

Finlay Community School

Handwriting

Our Whole School Intent

At Finlay, we intend to teach a curriculum that is engaging, relevant and purposeful to all learners. We ensure that our curriculum allows all pupils to achieve and succeed in line with National expectations. We aim for our curriculum to allow all children to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in line with the National Curriculum (Key Stage 1 and 2) and the Early Years Framework (Pre-School and Reception)

In addition to this, we have identified five core values which are integral to the learning experiences we provide for all of our children. We therefore aspire for our curriculum to allow pupils at Finlay Community School to leave with a **SMILE**: Social Awareness, Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing, Independence, Life Skills and Excellent Aspirations

1. Handwriting Intent:

Our intent is to ensure that all pupils develop **legible handwriting** that can be read easily by themselves and others, enabling them to communicate their ideas with clarity and confidence. We aim for pupils to write with **fluency and automaticity** so that transcription does not limit the quality, pace or independence of their written work.

High-quality teaching of handwriting at Finlay focuses on secure **letter formation**, consistent sizing, clear spacing and accurate orientation. Pupils are taught to develop an efficient and comfortable **pencil grip** that supports stamina and reduces cognitive load, allowing them to focus on composition rather than the mechanics of writing.

Through explicit modelling, regular practice and targeted support, we ensure that pupils build the foundational skills needed for handwriting to become an automatic, fluent and lifelong tool for learning.

Handwriting Implementation

- 3 x weekly Letter Join sessions. These sessions are progressive and mapped out across school.
- Children will learn to form and print their letters in Reception and the beginning of year 1, before moving on to learning to use a cursive style.
- Teachers will model using the same structure they expect from children.
- All staff will model expectations and make these clear to the children – ‘we are going to start writing now. Pick up your pencil in the tripod grip’.
- When teachers are teaching and TAs are helicoptering, they will be looking at pencil grip and addressing this.
- Fine motor continuous provision will be used in Reception to support handwriting and pencil grip.
- Handwriting interventions will be used across school to support – Dough Disco, Pen Disco, Fizzy OT programme, Write from the Start

Pencil Grip

The physical hold on the pencil

- The position of the fingers, thumb and hand when holding the pencil.
- Typically, schools aim for a dynamic tripod grip:
 - Pencil held between thumb and index finger
 - Middle finger supporting underneath
 - Ring and little finger tucked into the palm
- This grip allows for controlled, efficient movement.

How the grip affects movement

- A functional pencil grip enables small, precise finger movements, which are essential for forming letters accurately.
- Inefficient grips (e.g., whole-hand or tight grips) can restrict movement and slow writing.

Impact on handwriting outcomes

A secure pencil grip supports:

- Legibility — letters are clearer and more consistently formed.
- Fluency — writing flows more smoothly.
- Automaticity — children can write without overthinking the mechanics, freeing cognitive space for spelling and composition.

Key Definitions:

- Radial – Thumb side of the hand
- Digital – Finger or pinkie side of the hand; can also mean digits, as in fingers
- Palmar – Palm side, or the inside part of the hand
- Supinate – Palm facing up or forwards
- Pronate – Palm facing down or backward

Progression of Pencil Grip

Crude Palmar Grasp	Palmar Grasp	Radial Palmar Grasp	Raking Grasp
Age: 3 – 5 months old By age 3.9 months, a baby should be able to grasp a rattle or other objects. By age 5.2 months, they reach for objects with their whole arm using a crude palmar grasp (grabbing at objects with the pinkie side, or palmar side, of their hand. The thumb is not being used at this time.	Age: 6 months old The child will start using their entire hand to grasp objects, including some thumb movement. This is called a Palmar Grasp.	Age: 7 months old They will begin to involve the thumb and all fingers while using more of the thumb side of their hand to grab objects or using a radial palmar grasp.	Age: 8 months old By 8 months, the child will start to use a raking-type grasp. This involves bending (or flexing) the fingers to bring objects into the hand and closer to them.
 Crude Palmar Grasp	 Palmar Grasp	 Radial Palmar Grasp	 Raking Grasp

Radial Digital Grasp	Inferior Pincer & Pincer Grasp	Palmar Supinate Grasp	Digital Pronate Grasp
Age: 8-10 months old Between 8-10 months old, the child will start to perfect the pincer grasp using a Radial Digital Grasp & Inferior Pincer Grasp. A radial grasp refers to the fingers from the middle finger to the thumb doing the grasping. As pictured, the child tends to use the pads of their fingers to grasp instead of the tips.	Age: 10 months old By the age of 10.2 months, they should be able to use a thumb-finger grasp (pincer grasp). The difference between the Inferior Pincer Grasp and a regular Pincer grasp is all in the placement of the fingertips. The index and thumb are used for this grasp. If the pads of the fingers are holding the object, that is an Inferior Pincer Grasp. A true pincer grasp uses the tips of the pointer finger and thumb.	Age: 12-15 months At this age, a young toddler begins to use a palmar supinate grasp. It is a fist-like grasp with the thumb wrapped at the top of the writing utensil. This is usually accompanied by scribbling. This is considered a primitive grasp.	Age: 2 – 3 Years Old By 2-3 years old, a child moves to a digital pronate grasp, pictured below. This is the beginning of an efficient-looking hand grasp. The fingers are now pointed down towards the bottom of the writing utensil; however, all the fingers are being used along with a lot of whole arm movements. This is also a common grasp for self-feeding with utensils.
			

Static Tripod and/or Quadrupod Grasp	Dynamic Tripod Grasp
Age: 3-4 Years Old By age 3 to 4, a child will switch to a static tripod grasp or Quadrupod grasp. They hold the writing utensils crudely and use the whole pads of their fingers on the writing utensil. There also may still be some wrist and forearm movement to move the pencil, with the fingers not moving, or static. The static tripod grasp is a 3-finger grasp, two fingers pinching the writing utensil and the 3rd (middle) finger tucked to the side of the pencil, forming a tripod. The 4th and 5th fingers are usually static next to these fingers and do not tuck into the palm.	Age: 5-6 Years Old By the time the child finishes Reception, they will use the most mature grasp, the dynamic tripod/quadruped grasp. They will use the tips of their fingers on the writing utensil and also hold the crayon/pencil more at an angle than vertically. This is much like an adult grasp. Their finger movements are also dynamic, which means they move back and forth without any forearm or minimal wrist movement (the arm will be resting on the table or writing surface instead of floating above). This grasp is also referred to as a 3-finger grasp, with the first 2 fingers on the pencil while resting on the middle finger. The 4th and 5th fingers are tucked into the palm and help to stabilize the hand on the table.
 A photograph showing a child's hand holding a yellow pencil in a static tripod grasp. The pencil is held vertically between the thumb and index finger, with the middle finger supporting it from underneath. The text "Static Tripod Grasp" is overlaid in the top left corner. A logo for "GROWING HANDS ON KIDS" is in the bottom left corner.	 Two photographs are shown side-by-side. The left photo shows a child's hand holding a yellow pencil in a quadrupod grasp, with all four fingers wrapped around it. The right photo shows a child's hand holding a yellow pencil in a dynamic tripod grasp, with the pencil held between the thumb and index finger, resting on the middle finger. The text "Quadrupod Grasp" is overlaid on the left photo. A logo for "GROWING HANDS ON KIDS" is in the bottom left corner of the right photo.

Supporting Pupils to use a Tripod Grip

Supporting pupils with a tripod pencil grip involves using chunkier writing tools, employing physical tricks like the "nip-and-flip" or cotton ball method, and utilizing ergonomic aids. These strategies improve fine motor control and reduce fatigue during handwriting practice.

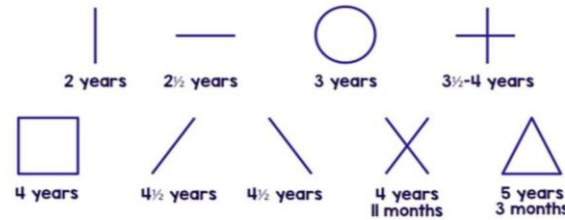
Physical Techniques & Tricks

- **Pinch, Lift, Spin, and Grip:** Place the pencil flat on the table pointing away from the child. Have them pinch the tip with their thumb and pointer finger, then "spin" the pencil up into their hand and grip
- **The "Crab Claw":** Teach children to make a pincer movement with their thumb and index finger to pick up the pencil, resting the base of the pencil on their middle finger.
- **The Cotton Wool Trick:** Have pupils hold a small cotton wool ball or pom-pom in their palm with their little and ring fingers while they write. This forces the correct fingers to stay curled and engaged.

Ergonomic Aids & Writing Tools

- **Shortened Utensils:** Break chalks or wax crayons in half. A shorter tool physically prevents a child from wrapping their whole fist around it, forcing a natural tripod pinch.
- **Triangular Pencils:** Switch to three-sided pencils or crayons, which guide the fingers into a natural triangular resting position.
- **Pencil Grips:** Introduce transitional grips like the Stubbi Mini Pencil Grip or the Pinch Pencil Grip to help pupils who need extra tactile reinforcement.

Pre-writing skills



- Ensure children can draw these pre-writing shapes:
- Asses them to check which shapes they can/cant draw
- If they cannot draw these, implement a Pre-writing intervention, incorporating fine motor skill activities

Fine Motor Activities:

- Offer children plenty of every day opportunities to handle small objects (if safe and appropriate) to practice using a tripod grasp e.g., helping to put tops on tubes; helping to zip up things; taking tops of felt tip pens; picking up and eating raisins or similar etc.
- Play games where there are small parts e.g., dice, counters
- Playing with clothes pegs, tweezers, tongs, and scissors.
- Winding up toys
- Peeling off stickers
- Building with (small to medium sized) construction toys.
- Pick up as many small objects as you can and conceal them in your hand (a game that is sometimes called Jacks)
- Playing with play dough; poking and pinching; ripping and tearing etc.

Interventions

- Pre-writing shapes
- Fine motor skills (pre-writing)
- Write from the Start
- Fizzy
- Dough Disco
- Pen Disco
- Letter Join – use the previous year group/Year 1 scheme