

Guidance on identifying writing difficulties and supporting Children & Young People who have persistent difficulties with acquiring writing skills

This is a guidance document for advice and information to support Hertfordshire schools, settings and families in recognising and meeting the needs of learners with writing difficulties. This guidance has been collaboratively coproduced through consultation with representatives including: Headteachers, Educational Psychologists, Specific Learning Difficulties Advisory Teachers and Parents.

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1. Writing

Writing is an important tool for communication. In schools it is the main method for students to communicate what they have learned. Writing involves a wide range of skills including; motor skills, core strength, awareness of letter-sound relationships (Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondences), spelling, grammatical skills, processing abilities, abstract thinking, emotional regulation, planning and reviewing¹.

The skills involved tend to be divided into two areas: composition and transcription skills².

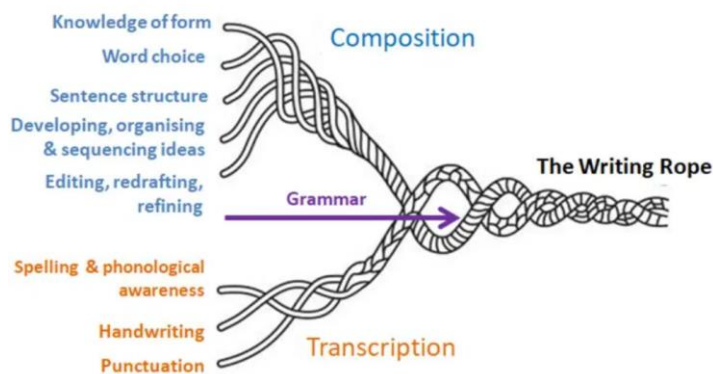


Image credit: [The Writing Rope: managing cognitive load, metacognition and developing effective writers – Little Miss DHT thinks about... \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.wordpress.com/)

Composition encompasses the generation of ideas, planning and reviewing of work.

- For example, *sentence construction* requires formulating an idea, retrieving words from memory, sequencing the words, and then a knowledge of acceptable grammar³.

Transcription involves the skills of spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

These two areas interact and rely on each other, for example improving fluency in transcription skills can improve compositional skills. Fluency in transcription means the learner has to focus less on the skills of forming letters and spelling words correctly, which frees up mental space and demand for them so they can focus on content, meaning and comprehension⁴.

Language and language processing

Writing skills stem from language and communication skills⁵, including receptive and expressive language, listening, attention, and vocabulary knowledge⁶. Early language skill development is important for the development of writing skills^{7 8}. There is a strong link between the quality of spoken language and the quality of written language. However, some CYP may be able to explain their ideas verbally with clarity and fluency but experience

¹ Dunsmuir & Clifford, 2003

² Dunsmuir, Thomas, May, Monroe, Roiter & Wellman, 2008

³ Saddler, 2013

⁴ Baker, Gersten & Graham, 2003

⁵ Early Education, 2012

⁶ The Communication Trust, 2018

⁷ Castles, Rastle & Nation, 2018

⁸ Snowling & Hulme, 2011

difficulties when putting these in writing; other CYP may struggle to organise their thoughts verbally and this may be reflected in their writing.

Spelling

Spelling is interlinked to reading and therefore a lot of the skills needed for reading are needed for spelling too. For instance, phonological skills (awareness of syllables, rhyme, alliteration etc in speech) play a key role in spelling⁹. When, and if, a child or young person (CYP) understands the relationship between spellings and sounds, they can then begin applying this to their writing.

As well as phonological awareness, a number of other factors have been shown to be important in learning how to spell, these include: experience and an awareness of print, an awareness of words and their parts, and being able to use the visual parts of a word to identify them from memory¹⁰.

A knowledge of the structure of words and their parts, such as suffixes, prefixes, and base words, can help pupils to make the link between spelling and meaning¹¹ e.g. 'ed' at the end of a word commonly meaning in the past tense.

Some pupils with writing difficulties may be able spell words in isolation but their spelling may deteriorate in longer pieces of writing due to the complexity of the task.

Motor skills

Children and young people need gross and fine motor strength and skills to support writing. Core muscles support posture which is needed for handwriting. Fine motor skills is a term used to describe the intricate and detailed movements of the hand needed to manipulate, control and use objects and produce legible, neat handwriting. A CYP (child or young person) with poor fine motor skills may struggle with these tasks.

For handwriting skills to develop, it is necessary for an individual to have enough strength in the small muscles in the hand to manipulate objects, to have good eye-hand coordination skills and visual processing. These skills, along with sustaining a good posture whilst sitting (gross motor skills) on an appropriately sized chair and table, are needed to be able to control the hands with precision when steadying, manipulating and gripping a pen or pencil to form shapes or letters.

Learning to write is a complicated process and CYP may acquire skills at different rates. Slow progress does not necessarily mean a CYP has a significant underlying difficulty, it may indicate a delay in acquiring skills instead requiring further teaching and practice.

In every class, several children are likely to be **left-handed**. However, the letter formation used for cursive handwriting has evolved from the majority right-handed perspective, meaning that left-handers often take longer to develop fluent and legible handwriting and neat presentation. Extra thought will need to be given to seating arrangements, posture, paper position and pencil grasp and to additional resources that could support these eg pencil grips, writing slope. (see appendix 4 for further information)

⁹ Goswami & Bryant, 2016

¹⁰ Woolfson, 2011

¹¹ Castles, Rastle & Nation, 2018

Some children/ young people may have underlying medical conditions that affects their ability to develop fine motor movements and may even cause pain. Conditions could include hypermobility, cerebral palsy, developmental delay, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, for example.

Emotional factors affecting writing

Children's emotional regulation skills have an important effect on their ability to read, write and spell. Emotional regulation can be defined as an individual's ability to modulate an emotion or set of emotions. Emotional regulation can require conscious monitoring, where the individual may recognise how different behaviours or cognitive appraisals can affect their emotional state and how to manage that emotion in a way which is appropriate to the situation¹². Difficulties with emotional regulation can affect children's and young people's learning and the emotional impact of handwriting difficulties should not be overlooked.

Problems with handwriting can cause heightened awareness, emotional distress¹³ and anxiety which can affect an individual's self-image, perception of ability, and relationships with peers¹⁴. Children and adults with handwriting difficulties often become frustrated with the task of writing (and spelling), and their difficulties can lead to task refusal¹⁵. The struggle to spell words correctly or produce legible handwriting means that the child can become distracted from the task itself¹⁶. Children or young people who have difficulties with writing, but no other learning needs can be misunderstood or be deemed to be unmotivated.

Other factors that can have an effect on developing writing skills can include:

- cognitive challenges: for example, slow processing speed, visual processing, developmental delay;
- developmental language disorder
- environmental: for example, lack of appropriate early learning opportunities
- difficulties with executive functioning including attention and working memory
- visual or hearing difficulties;
- other co-occurring difficulties e.g. ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia / Developmental Coordination Difficulties (DCD), ASD

This list is not exhaustive but indicates a range of difficulties that can impact on writing. It is important not to underestimate the impact these difficulties can have.

It is acknowledged that sometimes the term dysgraphia can be used to describe writing difficulties but there is currently an insufficient evidence base and no commonly agreed assessment criteria for this to be recognised as a distinct and isolated difficulty. Therefore, this is not a term used by professionals in Hertfordshire. Instead, Hertfordshire professionals use a more personalised 'needs and strengths' approach to the identification of writing difficulties in order to ensure that intervention and support is appropriately tailored to the individual.

¹² American Psychological Association, 2020

¹³ Macklem, 2010

¹⁴ Feder et al, 2000, Sassoon, 1997

¹⁵ The Dyslexia Association

¹⁶ McCloskey & Rapp, 2017


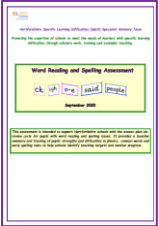

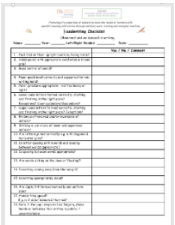
2. Assessment of Writing skills and difficulties

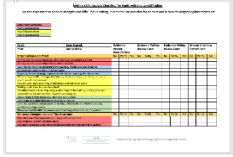
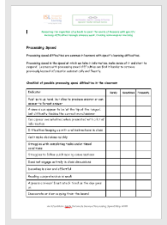
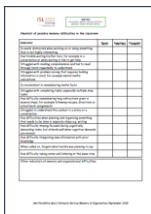
It is important that assessments take into account the different factors that could impact on a CYP's progress in writing skills. To inform teaching, it is important to know what the CYP can do and what the next steps are to know what to teach the CYP next.

When a CYP is not making expected progress with writing and / or is experiencing pain or anxiety, teachers or SENCOs are best placed to complete an accurate school-based assessment in order to inform an appropriate intervention to address those difficulties.

There is a range of assessment materials that can be used effectively by schools to pinpoint strengths and difficulties linked to writing available on the [Local Offer](#).

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Specialist Advisory Service Assessments to identify difficulties with aspects of writing

Assessment	What it assesses	Who to use it with
<p>Phonological assessment</p> 	Phonological awareness.	Pupils with weak spelling skills to check that they do not have underlying phonological difficulties that need addressing too.
<p>Baseline phonics/ common word assessment</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters & Sounds phonics phases – application to spelling words. First 100 Words spellings and Year 1 & 2 common exception word spellings. 	Pupils with weak spelling skills.
<p>Expressive language checklist</p> 	Expressive language.	Pupils with weak spoken language which can affect their writing e.g. sentence structure, tenses, pronouns, vocabulary, pronunciation.
<p>Handwriting checklist</p> 	Writing process /product i.e. posture, paper position, pencil grasp/pressure, letter formation/ spacing/position.	Pupils with weak letter formation, spacing, joining, position of letters on the line/from margin.

<p><u>Writing assessment</u></p> 	<p>Analyses which aspects of the writing process are causing difficulty.</p>	<p>Pupils with weak writing e.g. poor sequencing of ideas, awareness of audience, limited vocabulary range/language structure.</p>
<p><u>Processing speed checklist</u></p> 	<p>Indicates areas of processing difficulties in the classroom.</p>	<p>Pupils who work slowly, orally and/ or in writing.</p>
<p><u>Working memory checklist</u></p> 	<p>Indicates areas of working memory difficulties in the classroom.</p>	<p>Pupils who find it difficult to organise ideas and forget what they need / plan to include.</p>

3. Accessing External Services

For those children whose writing difficulties are persistent and not responsive to the evidence-based interventions delivered over time, following the assess – plan – do - review model, more specific assessments of strength and needs and bespoke interventions (based on these assessments) may be required.

“Where a pupil continues to make less than expected progress, despite evidence-based support and interventions that are matched to the pupil’s area of need, the school should consider involving specialists, including those secured by the school itself or from outside agencies.” (6.58 SEN Code of Practice 2015)

“A school should always involve a specialist where a pupil continues to make little or no progress or where they continue to work at levels substantially below those expected of pupils of a similar age despite evidence-based SEN support delivered by appropriately trained staff. The pupil’s parents should always be involved in any decision to involve specialists.” (6:59 SEN Code of Practice 2015)

Before considering the involvement of Hertfordshire Integrated Services for Learning (ISL) professionals, schools should ensure that

- They can evidence that they have delivered quality first teaching, i.e., the effective inclusion of all CYP in high-quality everyday personalised teaching and inclusive classrooms (see Appendix 3);

- baseline assessments are in place and both universal and targeted support has been delivered and has been monitored consistently **in line with the school assess – plan – do review cycle (refer to school SEN offer for more information);**
- the CYP is not making progress or making only very limited progress and remains significantly behind their peers in writing skills.
- Consider contacting the advice line for SENDSAS or the contact line for the EP service (see Local Offer for details)

If the CYP has a complex profile of need including writing difficulties and requires involvement from ISL (see Targeted Support Offer, Appendix 1), SpLD Specialist Advisory Teacher or Educational Psychologist (EP) involvement may include:

- consultation with school staff and parents (in line with the Targeted Support offer) to explore interventions that have been put in place, look at pupil assessment information and make further recommendations on teaching and learning strategies. They may work with the school staff to achieve a better understanding of the factors that may be preventing the CYP from making progress;
- the SpLD Specialist Advisory Teacher may contribute to staff development by providing specific advice and model interventions relevant to the CYP's needs;
- work directly with the CYP to complete a detailed assessment of their strengths and difficulties and recommend targeted interventions based on the findings of the assessment. These should then be reviewed;
- it is the responsibility of the school/setting to implement, monitor and review advice given by ISL professionals.

Following school assessment and intervention (see flow chart – appendix 1), a range of assessments pertaining to handwriting, spelling, writing, working memory and processing speed may be completed by SpLD Specialist Advisory Teachers and/or Educational Psychologists as part of identifying strategies for teaching staff or to identify best practice and evidence-based intervention.

EPs and SpLD Specialist Advisory Teachers may use tests of cognitive functioning. These tests sometimes show that children and young people with writing difficulties also have difficulties with cognitive processes such as memory, language, visual-spatial and information processing. Formal assessments can be useful for overall educational planning and ensuring that there is the appropriate level of intellectual challenge in lessons. However, cognitive assessments by themselves do not provide the information needed to plan interventions for writing and they should not be used to predict progress in writing.

Please see below for details of other relevant services such as Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy or Speech and Language Services.

Service	Support Provided	Referral Information	Contact Details
Hertfordshire Educational Psychology Service	<p>The Hertfordshire Educational Psychology Service (EPS) work directly with schools and settings across the county. Each school has a Contact Educational Psychologist (EP). They help meet the needs of children and young people aged 0 – 25 by supporting professionals and parents to understand how people think, learn, feel, behave and develop. Input from this service takes place in various forms but most often via consultations.</p>	<p>A referral to the EPS is made via your school. Each school in Hertfordshire has a Contact Educational Psychologist, who they work closely with. Usually the school SENCo helps parents with a referral to the service or in some instances the Deputy/ Head Teacher can do this.</p> <p>If your child has an Education, Health or Care Plan (EHCP), you can speak to your child’s school SENCo about input from their Contact Educational Psychology or speak to your child’s SEN Caseworker.</p>	<p>All relevant information and contact details can be found here:</p> <p>Educational Psychology Service (hertfordshire.gov.uk)</p>
SEND Specialist Advice and Support (SEND SAS)	<p>This high needs service consists of various specialist advisory teachers to support schools and settings think about and support the needs of children and young people.</p> <p>Specialist groups include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Specialist Advisory Teachers Team • Physical and Neurological Impairment Team • Early Years SEND Team • Speech Language Communication and Autism Team 	<p>A referral to the SEND SAS is made via the school and parents using the Hertfordshire Service Request Form.</p> <p>The referral form can be found on the web link in the contact details column.</p>	<p>https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/services-for-children-and-young-people/physical-and-neurological-impairment-team.aspx</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual Impairment Team • Hearing Impairment Team • Multi-sensory Impairment Team (Deaf blindness) 		
Occupational Therapy Service	<p>The Hertfordshire Occupational Therapy Service is an NHS and HCC funded service. It is set up to support children and young people to participate in daily activities (or occupations) to improve their health, independence and wellbeing. ‘Occupations’ for children or young people may include self-care (dressing, eating a meal, using the toilet or making a simple meal), being productive (participating in activities and routines at nursery, school or home) and leisure (playing with friends, doing sports or hobbies or volunteering).</p> <p>This service support children and young people with physical and developmental disabilities aged 0-18 (19 years old if attending a special school) in Hertfordshire and receive an integrated health and social care occupational therapy service. The East North Clinical Commissioning</p>	<p>The Children’s Occupational Therapy service operates various referral streams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For social care support (equipment, minor and major adaptations for home) parents can self-refer by phoning the referral hub on 01923 470689 and completing a referral form, available from the Trust website, which can be found using this link: https://www.hct.nhs.uk/our-services/childrens-occupational-therapy/ • For health Occupational Therapy support, the service requires a referral from a school SENCo or medical professional listing 2 functional difficulties relevant to Occupational Therapy. A functional difficulty is defined as an everyday activity that the CYP is expected to be able to participate in given their age and developmental (cognitive) level but struggle to do so (i.e. one of these might be a handwriting difficulty). • For children over the age of 12 years who do not have a long-term physical 	<p>All the referrals go via the Occupational Therapy admin hub – details below.</p> <p>The service advice line number is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.</p> <p>Please leave a message on their Advice Line 01992 823093 and an Occupational Therapist will contact you. Calls are responded on weekdays.</p> <p>If the CYP is known to the service: Telephone: 01923 470680 Email: hct.cyptherapies1@nhs.net (admin hub contact details)</p>

	<p>Group (CCG) and Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group commission a service for CYP, for those children that are registered with a GP in Hertfordshire and are between the ages of 0-18 (Health). Young people with a severe learning disability (SLD) and accessing specialist education will continue to have access to this service until the end of the academic year in which the young person is 19 years old.</p> <p>The service will see a child/ young person with a Hertfordshire EHCP. They are also commissioned to see young people up to the age of 25 in further education if OT provision has been stated in the child/ young person's Hertfordshire EHCP.</p>	<p>disability, the OT service are commissioned to offer a one-off assessment and provision of advice session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the Specialist Handling and Access Team for moving and handling, assessment, advice and training to mainstream schools referrals are accepted from therapists, ISL SEND Specialist Advice and Support and other medical professionals. • Referrals will be triaged by a clinician to assess need and impact, working upon a priority triaging process. Families and the referring professional will be advised of the next steps following triage. 	
Physiotherapy Service	<p>The physiotherapy service is a 0-18 service for neuro/complex needs, as well as 0-8 service for musculoskeletal issues. Physiotherapists work with child development centres, as well as homes, nurseries, mainstream and special schools. Generally speaking,</p>	<p>Physiotherapists require a referral from a health professional in order to access the service and so currently do not accept requests from education. The only exception is accepting self-referrals for children with long term conditions who are re-accessing the service having been previously discharged.</p>	<p>Their website can be found below, along with the more detailed service offer, contact details and the referral information.</p> <p>https://www.hct.nhs.uk/our-services/childrens-physiotherapy/</p>

	<p>physiotherapists don't have any involvement with children with handwriting difficulties, as they usually consider this to be within the remit of the Occupational Therapy team. They may however offer advice on core stability and postural control if it was felt that they were impacting on a child's ability to do table-top activities.</p>		
<p>Speech and Language Therapy</p>	<p>The Speech and Language Therapy Service work with children and young people (CYP) to promote their functional communication and/or eating and drinking skills. They support CYP with a range of speech, language and communication needs.</p> <p>The service routinely works in partnership with parents, carers, health and education professionals to promote positive outcomes for CYP. They routinely visit early year's settings including Early Years Specialist Development Centres (EYSDC), special schools, mainstream schools and some specialist bases/units. Some children may be seen at home or in clinic according to clinical need.</p>	<p>The service operates an open referral system. Pre-school children from 2:06 years can access drop-in clinics which are run throughout the week in a variety of locations across Hertfordshire. These clinics provide a screening assessment, giving immediate advice and support to families regarding early communication development.</p> <p>Health and Education professionals can refer directly with evidence of need and impact on the CYP's functioning. Schools are advised to discuss referrals with their link therapist so that initial advice can be provided and planning completed for any assessment required. Parents are also encouraged to discuss any concerns they may have with their child's setting prior to a referral being made. Referrals will be triaged by the service to assess need and impact. They will be accepted</p>	<p>For more information please see: www.hct.nhs.uk/our-services/childrens-speech-and-language-therapy/</p> <p>There is an advice line open to parents/carers and professionals which is 01992 823093.</p>

		when they are accompanied by evidence of assess-plan-do-review. Evidence may include IEPs, provision plans, Universally Speaking checklists or similar. Families and the referring professional will be advised of the next steps following triage.	
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Herts for Learning have produced the SEND Toolkit to assist school staff in supporting CYPs with SEND:
<http://publications.hertsforlearning.co.uk/160122/160407/236064/HfLSENDtoolkit2019/index.html>

All service access information accurate at the point of publication and is subject to review.

4. Intervention and support within schools

All CYP are entitled to fair access to the relevant support to meet their needs and which enables them to progress. It is important that both the writing skills causing concern and the CYP's ability to demonstrate their understanding of the content of lessons are considered when planning a support package. When planning any support, the emotional well-being and confidence of the CYP should be prioritised, with all adults having a clear understanding of the CYP's needs.

The Code of Practice (2015)¹⁷ provides statutory guidance for organisations that work with CYP who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Code stipulates a process of assess – plan – do - review in identifying and meeting CYP's SEND needs. This is also referred to as the Graduated Response.

Assessment through teaching provides a framework for the assess – plan – do - review process. It supports teachers and teaching assistants in monitoring the CYP's access to the curriculum and response to a skill-based intervention. This takes into account assessments over time and emphasises the importance of analysing the teaching when reviewing a CYP's progress (see Appendix 1).

Reasonable adjustments need to be in place to address writing difficulties. Examples of reasonable adjustments to support writing difficulties include:

- alternative methods of recording e.g. scribes, touch typing (e.g. BBC Dance mat / Nessy etc) and voice-activated software (e.g. Dragon, Pages microphone, MS dictate);
- special arrangements to support verbal working memory and processing speed difficulties (e.g. additional time, avoiding unnecessary copying);
- resources to support spelling (e.g. spell checkers, key words).
- alternative methods of assessing understanding that do not solely rely on writing

An accurate assessment of writing skills and/or other underlying difficulties is required to identify the specific areas to address. The content of an intervention will depend on the areas of writing causing concern and their associated pre-requisite skills.

It is important that the teaching methods used within any intervention are regularly reviewed to show they are effective. Research emphasises that focusing on how and what children and young people are taught is more important than school structures, organisation, or where they are taught. If the teaching is structured well, this is more effective than other factors such as ability grouping, class size, individualised teaching and spending more money¹⁸.

¹⁷ DfE (2015). *SEN Code of Practice*. London: DfE

¹⁸ Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning*. London: Routledge.

²⁰ Baddeley, A. (1997). *Human Memory: Theory & Practice*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Research shows that interventions are most effective when the following are included:

- distributed practice, i.e. short, frequent teaching sessions (a little but often approach), that incorporate practise of identified skills, as this addresses any identified working memory deficits¹⁹;
- teaching of skills to fluency and generalisation, as well as accuracy²⁰, by ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities for children and young people to practise the skills before moving on;
- a structured approach using task analysis that ensures that one new skill is taught at a time, ensuring that skills are taught in a hierarchical sequence, and includes mixing old and new learning, which minimises forgetting;
- ensuring CYP are fully informed about the purpose of interventions, their achievements and rate of progress²¹;
- peer-assisted learning²²;
- utilising appropriately trained teaching assistants to implement well-founded interventions²³

5. Provision in Hertfordshire

The majority of CYP's needs in this area should be met within the graduated response. This is described in the SEND Code of Practice within mainstream schools via SEN Support (see Appendix 1).

It is the school's statutory responsibility to meet these needs from their delegated budget.

Most CYP's needs are met using a structured and systematic framework within school that incorporates the recommendations detailed above to varying intensity.

Schools can request support and guidance from SEND SAS (see Appendix 2): *Hertfordshire County Council – Targeted Services Offer for Specific learning difficulties*. via the advice line or service request.

Schools can liaise with their Contact Educational Psychologist to consider consultation, training and support in effective evidenced-based interventions.

If an EHC Plan is in place, monitoring of the CYP's progress in response to intervention involves the Local Authority, in partnership with parents/carers and schools. This is achieved through the Annual Review process.

In exceptional circumstances, where a CYP fails to progress with access to additional resources as described, specialist provision may be identified. These CYP usually have SpLD as part of a more complex special needs profile, e.g. they also have Social Emotional and Mental Health needs and/or Speech, Language and Communication needs.

¹⁹Baddeley, A. (1997). *Human Memory: Theory & Practice*. Hove: Psychology Press.

²⁰ Haring, N.G. & Eaton, M.D. (1978). Systematic instructional procedures: An instructional hierarchy.

²¹Education Endowment Fund (2017). *Improving Mathematics in Key Stages Two and Three: Guidance Report*. London: EEF

²² 22 Wegerif, R., Littleton, K., Dawes, L., Mercer, N. and Rowe, D. *Widening access to educational opportunities through teaching children how to reason together*. F

²³ 23 Education Endowment Fund (2018). *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants*. London: EEF

6. Partnership with parents/carers

The SEND Code of Practice highlights the importance of working in partnership with parents/carers, where they are involved in discussions and fully informed about the assess–plan–do–review process undertaken in school. The SEND Code of Practice stresses the importance of the CYP’s parents (and the CYP themselves) participating as fully as possible in decisions and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.

7. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) related to writing difficulties

➤ **I am concerned about my CYP’s writing difficulties. What are some of the symptoms/indicators which may suggest that my child requires further support?**

- *Cramped grip, which may lead to a sore hand;*
- *Difficulty spacing things out on paper e.g. writing on lines or within margins (poor spatial planning);*
- *Difficulty in planning and organisation of ideas;*
- *Difficulty constructing and writing letters, words and grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs;*
- *Frequent erasing and/ or crossing out;*
- *Inconsistency in punctuation, letter and word spacing*
- *Inappropriate use of lower and upper case letters in words;*
- *Poor spelling, including unfinished words or missing words or letters;*
- *Unusual wrist, body, or paper position while writing.*
- *Task avoidance / refusal and/ or significant anxiety.*

All the above should be considered in relation to the age and individual needs of the CYP.

➤ **Is the involvement of a Specialist Teacher or Educational Psychologist required in order for my CYP’s needs to be recognised and supported?**

No. Writing difficulties at school can be identified by following the Code of Practice (2015), using the assess–plan–do–review approach. Schools have access to the appropriate tools for assessment/screening so it is not always necessary to have the involvement of an Educational Psychologist or other external specialists. However, staff in schools sometimes find it helpful to discuss the difficulties with external professionals and can seek further in-depth assessments if a CYP’s difficulties appear to be significant and persistent. Please see information in Section 2 for further information about involvement from external agencies and general guidance related to when an external professional may be involved.

➤ **Do Educational Psychologists in Hertfordshire EPS diagnose ‘dysgraphia’?**

As acknowledged in Section 2, there is currently insufficient evidence for dysgraphia to be recognised as a distinct and isolated difficulty. Therefore, it is not a term used by professionals in Hertfordshire. Instead, Hertfordshire Professionals use a more personalised ‘needs and strengths’ approach to the identification of difficulties in

order to ensure that intervention and support is appropriately personalised for each CYP.

- **I want 1:1 support for my child in class. Does s/he need to have a diagnosis in order to access support at school?**

No, all schools are already responsible for making reasonable adjustments for learners, and this may, on occasions, include access arrangements for exams and direct Teaching Assistant support in lessons. [Schools routinely put extra support in place for all CYP with SEND \(special educational needs and/or disabilities\)](#). It should be noted that provision and intervention are based on level of need rather than categories of difficulty.

- **Will a private report identifying “dysgraphia” get more help for my child?**

No, schools and ISL services can carry out the appropriate assessment and put in place the intervention for the CYP. However, if there is a private report which parents wish to share, the recommendations should be considered by school staff.

- **How can I support my child with his/her difficulties?**

As with all aspects of education and particularly SEND (special educational needs and/or disabilities), parents who accept and understand their child’s needs are best placed to support them and advocate on their behalf. Parents and carers are also key in helping their child to understand their needs, how they affect them as an individual and how to manage day to day. Good home-school communication is vital.

See also the SEND Toolkit:

<http://publications.hertsforlearning.co.uk/160122/160407/236064/HfLSENDtoolkit2019/index.html>

Below are some useful websites for parents:

National Handwriting Association – About Handwriting Skills - <http://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/about-handwriting-difficulties/>

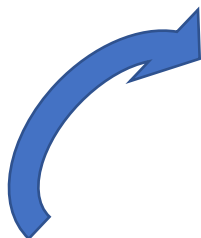
National Handwriting Association – Resources for Parents - <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/help-for-parents/resources-for-parents/>

Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust – Pencil Skills - <https://www.hct.nhs.uk/media/1262/using-a-pencil.pdf>

A guide to SpLD - https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/P16-A_Guide_to_SpLD_copy_2.pdf

Assess

- Difficulties with writing identified through **class teaching**
- Talk with the CYP and their parents/carers about strengths, difficulties, self-esteem and confidence with writing
- School based assessment (e.g. curriculum-based assessments) and exams
- SpLD assessments related to writing
- SpLD checklists for memory and processing speed
- Explore other difficulties e.g. visual / language / motor
- Progress towards SMART targets from previous APDR cycle (if applicable)



Review

- Take account of views of CYP and family, as well as school staff
- Evaluate accuracy, fluency and generalisation of targets set
- Evaluate self-esteem and well being
- Where progress is good, identify what worked and how this can support next steps
- Where progress is slow:
 - Do targets need to be broken down further?
 - How can teaching / resources be adjusted to meet need?
 - What further assessment is needed to pinpoint strengths and difficulties?
 - Have all reasonable adjustments been implemented? What impact have they had?
 - Does support need to be 1 to 1, rather than small group?

Plan

- What reasonable adjustments are needed to enable curriculum access, demonstrate understanding and support progress?
- Would access arrangements be helpful in school and external exams?
Would assistive technology support recording?
- Focus on high impact areas of writing that can be generalised
- Ensure all staff involved are appropriately trained and equipped, time is allocated for necessary support and/or intervention, and suitable space is available
- Set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant time-based targets based on assessments with CYP, family and all staff involved

When all these aspects have been addressed and progress is still slow, consider requesting support from external professionals e.g. SpLD Specialist Advisory Teacher/EP

Do

- Implement reasonable adjustments and access arrangements
- Provide and model use of appropriate resources and strategies to support the writing process for the CYP
- Be positive and supportive, address anxiety and promote self-esteem, independence and metacognitive skills
- Use time limited interventions. Teach directly and explicitly in a range of contexts and to high levels of fluency using multisensory techniques
- Mix old and new learning regularly to revise and overlearn previously taught concepts through repeated practice
- Monitor implementation of the above to ensure provision is matched to need within and outside the classroom.



Appendix 2: Inclusive classrooms for specific learning difficulties

Practical Resources

- **Prompt cards** e.g. bpd, simple / complex sounds, letter / digit formation, sentence starters, worked examples of key punctuation.
- High frequency **word lists** easily available (appropriate to key stage / pupil/ subject).
- **Resources for writing**, e.g. alphabet strip - lower and upper case, range of pens, pencils, grips and sloping boards available as required.
- **Resources for spelling** e.g. phoneme and syllable frames, mini whiteboards, spelling journals, range of dictionaries as appropriate, ask SIRI etc.
- **Scaffolding** available e.g. problem-solving grids, writing frames.
- Trays, cupboards, drawers clearly **labelled with picture prompt** if possible and **colour coded**.
- All pupils reminded and encouraged to use a range of **1st hand equipment** readily available.
(e.g. number lines, Numicon, 100 squares, Dienes, word mats, electronic spell checkers etc).
- **Visual timetable** and **memory prompts** (e.g. sticky notes, individual whiteboards, jottings) to promote independence.
- **Reduce glare on IWB** and experiment with **pastel backgrounds** for visual comfort. **Write clearly** and **use colour / layout** to organise information for easy access.

The Learning Environment

- Opportunities for children to work in a range of **groupings; appropriately sized seating** carefully planned, **distraction free** working space available.
- Arrangements in place (e.g. buddying, adult support, pre teaching, talk partners) to enable all children to **access learning**.
- **Effort** as well as achievement clearly valued.
- Clear messages (written as well as oral) promoting **positive learning behaviours** to encourage resilience and allow all pupils to learn from mistakes.
- **Appropriate behaviour** (including learning behaviours) noticed, praised and reinforced.

- **Independence in learning** is actively promoted - learners develop self-help strategies.
- **Additional adults** promote independence, protect self-esteem and increase pupils' inclusion within their peer group.
- A selection of **reading books** available (including high interest, low reading age texts).

Day to day strategies

- Learning objectives and date on **stickers or scribed** for pupils who have difficulty copying or short date available on board for pupils with writing or copying difficulties.
- **Paper stand** for pupils with visual tracking / working memory difficulties when copying or working from text is essential –avoid all unnecessary copying.
- **Copies of text** available to highlight/ underline / annotate as well as read from board.
- All **board writing and labels** in line with school handwriting policy.
- Use of **spelling strategies** and organisational strategies e.g. **mind mapping** demonstrated regularly by adults during lessons.
- All pupils can **see and hear** the teacher and any resources in use.
- **Displays are uncluttered and include** key vocabulary, steps to success, examples of good work (variety of levels) picture stimulus, questions to engage.
- Adults speak clearly, **sum up regularly** and **check understanding** during lessons.
- Give **instructions in the order of tasks** and provide **written versions of multi step** directions.
- **New vocabulary** clarified, written up, displayed, returned to, modelled in use – pre teach key vocabulary and texts where necessary.
- Provide **texts appropriate to reading abilities, read instructions aloud** if needed, encourage **paired reading**, do not ask learners to read aloud (unless they want to) and **check comprehension** through summary, prediction and clarification.
- Effective **use of ICT** as an access strategy (e.g. on-screen word bars, predictive word processing, speech to text) and build in opportunities to learn keyboarding skills.

- Opportunities are provided for **alternative forms of recording** e.g. scribed/ word processed/ photographs, recorders etc.
- **Expectations** e.g. outcomes and time available **made clear** and **adjusted to need**.
- Differentiated lesson **planning** shows opportunities for all children to work with teacher as well as TA and takes account of range of learning preferences.
- '**Stickability**' of new learning facilitated by range of strategies e.g. metaphor, analogy, colour, humour, drama, 1st hand experiences - links made to new learning and 'bigger picture' of learning journey.
- Adults and learners aware of **strengths as well as difficulties**, **targets** set and **progress** towards these.
- Range of sensitive opportunities and methods for **self /peer assessment** during the lesson as well as at the end.
- **Questions** pitched to challenge pupils at all levels, **thinking time / opportunities to make jottings** built in as needed.
- **Range of opportunities for pupils to contribute** e.g. making suggestions from which the children can choose, speculating, making a personal contribution from own experience.
- **Marking** in line with school policy - comments read aloud to learners if necessary and time allowed to respond to marking. Mark for content rather than spelling where appropriate, and identify most helpful words e.g. high frequency, to address in spelling practice.
- **Homework** differentiated and recorded clearly for learners with reading / writing difficulties.
- **Instructions** clear, chunked with numbered, written reminders and / or opportunities for pupils to repeat and clarify.
- **Worksheets** have clear font, lines/ paragraphs numbered (both ends), information chunked e.g. questions interspersed with text if possible, include diagrams, picture clues and bullet points, copied on cream or pale pastel colours if needed, double line spaced if necessary.

Appendix 3: Left Handedness



Approximately 10% of the population is left-handed. Children usually develop a preference for one hand or the other by the time they start school. It is not unusual for 3-4 year olds to show no distinct preference.

Children **should not be discouraged from using their left hand** if they choose to. Handedness is determined by the brain and most children choose to use their preferred hand i.e. the one that best allows their brain and hand to work together.

A left-hander is likely to...

- Make marks from right to left across the page so is less comfortable with a system of writing that moves from left to right
- Draw circles in a clockwise direction and therefore may find difficulty writing the rounded letters a, d, g, q, o, e, c because they need to be formed in an anticlockwise direction
- Have to make more pushing movements than a right-hander when writing which are more difficult control than pulling movements
- Have the word they have just written covered by their writing hand, meaning that they cannot see what they have just written
- Smudge their work with their left hand as they write leading to messy presentation, particularly if they are writing with ink.

Developing left handed writing

Pre-writing patterns - be aware that the left-hander may start right to left instead of left to right, therefore put a green dot on their sheet to show them where to start.



Letter formation - teach letter formation in letter family groups. It will help left-handers to reinforce letter direction if taught with a group of similar letters e.g. a, c, d, g, q, o.

When forming an individual letter, draw a green dot with a directional arrow to show where to start the letter formation. Remind them which letter family the letter belongs to.



Seating, Posture and Grip

- **Give space** - Left-handers need plenty of elbow room on their left side so they are more comfortably seated at the edge of a table so they do not bump elbows with a right handed child.
- **Check paper position** - if possible. Place the paper at an angle towards the right (about 35 degrees).
- **Provide a writing slope** - if possible. This should slope at about 20 degrees from the desk surface, as this makes it easier for the left hander to see their writing and improves posture. It also makes it less likely that they will develop a hooked hand position.
- **Check pencil grip** - the dynamic tripod grip is the most successful, but the pencil should be held about 1.5 cm back from the tip, so the writing is more visible to the writer and it reduces the likelihood of smudging. A simple way of making sure they hold it in the right place is to wind a rubber band around the pencil at 1.5 cm from the tip. Alternatively try using a Yoropencil or a pencil grip such as a Grotto Grip.
- **Check the angle of the pencil** - the end of the pencil needs to be pointing towards the left shoulder.
- **Check the child is holding the paper down** - they need to use their right hand to stop it slipping.



Prompts for the left-hander when writing sentences

- Where to start writing?
For writing a whole word or sentence - draw a green dot (for GO) on the left hand side of the page to show where to start writing and a red dot on the right hand side to show them where to stop.
- **Spaces between words** - a finger space between words is difficult for left handers to do. Therefore try getting them to use an SpLD Base Spaceman upside down to mark the space.

