equipment in school, and at home. This may include a desk top computer with keyboard and mouse, a laptop, a touch screen or other assistive technology.



'Ease of Access' features in Windows can help I.T. accessibility. For example, by increasing text size, changing the colour of screen backgrounds, changing the size, speed or colour of the text cursor/pointer, or using sticky keys. Windows also offers dictation software.

Touch Typing

Touch typing skills help increase typing speed but most students will need support and practice to develop these. The optimum time for intervention to support typing skills is in upper primary. Aim for 10-15 mins typing skills practise every day for 10 weeks then review progress.



In typing skills practise, ensure real words are used straight away not letter sequences. Steer away from typing games like DanceMat typing – these are good for building speed after secure keyboarding skills are developed. Recommended programmes:



- ➔ Touch Type - Read and Spell <https://www.readandspell.com/>
- ➔ English Type Junior or Senior <https://englishtype.com/>
- ➔ Nessy Fingers <https://www.nessy.com/uk/product/nessy-fingers/>

Exam Access Arrangements (EAA) are agreed adjustments to help reduce disadvantage in exams for children with additional needs. Examples of EAA might be:

- Extra time to complete exams
- Taking supervised rest breaks
- Using assistive technology like a laptop or screen reader

Schools should apply for access arrangements well in advance of exams and students need training to ensure they can effectively use EAA. Regulations and guidance for EAA can be found here www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance/

Clicker and Docs Plus

Clicker (primary schools) or DocsPlus (secondary schools) are assistive technology software programmes. DocsPlus can support young people who struggle with their handwriting when they take on exams, the exam mode is JCQ compliant and allows older pupils to access and record their answers to GCSEs and other exams.

If a school is new to using Clicker it might be helpful to watch the Clicker tour video and look at the Clicker Basics page on the Crick Software website to give a good overview of the features available: <https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/clicker-training/tutorials/win-mac/get-started>
<https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/clicker-training/clicker-basics>

There is also a full training guide with comprehensive information if required:
<https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/clicker-training/training-guide/win-mac> Schools can arrange to meet with a CrickSoftware representative via a customer care meeting to discuss how to embed Clicker in your school and ask questions. Link:
<https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/customer-care-meetings>

Once staff are familiar with the features of the software they can begin thinking about which ones might be helpful for a specific child. Further support from a Crick Software rep can be requested. It can be helpful to trial one feature at a time so not to overwhelm the child or the staff helping them.

Top tips for Clicker and Docs Plus:

- Ensure all technical aspects are set up before introducing them to a child e.g. does Clicker open successfully, how can the child save their work and how can they print? It may help to involve your IT team to problem solve if needed. You may need to consider purchasing headphones if the child is using the read aloud feature of Clicker. Technical support can be found here:
<https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/support/contact>
- It is useful to have a member of staff who is upskilled and takes a lead on Clicker. The software can be overwhelming to staff so having a key person can be helpful for staff members or the child to go to.
- It can be helpful to spend time upskilling the child so they are as independent as possible e.g. do they know where the laptop/device is stored, can they access it without having to ask, do they know how/where to charge the device? It needs to be as easy as getting a book off the shelf like other children would otherwise these things can be a barrier to success. Also, skills such as logging into the laptop, opening Clicker, saving, printing etc. may need to be taught.

Supporting Neurodiverse Learners

Schools can consider how neurodiverse young people may find handwriting difficult and can try introducing simple strategies to support learners. Educators can access training to consider handwriting difficulties for neurodivergent children and strategies to help here:

<https://sway.office.com/ksMkgPQMSWW26NYn?ref=Link>

The 'Menu of Technology' gives strategies to consider and trial in the classroom under the 'areas of need & support' tab: <https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Partners/Inclusion-Task-Force/Guidance-and-Resources> –.

Onward referral of handwriting difficulties

If the above strategies have been tried and handwriting difficulties persist, health professionals can refer to community therapy services. Referrals will be accepted for children with handwriting difficulties if they have at least 2 other areas of gross or fine motor skill difficulties. Referrals are not accepted for children with only handwriting difficulties as this is most likely due to specific learning needs rather than motor difficulties.

**Referrals are accepted if a child has a physical disability that is directly affecting their ability to handwrite or use technology, such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.*

If schools recommend to a parent or health professional that a child is referred to therapy services, they should indicate all areas of motor difficulty, what handwriting intervention they have tried and what strategies have helped.