When you introduce Penpals for Handwriting into your school, it is important to ensure that all staff in the school understand and follow the scheme.

You may find it useful to hold an INSET staff meeting, for which we have a range of supporting resources available on the Penpals website:

- A customisable INSET presentation
- An information sheet for you to share with parents
- Information on variations in the Penpals font and a photocopiable ruled sheet for practicing slanted writing.

In addition, photocopiable handwriting mats for left- and right-handed children are available at the end of the Teacher’s Books.

Suggested topics for inclusion in INSET meeting

Organisational issues
- Rationale for introducing Penpals and how to use the scheme and information on Classroom organisation, available to download on the website.
- Assessment and record-keeping, detailed in the beginning of the Teacher’s Books.

Handwriting issues
- Style – Penpals F1, F2 and Year 1 introduce, practise and consolidate letter formation in letter families. By the time they reach the Year 3 resources, children should be becoming secure and confident with the common joins and beginning to use them in all ‘neat’ writing activities. The emphasis throughout Penpals is on developing a fluent and even handwriting style, ensuring consistency in the size and proportion of letters, in the spaces between and within words and in parallel downwards strokes.

- Font – Use the Alphabet in the Reference section of the Penpals Interactive resource to demonstrate the font. Information in the Teacher’s Book introduction may be used to clarify any issues arising.

- Joins and break letters – Use the Library of Joins in the Penpals Interactive resource to demonstrate joining letter sets and the break letters.
• **Writing on lined paper** – Children should be encouraged to write on lined paper from the time they begin to focus on correct letter formation and orientation. As the children’s handwriting becomes more controlled, the width between the lines should decrease. It may well be that at any given time, different children will benefit from writing on paper with different line widths. The size of the font in the Practice Books is intended to reflect a development in handwriting. However, you should still tailor the handwriting materials to meet the needs of the individual children in your class. Some children may prefer to write on lined paper which also includes guidelines for the height of ascenders and descenders.

• **Pencil hold** – Use the pencilhold examples in the Posture Clips section on the Penpals Interactive resource to illustrate good pencil hold. The traditionally recommended pencil hold allows children to sustain handwriting for long periods without tiring their hands. However, there are many alternative pencil holds (particularly for left-handers) and the most important thing is comfort and a hold that will be efficient under speed. Some children may benefit from triangularpencils or ordinary pencils with plastic pencil grips.

• **Posture** – Use the examples in the Posture clips sections in the Penpals Interactive resource to illustrate good writing posture. A good posture and pencil hold are vital for good handwriting. Although many young children enjoy sitting on one foot, kneeling or wrapping their feet around the legs of the chair, they will find it easier to sustain good handwriting comfortably if they adopt a good posture.

• **Left-handed children** – Left-handed children should not sit to the right of right-handed children as their papers will meet in the middle! Left-handed children should be taught to position their paper to the left of centre and then angle the paper for comfort as suggested below. Use the left-handed pencil hold and posture examples in the Posture clips section of the Penpals interactive resource to illustrate this. There is no reason why left-handed children’s handwriting should be worse than that of right-handed children.

• **Sloped surfaces** – Children who experience some motor control difficulties often benefit from writing on a slight slope. The easiest and cheapest way to provide this in the classroom is to use substantial A4 or foolscap ring-binders, of which there are usually plenty in school. Commercial wooden or plastic writing slopes are also widely available.

• **Angle of paper** – Make an OHT of the writing mats provided at the end of your Teacher’s Books. If children still need help with choosing a good angle for their paper while they are writing, you can photocopy these onto A3 paper and laminate them to make table-top mats. Use the spaces provided to allow children to find the optimum position. Show the children how to line up the corners of their books to create a comfortable angle for writing, or how to use Blu-Tack to secure the paper to the mats to produce guidelines when writing on blank paper. These guidelines provide a good guide, but encourage the children to explore personal variation of the angles.