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96 percent of parents believe that handwriting is important – the “Handwriting 2020” campaign calls for improved promotion

A recent survey conducted on behalf of the Schreibmotorik Institut, Heroldsberg, with the support of the *Bundeselternrat* [German Federal Parents Council], makes it clear that even in the digital age, handwriting is still an important educational issue – too many children are having problems with it. The Didacta Association and the Schreibmotorik Institut have now launched the “Handwriting 2020” campaign.

COLOGNE. More than 96 percent of parents believe that learning handwriting is still important today; almost two thirds of those believe it to be very important. However, over 23 percent have observed that their child has trouble writing for more than 30 minutes at a time. Extrapolated to all of Germany, this amounts to 1.2 million children between the ages of six and twelve who cannot write legibly for longer periods and without cramping.

These are the results of a representative survey of parents in Germany, which was carried out by the Schreibmotorik Institut with the support of the *Bundeselternrat* (more results can be found at www.schreibmotorik-institut.com). These problems are the reason that the “Handwriting 2020” campaign was established, which aims to improve the promotion of writing motor skills in childcare centres and primary schools. The founding members of the alliance, which was introduced as part of a press conference at the Didacta trade fair for education and training, are the Didacta Association and the Schreibmotorik Institut. The Executive board of the *Bundeselternrat* is supporting the alliance.

Prof. Dr Wassilios E. Fthenakis, president of the Didacta Association, explained: “Children take great pleasure in movement. For them, movement is a fundamental form of expression just like talking, singing and dancing. Writing is also based on movement, and handwriting promotes children’s motor development and is therefore of essential importance for their overall development.”

Michael Töpler, Chairman of the Bundeselternrat, says: "This survey demonstrates clearly that handwriting continues to be very important to parents, represented here by mothers. The children's problems should be precisely analysed and suitable strategies for individual support should be implemented."

Dr Christian Marquardt, the scientific advisor for the Schreibmotorik Institut, reports: "The extent of the problems with learning to write is alarming. However, the positive attitude towards handwriting shown by the parents and children is encouraging. Many parents wish to receive more information about how they can support their child in learning handwriting. To this end, the Schreibmotorik Institut will employ informative and exercise materials more intensively."

It is clear that more and more children have problems developing "legible, fluid handwriting" over the course of their literacy lessons in primary school, as is required as part of the nationally applicable "German for the primary level" educational standards. According to estimates by teachers, around half of boys and a third of girls have these problems. Above all, primary school teachers believe the most important cause to be "poor writing motor skills"¹. According to teachers, the situation has worsened in the last few years.

This impacts educational opportunities. Neuroscientific findings indicate a close correlation between the cognitive and motor development of children. Almost all teachers see a correlation between the handwriting of their pupils and their performance at school.²

For this reason, the "Handwriting 2020" campaign is taking initiative so that the requirements and opportunities for learning handwriting can be improved both in educational institutions such as childcare centres and schools, and with the family at home. Each child should have the chance to develop flowing, legible handwriting. Inclusion, in particular the integration of children from families with migrant backgrounds – currently refugee children – also necessitates the improvement of promotion in this field.

For the partners, it is therefore necessary

- to advance research into handwriting, scientifically develop existing teaching methods and, where necessary, create new scientific teaching methods and test them in practice. This also includes the development of opportunities for combining digital learning with the promotion of graphomotor skills.
- So far, the topic of writing motor skills is not widespread enough in universities. A corresponding professorship, which includes the findings from the worlds of neuroscience, educational science, educational research, ergonomics and sports science would be desirable.
- In addition, the alliance is committed to ensuring that the results of research into handwriting are incorporated into teacher training and emphasised in further training courses.
- The aim of the "Handwriting 2020" campaign is to establish an extensive programme for promoting handwriting in childcare centres and schools by 2020. Parents should be comprehensively informed of scientifically proven methods of improving writing motor skills in order to support the work taking place in educational institutions. An annually published report will document the work of the "Handwriting 2020" campaign and show any progress and/or need for action.

The alliance sees itself as an open union that will gladly take on more partners. The founding members are the Didacta Association of the German Education Industry, who represent more than 250 companies and organisations both nationally and internationally and actively participate in debates about the development of educational systems, and the non-profit Schreibmotorik Institut from Heroldsberg that – with the support of the writing instruments manufacturer Stabilo – conducts research into the fields of writing motor skills and writing ergonomics.

¹ This is based on a survey carried out by the Schreibmotorik Institut in Heroldsberg together with the *Deutscher Lehrerverband* [German Union of Teachers] last year. According to the survey, four fifths (79 percent) of the secondary school teachers surveyed believe their pupils' handwriting had deteriorated on average. As many as 83 percent of the primary school teachers surveyed stated that the skills pupils require for handwriting development had deteriorated in the last few years. The most common causes from the primary school teachers' point of view: "poor fine motor skills" (84 percent), "too little practice at home" (61 percent), and "increasing digitisation of communication" (53 percent).

² Only 0.7 percent of teachers in secondary schools, 1.4 percent of primary schools see no correlation.