Year Group	Milestone 1: Physicality & Grip	Milestone 2: Letter Formation	Milestone 3: Flow & Alignment	Milestone 4: Joining (Cursive)	Milestone 5: Presentation & Speed
Tiny Steps (2yo)	Develops "shoulder stability" through large-scale movements (painting with water, ribbons).	Makes random marks and begins to mimic circular or vertical strokes.	Explores "sensory writing" (tracing shapes in sand or shaving foam).	N/A	Enjoys the "process" of mark-making without a fixed outcome.
Nursery (3yo)	Develops "pincer grip" using tweezers and playdough; uses a comfortable grip.	Distinguishes between a "line" and a "circle"; may attempt the first letter of their name.	Understands that writing in English goes from left to right.	N/A	Can follow a simple "pathway" on paper (e.g., helping a bee get to a flower)
Reception	**(DfE Focus):** Holds a pencil effectively using tripod grip in most cases.	Forms lower-case letters in "families" (e.g., c, a, d, o, g starting with the same curve).	Sits letters on a line and starts to show a clear distinction between "tall" and "short" letters.	N/A	Begins to form some capital letters correctly to start their name.
Year 1	Maintains an upright sitting posture and correct paper position.	Forms all lower-case and capital letters correctly, starting and finishing in the right place.	Understands "ascenders" (h, l, k) and "descenders" (g, y, p) and fits them on the line.	**Intro:** Begins to use "flicks" or lead-outs in preparation for joining.	Spaces words using "finger spaces" consistently so text is legible.
Year 2	Refines grip to ensure no tension in the hand during longer writing tasks.	Writes capital letters and digits of the correct size and orientation relative to each other	**(NC Requirement):** Starts to use some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join.	Joins most high-frequency words (e.g., the, and, in) fluently.	Produces writing that is consistent in size; starts to use a "pen" for special work
Year 3	Can write for 15 minutes without physical fatigue	Ensures the "downstrokes" of letters are parallel and straight.	Uses consistent spacing between words that is proportional to the letter size	Uses diagonal and horizontal joins throughout all independent writing.	Increases legibility and begins to develop a personalized, neat style.
Year 4	Adjusts paper angle and body position instinctively for comfort.	Correctly handles "break letters" (letters like b, p, x, s that don't always join).	**(Ofsted Focus):** Handwriting becomes automatic, allowing focus on spelling and grammar.	Joins are fluid and consistent across all curriculum books (not just Literacy).	Can "print" clearly when needed (e.g., labelling a scientific diagram).
Year 5	Maintains quality of handwriting even when taking rapid notes	Ensures capital letters do not join to lower-case letters.	Maintains a consistent "slant" (either vertical or slightly sloped).	Chooses which shape of a letter to use when given a choice (e.g., "f").	Adapts handwriting for different tasks (e.g., a formal letter vs. a quick list).
Year 6	**(NC Requirement):** Writes with flow, legibility, and speed.	Demonstrates a mature, joined style that is easy for any reader to decipher.	Maintains consistent letter height and spacing even under timed conditions (SATs).	Can use a range of writing tools (HB pencil, ink pen, fine-liner) with control.	Takes pride in the "aesthetic" of a finished piece of published work.