

## Handwriting - Support for Parents



1. **Cursive handwriting is, put simply, joined-up writing.**

There are two different types: fully (or continuous) cursive, where every letter in a word is joined, so you don't lift the pen off the paper until the end of the word, and part cursive where most letters are joined, but not all (for example, letters following a "b"). At St. Patrick's we are using fully or continuous cursive.

2. At St. Patrick's we teach fully cursive handwriting right from the start. The main benefit is that children tend to reach fluency faster, whereas if they learn to print first and then learn to join up, it's like learning two different languages.

4. When learning cursive handwriting, children are not taught letters in alphabetical order, but in groups according to their formation: for example, 'a', 'c', 'e' and 'o' are taught together because they're all based on an anti-clockwise circle. When practicing at home it will be helpful to practice the letters in groups according to their formation.

5. When our children first learn to form letters each letter will be written with a lead-in (or entry) and lead-out (exit) stroke or flick, which paves the way for learning to join them later. This will be how children in Nursery and Reception will be taught initially and this is called **pre-cursive**.

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6. The 2014 Curriculum says that children should learn to form all their lower case and capital letters plus digits 0 to 9 by the end of Year 1. They then need to start joining their letters in Year 2. In Year 3, they need to concentrate on increasing the legibility, consistency and quality of their joined handwriting. Throughout Key Stage 2, children need to keep up the quality of their handwriting, and concentrate on increasing their speed.

7. Cursive handwriting has a number of advantages. It generally has a pleasing style, and does seem to help children speed up their writing. Children who write quickly generally get more words on the paper and produce better quality content. Cursive writing also helps with spelling as you develop a muscle memory of the movements of each word.

8. Good posture is important for cursive writing. I encourage children to sit with their feet flat on the floor, their back straight (no heads on the table) and relaxed shoulders.

9. A good tip....If you're helping your child learn cursive handwriting, rather than starting with paper and pen, use a blackboard and chalk. The rough, resistive surface sends stronger sensory feedback to the brain, and helps the movements become automatic.

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10. What's the best writing implement for cursive? Although children usually write in pencil at school, it is good for them to practice cursive handwriting with felt tips and gel pens, which have a nice, fluid delivery of ink.

11. If your child is using a pencil, the softer B pencils are generally easier to write with as they move more fluently across the page. Triangular barrels are best because we hold pencils with a tripod grip, and large-barreled pencils reduce strain on the fingers.

12. Lined paper can help your child achieve uniformity in their handwriting, but plain paper is also good for practicing cursive. Lines can be quite constraining, so let them practice on unlined paper so they master the free flow of movement needed for cursive.

13. Don't stick to practicing on paper. Children can practice specific joins in other mediums, such as tracing them in the air, in sand with a stick or on another person's back with their finger. You could also try chalks on the patio or shaving foam on a tray.

14. Keep an eye on your child's pen grip. It's important that the pad of the thumb connects with the pencil; if the side or tip of the thumb touches, it closes up the hand and restricts the flow of movement. Try chopping a pencil down to 3cm long; it's impossible to hold it incorrectly!

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15. Your child may find cursive writing easier if their paper is at an angle. You can turn the page up to 45 degrees in either direction.

16. Boys tend to be slower than girls at mastering cursive writing. Left-handers may also have more trouble as they push the pencil across the paper, rather than pulling it.

18. Practicing patterns of joined up letters (such as a string of connected 'c's) helps children master cursive. The more your child practices patterning, the sooner they'll establish the neuro-motor pathways that make them automatic.

19. Handwriting worksheets showing letter formation, with dots at the starting point and arrows showing the direction of movement, can be very helpful. You can also encourage your child to do other non-writing activities to improve their fine motor control, such as colouring and dot-to-dot puzzles.

20. To help your child at home, ask how cursive is being taught at school: for example, the entry stroke is referred to as a 'lead in' and the exit stroke is 'lead out'. It's important to use consistent language so you can give your child useful verbal cues. We have included examples of how each letter is taught inside each child's homework book.