



Bracken Hill School

Handwriting Policy

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Policy Type: Whole School

This policy is reviewed biennially to ensure compliance with current regulations

The Governors of the school recognise that all staff play a vital role in the achievement of high standards and in providing our pupils with the best opportunities matched to their needs.

INTENT

At Bracken Hill School, handwriting and mark making are viewed as essential components of communication, literacy, and independence. Our intent is to provide an inclusive, developmental approach that recognises the diverse needs of our learners across the Explorers, Adventurers, and Pioneers pathways.

We recognise that handwriting development is not linear and, for many of our pupils, progresses through sensory, physical, and communication stages rather than age-related expectations.

We aim to:

- Provide a progressive and inclusive approach to handwriting and mark making that reflects individual developmental stages.
- Value all forms of recording as meaningful communication, including mark making, symbols, and technology-supported writing.
- Develop the physical foundations for writing, including gross and fine motor skills, sensory regulation, and coordination.
- Support pupils to develop functional writing skills that promote independence and preparation for adulthood.
- Ensure handwriting is purposeful and meaningful, linked to communication, phonics, and real-life contexts.
- Provide a multi-sensory and engaging curriculum, supporting pupils to access writing through a range of approaches.
- Align handwriting development with phonics, early reading, and communication strategies (including Makaton and symbols).
- Prepare pupils for accreditation pathways, including OCR Entry Level English, AQA Unit Awards, and Edexcel Functional Skills, where appropriate.
- Ensure that older pupils, particularly within Adventurers and Pioneers pathways, access age-appropriate writing approaches, moving away from early developmental activities (e.g. Dough Disco) where not appropriate, and focusing instead on functional and purposeful writing.

Our approach ensures that all pupils develop the most effective and meaningful way to record their ideas and communicate with the world around them.

IMPLEMENTATION

Handwriting and mark making are implemented through a structured, multi-sensory, and differentiated approach, embedded across the curriculum and tailored to each pathway.

Pathway Approach

Explorers Pathway Focus: Early developmental foundations of writing.

Pupils are supported through:

- Sensory exploration and early mark making (e.g. sand, paint, foam)
- Large-scale movements to develop shoulder and arm strength
- Tactile and kinaesthetic experiences
- Cause-and-effect exploration

Key approaches include:

- Multi-sensory environments
- Continuous provision opportunities
- Activities such as Dough Disco and sensory circuits

Adventurers Pathway Focus: Developing control, intention, and early writing skills.

Pupils are supported to:

- Develop pencil control and fine motor skills
- Form letters and simple words
- Engage in structured writing tasks
- Use writing for simple communication

Approaches include:

- Structured fine motor programmes
- Phonics-linked writing (where relevant)
- Scaffolded writing opportunities
- Gradual progression away from early sensory activities where appropriate

Pioneers Pathway Focus: Functional and purposeful writing.

Pupils are supported to:

- Write sentences and short texts
- Record ideas across the curriculum
- Complete real-life writing tasks (forms, lists, messages)
- Develop independence in written communication

For older pupils (KS4/KS5) writing is linked to accreditation outcomes, including:

- AQA Unit Awards
- OCR Entry Level English
- Edexcel Functional Skills

With emphasis on functional literacy and independence using technology where appropriate.

Important:

Older pupils within Adventurers and Pioneers pathways will not typically access early developmental programmes such as Dough Disco, unless identified as a specific need. Instead, they engage in age-appropriate, motor skill activities.

Key Teaching Approaches

Gross Motor Development

We prioritise gross motor skills as the foundation for handwriting for students that need it:

- Movement circuits and sensory circuits
- Climbing, crawling, and balancing activities
- Crossing-the-midline exercises
- Outdoor learning opportunities

Fine Motor Development

Opportunities to develop these skills, where appropriate, include:

- Threading, cutting, and construction activities
- Use of tools (tweezers, pegs)
- Tracing and patternmaking

Multi-Sensory Writing

Writing is taught using wider resources, to promote engagement, for those pupils who need it:

- Sand, foam, chalk, and paint
- Tactile and visual experiences
- Kinaesthetic activities

Phonics and Writing Integration

- Writing is linked to Phonics sessions where appropriate
- Pupils practise: Letter formation, writing sounds and simple words, Applying phonics knowledge

Core Word and Communication-Based Writing

- “Write it” opportunities embedded within communication sessions
- Links between language, symbols, and writing
- Functional and meaningful contexts

Writing Tools and Adaptations

We provide:

- Adapted pencils and grips
- Slanted boards and specialist equipment
- Alternative tools (chalk, paint, digital devices)

Technology to Support Writing

Where appropriate (to ensure accessibility and independence):

- Tablets and symbol-supported software
- Keyboards and adapted devices
- Speech-to-text technology

Learning Environment

- Print-rich classrooms
- Accessible writing resources
- Working walls and visual supports
- Opportunities for independent writing

Accreditation-Focused Writing Approaches

For pupils in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, handwriting and recording are explicitly linked to accreditation outcomes, ensuring that writing skills are purposeful, relevant, and support future pathways.

Teaching approaches include:

- Structured opportunities to practise writing skills required for:
 - AQA Unit Awards
 - OCR Entry Level English
 - Edexcel Functional Skills English
- Explicit teaching of:
 - Writing for different purposes (e.g. forms, letters, lists, emails)
 - Sentence construction and organisation of ideas
 - Functional spelling and vocabulary linked to real-life contexts
- Use of scaffolded frameworks (e.g. writing frames, sentence starters, modelled examples) to support success at different levels.
- Opportunities to apply handwriting and recording skills in real-life and vocational contexts, such as:
 - Completing forms
 - Writing messages
 - Creating CV-style profiles
 - Workplace-related tasks

This approach ensures that handwriting and writing development are not only developmental but also clearly linked to meaningful outcomes and recognised qualifications, preparing pupils for adulthood, further education, and employment.

Assessment and Monitoring

- Ongoing formative assessment
- Observations and work scrutiny
- Individual progress tracked via Solar
- External accreditations (AQA Unit Awards, OCR Entry Level English, Edexcel Functional Skills English)

IMPACT

The impact of our handwriting and mark making approach is demonstrated through pupils' increased ability to communicate, record, and express themselves in ways that are meaningful and appropriate to their needs.

This is evidenced by:

- Improved motor skills, including strength, coordination, and control
- Increased ability to make purposeful and controlled marks
- Development of recognisable letter formation where appropriate
- Greater use of writing as a tool for communication
- Increased independence in recording ideas, using handwriting or alternative methods
- Successful engagement with phonics and early writing
- Progress towards and achievement of accreditations, including:
 - AQA Unit Awards
 - OCR Entry Level English
 - Edexcel Functional Skills
- Increased confidence and willingness to engage in writing activities
- Pupils selecting appropriate tools and methods independently
- Development of functional literacy skills that support adulthood

For some pupils, this will result in conventional handwriting. For others, success is measured through the effective use of alternative communication and recording methods.

Ultimately, pupils leave Bracken Hill School with the ability to:

- Communicate effectively
- Record ideas in a way that suits their needs
- Apply writing skills in real-life contexts
- Develop independence and confidence for the future

EVALUATION

Policy dated March 2026

This policy will be reviewed biennially in line with the English policy review cycle.