

HELPING

handwriting

SHINE

Year 2
Intervention
Manual



This booklet is the result of a collaboration between the Education Endowment Foundation, the SHINE schools consortium in Bradford, the Born in Bradford project (within the Bradford Institute of Health Research), and the University of Leeds.

The goal of this partnership is to give every child the best possible start in life. There is a large body of research showing that it is critical for a child to acquire good handwriting skills in primary school. The consequences of poor handwriting affect a child's mental and physical health as well as their educational outcome. Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence that shows a number of children struggle to acquire this crucial ability.

The good news is that there is a robust body of evidence that shows it is possible to support children with handwriting problems through targeted exercises – education really does work! The purpose of this booklet is to provide collated information on techniques that have been shown to be effective following rigorous scientific evaluation.

The evidence base has been informed by individuals recognised as being world experts in the area. The initial exercises were advised by the previous and current Chairs of the National Handwriting Association (Professor Anna Barnett, Dr Mellissa Prunty, and Dr Angela Webb). The scientific rationale was developed and assessed for suitability by the creators of the 'gold standard' assessment of motor skill in children (Professor David Sugden and Professor Sheila Henderson). In addition, sensorimotor and developmental psychology experts at the University of Leeds gave guidance on the latest science on learning.

This allows us the greatest confidence that we can really make a difference to the lives of the children who participate in this programme.

Scientific research shows us, however, that one of the biggest factors in a successful intervention is the person delivering the programme. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting the children in your care and exhort you to really try to ensure that the children participate fully within the eight-week programme and beyond. There is no doubt that the greater the engagement of the child the better the outcome – and this can really make a difference to the education and health of the children in your care.

Yours faithfully,

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Contents

Background to the Intervention	4
Key Principles	5
Adaptable Intervention Aspects	8
Housekeeping	9
Intervention Materials	11
A) Preparing For Handwriting (up to 5 Minutes)	12
B) Warm-Up Activities (5-10 Minutes)	14
1) Lines	15
2) Crosses	16
3) Shading	17
4) Circles	18
5) Spirals	19
6) Free-Form Lines	20
C) Handwriting Activities (15-20 minutes)	21
1) Letter Formation	22
2) Bigrams and Trigrams	23
3) Letter Families	25
4) Sentences	27
5) Number Formation	28
Additional Materials	29
A) Session Plan	30
B) Example Curriculum	31
C) Template 1	32
D) Template 2	33
E) Template 3	34
F) Template 3 example	35
G) Template 4	36
H) Template 5	37
I) Template 6	38
Frequent Words	39

Background to the Intervention

Handwriting is a complex activity requiring the use of many different processes at once¹. Some children quickly learn to write, but other children may struggle to make writing an automatic process. This means that they concentrate more on how to write, and focus much less on what to write². This prevents the child from reaching their academic potential, and can cause academic, self-esteem and behavioural problems³. Intervention for these children is therefore very important.

This intervention has been designed to be delivered by teachers or teaching assistants in school, to full classes of Year 2 pupils (ages 6-7). The intervention has previously been piloted and you are currently participating in a randomised control trial (RCT) to test its effectiveness in practice.

The main aims of the **Helping Handwriting SHINE** intervention are to:

- Improve handwriting skill acquisition.
- Enable the development of appropriate mental strategies (metacognition).
- Support the transfer of these skills (across different environments and tasks). This is the most difficult goal, but also the most important, and is the long-term aim of all interventions.

Please note, the aim of this intervention is not to teach a handwriting style or scheme. Rather, it is to provide a framework for children to practice the fundamental sensorimotor skills that underpin handwriting.

For children aged 6-7, legibility of writing is key so the emphasis of the tasks is on accuracy and neatness. Specifically, the focus should be on the shape and size of the letters, spacing of letters and words, placement of the letters on the line, and stringing or joining the letters (where applicable). Speed will only be developed when legibility is well-established.

¹ Levine, M. D., Oberklaid, F. & Meltzer, L. (1981) Developmental output failure: a study of low productivity in school-aged children. *Pediatrics*, 67, 18-25.

² Medwell, J., Strand, S. & Wray, D. (2009). The links between handwriting and composing for Y6 children. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39, 329-344.

³ Sandler, A. D., Watson, T. E., Footo, M., Levine, M. D., Coleman, W. L. & Hooper, S. R. (1992) Neurodevelopmental study of writing disorders in middle childhood. *Dev Behav Pediatr* 13, 17-23.