

Information for parents and teachers

Fine motor coordination in children with VCFS (writing skills)

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Children with VCFS often present with signs of low muscle tone, clumsiness, motor coordination difficulties and motor planning problems. These weaknesses can cause difficulty in specific areas:

- Eye and hand coordination
- Drawing and writing
- Catching and throwing and hitting
- Dressing and undressing and daily self-care
- Organisation and planning
- Cutting, folding and pasting
- Tricycle and bicycle riding, and balance

These areas of skill development are very important in the development of academic proficiency and success, independence in daily living activities, social interaction, play, leisure and recreational skills, and feeling of self-worth. Weaknesses in these areas should be recognised and assessed, appropriate skills modeled and practised, and alternative solutions to these problems considered. At school, the most obvious and pervasive example of these problems is difficulty with handwriting.

Handwriting

Schools need to consider the emphasis they give to neatness as opposed to work completion and understanding of the material being copied. Schools may need to consider whether they persevere with teaching hand writing if it is intrinsically difficult, or whether children with VCFS learn and record information some other way. Many children with VCFS will have been assessed by Occupational Therapists who will have written reports and provided practical strategies to help the child with handwriting difficulties. These reports should be available for the child's teacher to read.

Schools need to be aware of the signs associated with handwriting difficulties:

- Sore hands and wrists
- Excess pressure applied to pencil
- Tiredness
- Avoidance of work which requires considerable writing

- Negative comments such as "I can't do this", or negative behaviours and refusal
- Anger, or other behavioural issues that relate to specific subjects

If it becomes clear that a child's handwriting difficulties are too severe to remediate easily, alternative strategies can be considered:

- School work can be copied by the teacher, a teacher's aide, or another child.
- A child may dictate work and ideas into a cassette recorder to be transcribed later by someone else.
- Teachers can photocopy their notes for students (this is very useful in high school).
- The child may need to develop keyboard skills. In some severe instances the child may need to be provided with a laptop computer.
- In external exams such as the Higher School Certificate, the child may be eligible for 'Special Provisions', for example a reader-writer, and extra time. The student will need to practise these strategies prior to exams.
- Some projects or assignments can be done orally, or on video, or through pictures or some other medium.

Writing should be a productive element of a child's day at school, not an onerous and unpleasant task to be avoided because it is too difficult. This should be paramount in the education and support of children with VCFS.

For more Information

If you require further information please contact:

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