

Writing in the Early Years at St Columba's

Being able to write is one of the key skills in all our lives, that we tend to take for granted. For children, writing is a key skill that they have to learn and it develops gradually. Communication is key to many of the things we want for ourselves and our children. It underpins everything we do and helps us live life to the full. Right from the start of their lives, babies are developing the skills they'll later need for communicating through writing. At St. Columba's, in the EYFS, all children are encouraged to develop their own emergent writing and their efforts are valued and praised. As children's phonic knowledge increases, we expect and encourage this to become evident in their writing. At the same time, children's knowledge of key words and language is supported through a wide range of writing (and reading) activities. The vital basic skills of how to form a letter, spell a word, leave a space, or use a full stop are modelled and clearly demonstrated by all staff in EYFS and are later followed by the more sophisticated strategies of modelling the planning, drafting and proof-reading of writing across a range of genres.

When teaching writing composition, children will be taught to :

- participate in whole-class or small-group talk as preparation for writing.
- Compose and write independently, when they have gained the necessary skills.
- Rehearse out loud what they are going to write, by composing a sentence orally before writing it down. (Chance to record their initial ideas, in order to help transcription.)
- Sequence sentences to form short narratives.
- Re-read what they have written to check it made sense.
- Read aloud what the children have written.

In line with the Government's "Bold Beginnings" document, it is our expectation that Reception children who are given these opportunities will be able to write independently by the end of the year.

Writing, along with reading, makes up Literacy, one of the four specific areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage . The EYFS Statutory Framework however, also points out that, "All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected".

The Early Learning Goals for writing come from both literacy and physical development. They are:

- **Writing** - children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible.
- **Moving and handling** - children show good control and coordination in large and small movements. They handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing.

The development of fine and gross motor skills is critical for the act of writing. Everything we plan for, around physical development at St Columba's feeds into this aspect of writing, because when children are active they are developing core strength, dexterity, and eye-to-hand coordination. Whilst we are aware of the importance of

However, it is often more useful for physical development to create opportunities for making marks that are not desk-based at all.

For instance, sticking paper on the underside of a desk so that the children can write upside-down, hidden in a den, or using easels and flipcharts so that the children can write standing up are just a few creative ways we will develop shoulder, arm and wrist strength.

Gross motor skills

Learning to write is closely linked to a child's physical development. Before children can control the muscles in their hands, they need to develop their gross motor skills (those that need large or whole body movements). For babies this means the freedom and space to kick, roll and crawl. And for older children this also means the chance to run, climb, balance, throw, push, pull and swing their arms. Children need a substantial amount of trunk strength in order to write,

because they must support their bodies, neck and head while staying relaxed. We will monitor our children for anyone who flops over, or who use the table or their elbows to support their bodies, and will help them to develop their core body strength by using plenty of gross motor activities. (At St. Columba's we will encourage the correct posture for writing- a '90-90-90 position' - a 90-degree angle at the feet/ankles, at the knees and at the elbows. The furniture in our setting will encourage our children to sit in the correct way.

Gross motor skills activities will include:

- Balance beams/benches
- Crawling through tunnels
- Carrying buckets of sand or water
- Digging in the sand or soil
- Yoga and dance sessions
- Tug of war (carefully supervised!)
- Using ribbons on sticks to make large circular and zig-zag movements in the air
- Swing and hang from climbing frames
- lift and move heavy objects
- Painting with large rollers and brushes on a vertical surface (like a wall or easel)
- Marching to music
- Anything that encourages our children to stretch their arms above their heads.

Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills are precise, small muscle movements. Hand eye coordination is a key part of this. By handling objects, children are strengthening their hands and fingers, so that they can then grip a pencil. Fine motor skills and hand strength activities at St Columba's:

- children will use small droppers to drop water on to a target
- use a spray bottle to fire water on to a target
- screw up small pieces of paper
- open and close zip loc bags using index finger and thumb
- squeeze sponges to move water from one container to another
- pop bubble wrap
- push pipe cleaners through the holes of a colander
- prod, poke, squeeze and roll play dough or push it through a garlic press

- pick up small objects and put them in compartments or a cupcake tray
- twist and open containers with lids.

We also recognise the importance of "bilateral integration" when encouraging early writing skills. This ability to coordinate the two sides of our body, while doing different things with each side, allows us to perform activities such as tying knots, or kicking a football. Most of us have a dominant side to our bodies - typically, the right if you are right-handed. In order to be able to write, our children need to be able to coordinate both sides of their bodies together, with one hand holding the paper, while the other manipulates the pen. Our children also need to learn how to 'cross the mid line' - to be able to control their movements across the centre point of the body. It is this that will let them write without changing the pen over to their other hand midway through a line. Activities to support the development of bilateral integration are:

- **Playing 'Simon Says' with a twist:** children to simultaneously to perform one action with one hand (pat your head) and a different action with the other (rub your tummy).
- **Drawing 'Lazy 8s':** Large (A1 size) paper will be put up on the wall and our children will use chunky felt tips or marker pens. They will be asked to draw a 'Lazy 8' with one hand (an 8 shape that has fallen over onto its side). They will then be encouraged to join in with a pen in the other hand, but going in the opposite direction. (This is surprisingly difficult to do.)

To be ready to start writing, our children need to have a variety of skills in place. These early writing skills include:

Mark making

Before children are able to form letters, they need to learn how to make marks. These marks can be with their finger in yoghurt on their high chair tray or pictures they've drawn or painted. They're working out how writing works, how to hold their pencil, what pressure to put on the paper and how to control the marks they make.

At St. Columba's we will ensure mark making and writing resources are available for children to use in every area of the EYFS classrooms, as well as outside. (Mobile writing "packs" will also be available.) Children need space to explore making marks and all pupils (but boys in particular) will

have the opportunity to make large scale marks on the floor where they can stretch out.

Writing and language

When babies first start to scribble, it's simply a physical activity. But through interactions with adults (both at home and at school) , they'll learn that these marks have meaning and can convey thoughts and feelings. These early marks will be discussed with the children in order to give them confidence to experiment more with mark making and to extend their understanding of how writing works. At St. Columba's we teach all children to listen to sounds and identify the correct corresponding graphemes (letters or groups of letters), according to the GPCs taught in our school's phonics programme. We teach and model how to sit correctly on a chair at a table when writing. We teach children to hold a pencil correctly and comfortably using the tripod grip, supporting this with a variety of pencil shapes and pencil grips. We teach and model how to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place. (Letter formation policy) We teach and model how to form capital letters, as prompted by our phonics programme. We teach children how to write, from dictation, simple English words made up of the GPCs they learn, at each appropriate phonics stage.

By the end of EYFS, we expect children to write their own name correctly (use of name cards) to be able to write simple sentences from dictation, to begin sentences with capital letters and finish with full stops.

We also want to encourage children's engagement with stories, in order to support children's oral language development, their knowledge of stories and of literary language, providing models for their own spoken and written language. At St. Columba's we recognise that listening to a varied diet of stories, forms part of our rich curriculum.

EEF Guidance for the EYFS states: "Writing is physically and intellectually demanding. Expressive language underpins writing and should be prioritised." To this end, we use a wide range of approaches and opportunities to enable children to communicate through writing and to develop children's motivation to write , in our EYFS. (E.g. the chance to record their story/writing ideas and hear them played back, to use these ideas as a basis for their writing.)

Stories play a crucial role in the development of thinking and writing, because they help children internalise the underlying rules and structures. Through listening to and sharing stories, our children will pick up on the patterns of story language - "Once upon a time ...", "And they lived happily ever after ...", "He huffed and he puffed".

How will we provide this?

Opportunities to Write:

Opportunities to write will be seen throughout all different areas in EYFS. (E.g. opportunity to order bricks in the role-play areas, to write a menu in a cafe, to write a prayer in the RE area, to thread wool through shapes in the maths area.

The EYFS classroom areas will immerse our children in mark-making and writing opportunities. Available activities will include not only a writing area with range of different papers, cards, boards, whiteboards, writing frames, various pencils, pens and clipboards, but also activities in outdoor areas and also mobile writing packs, to enable children to carry them with them, wherever they want to write.

A finger gym area will provide further opportunity to develop children's fine motor skills. Available equipment will include: large tweezers, spoons, scoops, marbles, beads, golf tees and pegs.

Outdoors, children will have the opportunity to mark make and write in sand, write with chalks, paints, water, make marks with sticks, brushes, straws, as well as having large equipment to crawl through and lift.

Everyday activities:

Children develop the hand skills needed to hold and control a pencil as they make everyday movements as well as with paper and a pen. Folding, wiping and playing with toys all strengthen their hands and build hand-eye coordination. School will also use vital daily skills such as putting on coats, pouring out drinks and cooking, as these will also help children's hands to develop their writing skills. To support the teaching of writing, the EYFS environment will emphasise inclusion of meaningful print such as a child's name, labels, words on a cereal packet in role play area, or a book title, in order to discuss awareness of similarities and differences between symbols. A phonics chart and alphabet (lower and upper case) will be displayed and used in daily teaching, in all EYFS classrooms.

- Language is at the heart of our curriculum and, in EYFS, we make language a priority, embedding spoken language, vocabulary development and listening comprehension into all aspects of our day.
- In line with the recommendations in the "Bold Beginnings" Government document, literacy planning for EYFS will devote sufficient time each day to the direct teaching of writing, including

frequent opportunities for children to practise and consolidate their skills.

- We recognise that providing writing opportunities also means following children's interests and taking them as the starting point for learning, rather than always planning an adult-directed activity. Planning linked to writing areas will enable children to create/ make their own books. Materials available will include children's own drawings, photos or pictures cut from magazines. Children's own writing/books will be used in our book area.

Language and talking

Communication and language sit at the heart of writing - everything we do around building language and supporting communication feeds into the writing that our children do, even at the very earliest stages of their mark-making.

Children don't learn to talk by accident - they need adults to nurture and support their language and communication. At St. Columba's we place high importance of language development and all staff provide quality first wave language teaching, supporting all pupils to improve their talking, understanding and listening skills. We understand that vocabulary is key. Learning and remembering words is incredibly important. We aim to help children of all ages ,by using all their senses to teach new words. We then build in time for lots of repetition and practice.

As "The Communication Trust" emphasise, helping children to enjoy the fun of language is vital. When children play around with words and make up silly rhymes, this supports their understanding of how words are made up, which in turn, helps with phonics, spelling and learning to write.

Specific Writing Area:

- ✓ Variety of writing materials including chalks, pens, pencils, crayons etc.
- ✓ Variety of writing surfaces including different textured /sizes of papers, cards, booklets. (Over-reliance on whiteboards is not encouraged- our rubric is that our EYFS children should have frequent practice of writing on paper - in other words, a rougher surface than a whiteboard. Whiteboard pens can be too chunky for small hands to hold in the correct grip that should be used for a

pencil. The whiteboards also tend to be slippery, meaning that children can struggle to control their hand movements properly and form letters correctly.)

- ✓ Chairs and tables at a suitable height for children to be able to sit correctly, for writing.
- ✓ Posters and alphabet friezes/phonics posters
- ✓ Many other resources- please also see Writing policy
- ✓ Writing opportunities in ALL areas for learning

Resources /Links:

<https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL->

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/early-years/>

<https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Gateway-to-Writing-crucial-role-of-the-early-years-practitioner.pdf>

<https://www.teachearlyyears.com/learning-and-development/view/the-road-to-writing-physical-skills>

Our Writing Process throughout school consists of:

A formative assessment of the text type with no teaching input

Immersion (a range of activities to analyse the genre and explore a variety of similar texts)

Imitation (creating a text map and using talk to internalise the text)

Modelling and Analysing (shared writing, exploring the text and boxing up the text)

Innovation (changing, adapting and developing the text)

Invention (independent application of the text type)

Invention Challenge (independent application of the text type, with a different context or theme)

Writing an independent piece, based on the genre with no teaching input ('Challenge Write') to demonstrate progress made.

Challenge Write review-children respond to teacher comments to edit their writing and assess their own progress.

[The EYFS writing model will be based around this.]

A wide variety of opportunities are provided in EYFS for our children to engage in writing activities in both the indoor and outdoor environments.

- Weekly focus groups
- Role play areas
- Opportunities to explore mark making
- Daily five sentence story writing with the class teacher or adult
- A specific EYFS writing learning journey