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Survey of teachers clearly shows: problems with handwriting at school are increasing

BERLIN. Teachers in Germany are seeing more and more pupils who have problems with handwriting. This is based on a survey carried out by the German Union of Teachers (*Deutscher Lehrerverband*, DL) together with the Schreiblemotorik Institut in Heroldsberg. According to the survey, four fifths (79 per cent) of the secondary school teachers surveyed believe their pupils' handwriting has deteriorated on average. As many as 83 per cent of the primary school teachers surveyed stated that the skills pupils require for handwriting development had deteriorated in the last few years. According to teachers who participated in the survey, half of all boys (51 per cent) and a third of girls (31 per cent) have problems with handwriting.

DL president Josef Kraus called for State Education Ministers to increase their focus on the issue of handwriting: "We need more support for basic and fine motor skills in child daycare centres and then in primary schools." He noted that child care workers and primary school teachers needed more support when faced with the increasing challenges. Kraus also spoke critically: "The blame for the increasing handwriting problems of many pupils lies with education policy that attaches less and less importance to writing and linguistic education as a whole." Kraus cited reduced basic vocabulary, gap-filling exercises and multiple choice tests, as well as the barrage of photocopies pupils are faced with every day, as reasons for his assertion. Kraus stressed that there tended to be a link between pupils' school performance and the quality of their handwriting. "Those who can write well and adeptly are better able to concentrate when memorising things they have written, and are more actively engaged in the task. They write more conscientiously and engage more fully with the content of the written words", he explained.

Graphomotor skills researcher Dr Christian Marquardt, the scientific advisor for the Schreiblemotorik Institut, said in view of the clear results of the survey: "Increasingly we are seeing children with problems in basic motor skills. But we are also seeing problems later on, when it's a question of writing faster and more fluently. Learning to write is above all learning to move, and here children need more support." And he added: "studies and scientific findings by the Schreiblemotorik Institut indicate that through good motor skills training, children learn to write faster and better. From a scientific point of view, we advocate a joint effort with educationists to develop new methods of teaching writing in schools – for the benefit of children and teachers."

How bad actually are the problems with handwriting in schools? And what can be done about it? In order to answer these questions, the German Union of Teachers (Deutscher Lehrerverband, DL), together with the Schreiblemotorik Institut in Heroldsberg, launched a survey. This was carried out online between December 2014 and March 2015. During this time, primary school and secondary

school teachers were presented with separate questionnaires. In total, more than 2,000 teachers from all over Germany took part in the survey. The survey is the first of its kind in Germany, meaning qualified statements on the development of pupils' handwriting can be made.

The results in detail:

- The issue of poor handwriting is very clearly pronounced in secondary schools. In primary schools, 58 per cent of teachers surveyed were either "very satisfied", "satisfied", or "reasonably satisfied with the development of pupils' handwriting; in secondary schools, this figure drops to 22 per cent.
- And it affects a majority of pupils: more than half of secondary school teachers surveyed noted as many as 38 per cent of pupils were unable to write for 30 minutes or longer without problems.
- And it has an impact on educational opportunities: very few of the teachers surveyed (0.7 per cent of secondary school teachers, 1.4 per cent of primary school teachers) do not see a link between a pupil's handwriting and their performance at school.
- The most common causes from the primary school teachers' point of view: "poor fine motor skills" (84 per cent), "too little practice at home" (61 per cent), and "increasing digitisation of communication" (53 per cent). In secondary schools: "pupils' lack of interest in handwriting" (69 per cent), "increasing digitisation of communication" (69 per cent), and "too little practice at home" (65 per cent). Multiple responses were permitted.
- Graphomotor skills have deteriorated on average in the past few years, according to 87 per cent of teachers from all types of school.
- Three quarters (74 per cent) of the primary school teachers surveyed call for "special motor skills writing courses" and "more time for handwriting in schools" to be implemented as countermeasures. At secondary schools, this was the view of 61 and 67 per cent of teachers respectively.
- "Learning to write by hand is important" or even "very important" – that was the view of 98 per cent of teachers surveyed.

The German Union of Teachers (DL) is the umbrella organisation for 160,000 teachers organised into federal associations. These are: *Deutscher Philologenverband e.V.*, *Verband Deutscher Realschullehrer*, *Bundesverband der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer an Wirtschaftsschulen e.V.*, and *Bundesverband der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer an beruflichen Schulen e.V.*

The Schreibmotorik Institut e.V. in Heroldsberg is unique in Germany. It carries out research in the field of graphomotor skills and writing ergonomics, links relevant institutions in the field of handwriting and brings together experts who have spent years examining the theory and practice of efficient writing. It has developed teaching materials for writing classes and offers seminars for teachers. The institute is supported by the writing instruments manufacturer Stabilo, but is independent and not-for-profit.