

The Schools of Woolton Hill Handwriting Progression

Long-term progression in handwriting over the different letter families and joins.

This shows the letter families and joins taught at each stage to promote cursive and legible handwriting.

Year groups	Key terminology	Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
Year 1 National Curriculum Focus: Sit correctly, hold a pencil comfortably/correctly (tripod grip), form lower-case letters in the correct direction (starting/finishing in the right place), form capital letters and digits 0-9, and understand handwriting "families."	• Pencil grip • Tripod hold • Straight line • Curve • Baseline • Letter family • Long ladder family • Capital letter • Lower-case letter • One-armed robot letter family • Curly caterpillar letter family • Starting point • Zog-zag monster letter family • Digit • Size • Finger space	• Correct table posture (flat feet, non-writing hand stabilizing the paper) • Secure comfortable, functional tripod grip • Introduce the concept of letters sitting on a baseline • Focus on long ladder family: l, i, t, u, j, y	• Focus on starting points and fluid directional movement • Ensure uniform ascenders and descenders • Maintain consistent left-to-right alignment • Focus on one-armed robot and curly caterpillar: r, b, n, h, m, k, p, followed by: c, a, d, g, q, o, e, s • Focus on retracing anti-clockwise loops and bouncing back up stems	• Form all capital letters with correct height relative to lower-case • Form digits 0-9 accurately without reversals • Introduce distinct finger spaces between words • Focus on zig-sag monster family: v, w, x, z • Focus on diagonal lines and sharp corners, matching baseline limits

Year 2 National Curriculum Focus: Form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another, start using diagonal and horizontal strokes to join, understand which letters stay unjoined, match capital/digit sizes, and scale word spacing.	• Ascender • Descender • Tall letter • Tail letter • Word spacing • Diagonal join • Lead-in • Lead-out • Horizontal join • High join • Unjoined letter	• Consolidate lower-case consistency (body of the letter fills half the line height) • Clear distinction between ascenders, descenders and short letters • Spacing matches the physical size of the child's lettering • Focus on sizing combinations (e.g. ch, th, ll) • Ensure capital letters do not join lower-case letters	• Introduce diagonal strokes from letters ensuring on the baseline • Focus staying on the baseline while initiating the join link • Teach which letters are best left unjoined (e.g. break characters such as g, j, y, x, z) • Focus on joining baseline letters without ascenders (e.g. in, am, un) and to letter with ascenders (e.g. at, il, th)	• Introduce horizontal (top) strokes from high-level exit letters • Practice maintaining horizontal tension without dipping back to the line • Build writing stamina across longer multi-sentence sentences • Focus on joining letters like o, w, v, f (e.g. on, op, wa, vi)
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Year 3 National Curriculum Focus: Refine diagonal and horizontal strokes, identify unjoined characters, and focus on parallel down-strokes and line spacing to prevent ascenders and descenders from touching.	• Continuous movement • Baseline contact • Break letter • Pencil lift • Join choice • Consistency • Legibility • cursive	• Review and secure Year 2 diagonal/horizontal strokes within cross-curriculum writing • Ensure down-strokes are parallel and upright • Focus on consistency of vowel strings (ea, ou, ai) • Focus on diagonal joins to non-ascenders (ai, ir) and ascenders (al, sh) • Keep loop heights uniform	• Master horizontal joins to non-ascenders and ascenders • Focus on joining to and from the letter f • Maintain consistent sizing of internal letter loops (b, p, o) • Focus on horizontal joins to non-ascenders (oa, wa) and ascenders (wh, ob)	• Prevent the descenders of one line from tangling with the ascenders of the line below • Ensure lowercase letters remain uniform even when writing speed increases. • Focus on joining to tricky anti-clockwise letters (ca, ng) • Systematically leave break letters unjoined (g, j, q, y, x, z)
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Year 4 National Curriculum Focus: Increase legibility, consistency, and quality. Ensure handwriting is automatic and joined throughout independent composition to free up cognitive capacity for spelling and editing.	• Downstroke • Parallel lines • Uniform angle • Line spacing •	• Ensure all four join types are executed smoothly without conscious hesitation • Eliminate exaggerated loops or flourishes that interfere with clarity • Establish clean margins, standard indentations and organised layouts • Focus on high-frequency root words, prefixes and suffixes (dis-, un-, -ful, -less, -ment)	• Introduce time transcription exercises to build speed • Focus on preserving letter shapes under the pressure of timed writing • Maintain neatness across a wider range of writing media (maths grids, unlined paper) • Focus on parallel down-strokes • Maintain the internal shape and cross-bar placement of the letter like t and f	• Transition fluent pupils from pencil to int (where appropriate) • Focus on pressure control to avoid ink smudging or bleeding • Self-assess handwriting legibility • Consistent sizing of capitals vs lowercase. Uniform baseline contact across long narrative paragraphs
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Year 5 National Curriculum Focus: Write legibly, fluently, and with increasing speed. Choose the best letter shapes and decide whether or not to join specific combinations. Choose the right writing tool for the task.	• Invisible baseline • Margin control • Unlined layout •	• Adjust spacing between words and lines to fit narrower lined paper • Keep down-stroke parallel and evenly spaced • Evaluate specific letter clusters where joining slows down output. Make conscious choices to lift the pen for clarity	• Select appropriate tool for specific tasks (e.g. fine-liner for charts, ink pen for long written pieces, pencil for diagrams) • Ensure mathematical symbols and digits are clear and precise • Maintain horizontal lines on completely unlined paper using visual tracking rather than structural guidelines	• Precise swift note-taking and mapping during listening tasks • Ensure personal abbreviations remain clear and readable • Maintain structural posture during extended writing tasks to minimise fatigue • Maintain uniform letter height and spacing across longer pieces of multi-page writing
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Year 6 National Curriculum Focus: Maintain legible, fluent, joined handwriting when writing at speed. Ensure transcription is fully automatic to maximize focus on complex composition, advanced vocabulary, and punctuation.	•	• Maintain neat, joined script during longer independent writing sessions • Keep ascenders and descenders short enough to prevent line overlap on narrow margins • Targeted corrections for minor personal slips (e.g. letters link e closing up, or loops on m and n flattening out at speed)	• Adapt writing style depending on the audience: quick informal notes vs polished presentational work • Refine quick-print and clear labelling styles for maps, science diagrams and charts • Targeted corrections for minor personal slips	• Consolidate handwriting speed and stamina in preparation for KS3
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A Note on Left-Handed Writers (Whole-School Guidance): At all stages of this progression, left-handed pupils require specific seating and paper positioning. Ensure they sit on the left side of double desks to avoid bumping elbows, and encourage them to angle their paper slightly to the right to maintain a clear view of their writing line and prevent ink smudging.

Letter Families

Lowercase letters

Long Ladder Family	Curly Caterpillar Family	One-armed Robot Family	Zig-Zag Monster Family
Core movement: Start at the top, come straight down to the baseline, and make a soft curve/flick to the right	Core movement: Start near the top, push back and around to the left in an anti-clockwise curve	Core movement: Start at the top, drop straight down to the baseline, bounce back up the exact same line and push over to the right	Core movement: Sharp, straight diagonal strokes that change direction abruptly
l, i, t, u, j, y	c, a, o, d, g, p, e, s, f	r, n, m, h, b p, k	v, w, x, z

Capital Letters

Straight Line Capitals	Diagonal Line Capitals	Curved Line Capitals
Formed using only purely horizontal and vertical lines	Formed using slanted, overlapping lines	Requiring continuous circles or half-loop extensions
L, I, T, H, F, E	A, V, W, X, Y, K, M, N, Z	C, O, Q, G, S, J, U, P, B, R, D