How learning builds in Art and Design

A guide for parents and carers | Years 3 to 6

Children build technical skill while developing their own ideas. They explore, discuss, practise and improve in every year group, using earlier learning with greater control and independence.

Area	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Developing ideas and using sketchbooks	Record observations of shapes, patterns and textures. Make sketches to plan drawings and sculpture.	Collect and organise ideas, including mood boards. Try layouts, colour palettes and repeating designs.	Experiment with materials and revisit ideas. Develop work from identity, emotion and memories.	Select and refine ideas for a purpose or design brief. Review progress and plan original outcomes.
Drawing and mark-making	Sketch with simple shapes; shade evenly to create tone; use marks for texture. Enlarge drawings while comparing proportions.	Use contrasting tones and charcoal with an eraser to suggest form. Compare proportions and combine marks for texture.	Use expressive lines to suggest movement and emotion. Combine tones and marks to create depth and a focal point.	Choose and combine drawing techniques to communicate ideas and messages. Refine composition and the intended effect.
Painting and colour	Explore natural pigments, charcoal and colour mixing. Compare prehistoric and modern materials and create texture.	Mix tints and shades. Use highlights, midtones and shadows to make a still-life painting appear three-dimensional.	Combine paint with drawing, collage and printing. Choose colour and materials to communicate identity.	Control watercolour through washes, gradients, layering and wet-on-wet or wet-on-dry techniques. Choose effects for mood and atmosphere.
Composition and communicating meaning	Arrange shapes and forms to represent observations and ideas. Begin to explain choices.	Test arrangements and use proportion, contrast and pattern for a purpose. Explain design choices.	Use balance, focal points, backgrounds and selected objects to express identity, emotion or memories.	Arrange photographic and painted elements deliberately. Justify choices of composition, media and technique.

Revisiting knowledge

For example, Year 3 shading develops into Year 4 light, shadow and form. Children then use tone to create depth in Year 5 and apply this understanding through layered watercolour in Year 6. Observation, vocabulary and evaluation connect the units throughout the school.

Developing a wider range of techniques

Some techniques are revisited in later units rather than taught as a separate unit every year. Children draw on earlier experiences as they encounter new materials and ways of making art.

Area	Earlier learning	Later application
Sculpture and three-dimensional form	Year 3 · Mega Materials Plan through drawing; shape materials by modelling and carving; join found objects through construction.	Year 5 · Making Memories Select and manipulate objects, combine forms in assemblage and refine their arrangement to communicate personal meaning.
Printmaking	Year 3 · Prehistoric Painting Explore positive and negative handprints. Year 4 · Tone, Texture and Proportion Develop drawn designs into prints.	Year 5 · Depth, Emotion and Movement and Expressive Portraits Design printing plates and explore monoprinting, selecting marks and materials for an intended effect.
Craft and purposeful design	Year 4 · Fabric of Nature Develop mood boards, colour palettes and repeating patterns; explore batik and how designers use nature.	Year 6 · Photo Opportunity Return to planning for a purpose, selecting props, layouts and image arrangements in response to a design brief.
Digital art and photography	Year 3 · Developing Drawing Use digital tools to create, save and present artwork. Year 5 · Expressive Portraits Explore photographic images alongside other media.	Year 6 · Photo Opportunity Create photomontages, consider viewpoint and close-up detail, and choose digital editing techniques to suit an idea.

Learning from artists and designers

Children look closely at artwork and discuss how it was made. They build from describing features and techniques to comparing approaches, interpreting meaning and using their understanding to inform their own work. For example, Year 4 explores how William Morris used natural forms in repeating designs.

Reflecting and improving

In Year 3, children identify strengths and suggest simple improvements. In Year 4, they explain how a change to colour, tone or layout improves a design. In Year 5, they justify creative decisions and refine their work. In Year 6, they review and adapt decisions more independently throughout the process.

Knowledge organisers support accurate art vocabulary. Conversations about choices, sketchbook experiments and finished work help children explain both what they have made and what they have learnt.