

## Golden Rules

DO offer plenty of praise. Writing takes practice and perseverance, both of which are hard to sustain if you are feeling discouraged. Think of things you can genuinely say something nice about - 'I love the way you've put that! It's brilliant.' Rather than 'I wish you would leave a space between your words.'

DON'T bribe a child to write (or read!). We can all be desperate to get a reluctant nine year old to do their homework and a good bribe can seem like a simple answer. But the problem with bribery is that it tells the child that they are doing their writing (or their reading) for YOU rather than for themselves. If we want our children to become responsible for their own efforts then we need to keep this in mind from the start. Writing and reading are not things we have to be bribed to do! We do them because they bring their own rewards - honestly!

DO allow different forms of writing. Writing emails, typing messages or posting stuff on a blog are all perfectly good forms of writing. They allow your child to practise expressing themselves in written form - which is what we want!

• DON'T get obsessed with spelling. The main criteria for a healthy piece of writing is that:

- o We can read it
- o It is well expressed
- o It fulfils its purpose - i.e. if it is a thank-you letter to granny, it says thank you!

If the writing satisfies all these criteria then a few mis-spelt words do not really matter.

## Handwriting

Although so much of today's writing is done on a keyboard, the ability to handwrite clearly and easily is still very important. At this stage your child should know how to form each letter and do so automatically. However, it is easy for children to slip into bad habits. A basic requirement of handwriting is that it can be read without difficulty. Another is that it can be written with ease, without causing physical pain or cramp to the writer. Help your child to maintain good hand muscle development by providing them with opportunities which they enjoy to do so - using lego, knitting, making models using ready-made kits, show them how to use simple tools such as screw drivers, teach them to chop vegetables safely using a knife. Any of these activities will help him to develop the fine motor skills required for legible pain-free handwriting.



## Calverton Primary School

### Simple advice on helping a junior child enjoy writing

Writing is just not easy - and many children find it a chore rather than fun. This is very irritating for those parents who watch a friend's child happily writing for pure pleasure, and whose own offspring has to be forced or bribed to do even three lines of writing! How can we parents make writing seem just a bit more attractive?

**Follow your child's interests:** Does your child like football, off-road cycling, designing clothes or playing with make-up? Whatever their interests, there are good writing opportunities. Perhaps a lockable football diary for writing match fixtures and a few private thoughts on each match as played. Use postcards or fancy writing paper for writing a short message to granny - and make sure she writes STRAIGHT back! Provide post-it stickers and encourage them to write messages to everyone ~ even the cat!

**Talk comes first!** The standard of children's writing at school is not only how they form letters and handwrite. They must be able to express their ideas clearly. Can they put thoughts in order and discuss what they want to say? All of these depend on speaking. So talk to your child, encourage them to express themselves, listen and respond to their ideas. It all helps!

**No just handwriting!** When your child is doing any writing, do not focus on the quality of their handwriting. It is discouraging for a child who doesn't like writing or who finds it difficult, to then be told off because the writing is not neat! Many handwriting faults will improve with practice and so your job is to help your child to want to write. More means better!

**Reading:** The more your child reads, the better they will write. Their choice of language and the ways they express themselves are all improved by reading. So follow their interests to encourage reading as much as possible. Read to them and read with them!



## Writing's not easy!

Writing well is not easy! It requires a complex mix of creative thinking, good organisational skills, a wide vocabulary, accurate spelling and legible handwriting. No child can develop these quickly and that is why we all spend so many years at school learning this crucial and complicated skill. The important things for parents to remember are that the time we spend helping our children learn to write is very valuable AND that we need to be patient. Children will sometimes make very slow or erratic progress. How tired or motivated they are feeling on any given day will have a big impact on how their writing turns out.

## Opportunities to write

'My son hates writing, he'll do anything to avoid it' - which of us hasn't said something like this at one time or another? And it is understandable that after a day at school doing lots of writing, most children are inclined to do something else afterwards. However there are home activities many children enjoy which happen to have a bit of writing as part of them, such as keeping photo albums or scrapbooks about a favourite hobby or a special holiday, writing out favourite song lyrics, or perhaps making little picture books or comic stories for a younger brother or sister. Other children love keeping a diary, secret or otherwise. It's really important that we continue to praise our children's efforts and ideas, and hold back on the urge to criticise the state of their spelling.

We want them to feel that paper is a safe place to explore their ideas, whether in pictures or in writing and that every time they decide to write something, it isn't going to be 'marked' and expected to be perfect. When they were younger did you display their imperfect pictures on the fridge for everyone to admire? Why not do the same with a piece of their writing now? It will show how much you value their efforts and ideas. This kind of independent creative writing, however flawed, is all helping to make his writing perfect!

## Emails

These days, writing doesn't have to involve pencil and paper. More and more of us do most of our writing on a keyboard with a computer screen. This will be true for our children as well of course. Perhaps they could write to a friend or relative who lives far away via email? The beauty of an email is that it can be very short and replies can be received very quickly. Attaching photos or website links can also be a good incentive to write an email - and encourages the respondent to reply!

## Homework

Of course writing at home is often going to happen in the form of homework. At this age, many children will be expected not only to learn spellings by heart but also to complete pieces of writing at home. The important thing here is to be clear what the purpose of the homework is. Is it about how their sentences are punctuated or is it about how to structure their piece of writing? Do your best to make the purpose your main focus for that piece of work. So try not to express horror at the state of their spelling but DO pay attention to what good 'describing-words' they are choosing, if that is what the homework is about. Afterwards, if you just can't help yourself, ask them to revisit a couple of glaring spelling mistakes and make improvements. This is not easy, but expressing more criticism than praise of your child's efforts is only going to put them off and discourage them further.

## Reading

The development of good writing skills is closely linked to how much a child reads and also to the variety of reading material he enjoys. A child who reads a lot will inevitably start to become familiar with a wider range of vocabulary and more complicated sentence structures than a child who does not. Your child does not have to be reading classic novels to get this benefit - more popular books and magazines will also help him. A reading diet that consists only of football magazines isn't perfect of course, so do try to encourage a bit of variety but SOME reading is infinitely better for his writing skills than none. Remember that no matter how old a child is, he still likes to be read to! Listening to a novel is another way of helping your child benefit from immersion in written language - and there are many excellent story CDs which can be played as they relax before sleep.

## Meaningful writing

Does your child see writing as something that only takes place at school? Perhaps she could be involved in practical writing tasks that are needed in the home. Could she be in charge of making the shopping list? Of writing important dates or 'don't forget' notes on the calendar? At some point she might enjoy being in charge of answering the phone and writing down messages for the family. Perhaps she could even make little instruction posters for places in the house (pictures of 'Please get a new roll of toilet paper when the old one runs out', 'Keep out, I'm busy', 'Have you got your key?!' etc.) Let your child see you writing and involve her in some tasks in a meaningful way so that she can see she is of use.