



Art Skills Progression from Nursery to Year 2

Purpose Children use art to notice, explore and express ideas about their world. In Nursery and Reception, making and creating link mainly to Expressive Arts and Design, Physical Development and communication. In Years 1 and 2, children develop drawing, painting, sculpture and other techniques, and learn from artists, craft makers and designers. Our continuous provision lets children revisit a taught process, experiment and make their own choices.

Our art curriculum in practice

Exploration and teaching. Children handle varied materials, observe closely and learn techniques through adult modelling. They then apply a taught skill in pictures or three-dimensional work that carries their own ideas.

Artists and makers. Show a carefully chosen range of artists, craft makers and designers. Children notice how work is made, compare similarities and differences and use an idea in their own way.

Provision and independence. Nursery and Reception keep accessible drawing, paint, malleable and collage materials. Year 1 provision revisits taught techniques and introduces clay alongside earlier playdough experience. Year 2 offers focused opportunities to plan, select and refine work independently.

Values and access. Kindness is shown when children respond respectfully to one another's artwork; resilience when they practise or change a technique; creativity when they explore an original idea. Offer tactile materials, adaptive tools, visual examples and spoken responses.

The progression at a glance

Skill	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
Explore materials	Handle, combine and describe materials freely.	Select and combine materials for an idea.	Choose from a taught range of materials to communicate an idea.	Select and combine media deliberately; explain the choice.
Drawing	Make marks and represent familiar things.	Draw from observation and imagination with greater detail.	Use line, shape and texture in portraits and observed drawings.	Control and vary line, tone and detail for an intended effect.
Painting and colour	Try brushes and notice colour changes.	Choose colours and explore mixing.	Mix and use colour, pattern and brush marks for a purpose.	Choose, mix and layer colour with increasing control.
Print and sculpture	Press, roll and shape malleable materials.	Make repeated impressions and form a simple model.	Create a print and shape clay using taught joining methods.	Refine a print or sculptural form and explain changes.
Look and respond	Notice colours and images made by others.	Talk about a picture or object and own work.	Describe an artist's method and link it to own work.	Compare artists or makers and evaluate own decisions.

How to read the tables. These are progressive teaching and observation prompts, not an age-based checklist for every child. EYFS experiences build foundations; the full Key Stage 1 programme is taught across Years 1 and 2. Teachers use assessment to revisit or extend a skill.

Drawing painting and printmaking

Skill	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
Mark making and control	Explore large and small marks using crayons, chalk or natural tools.	Use pencil and other tools to draw recognisable forms.	Vary pressure, line and shape in a portrait or local building sketch.	Select a drawing tool and vary line, texture and tone deliberately.
Drawing from observation	Notice and talk about a real object or plant.	Draw a familiar object, adding features seen closely.	Study a plant, face or building and record observed shapes/details.	Check proportions or placement against observation and refine.
Drawing from imagination	Use marks to tell a story in play.	Add imagined detail to a picture and explain it.	Combine observed and imagined elements in a composition.	Plan a scene, consider space and explain the intended feeling or story.
Colour mixing	Try colours and notice when they change.	Mix two colours to make a new colour with adult guidance.	Mix warm/cool colours and select them to show weather or mood.	Refine shades and layer colour to create contrast or atmosphere.
Paint techniques	Explore brushes, sponges, large surfaces and different marks.	Choose a brush or tool and fill, dab or stroke an area.	Use brush marks, layers and texture for a taught effect.	Choose tools and sequence layers with increased control.
Relief and repeat print	Make an impression with safe objects.	Repeat a simple shape using a printing tool.	Create repeated poppy or leaf shapes, controlling placement and colour.	Design and refine a patterned print; explain decisions about repetition.
Collage and surface	Tear, layer and stick a range of papers/textures.	Select and arrange materials to represent something known.	Combine cut shapes, texture and drawing in a planned composition.	Choose and adjust overlapping materials to communicate depth or movement.

In practice. Classroom link Year 1 group challenges include family portraits, poppy prints, winter landscapes, botanical observation and Earth Day art. In provision, vary one material or tool so children transfer a taught process rather than simply repeat the finished example.

Sculpture artists and creative decisions

Skill	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
Malleable exploration	Squeeze, roll, flatten and join playdough or other soft material.	Shape a model and use simple tools to add features.	Move from playdough practice to safely handling and joining clay; make a small relief or model.	Refine a clay or mixed-material form and explain how it stays together.
Three dimensional form	Stack, enclose and explore surfaces through play.	Choose shapes to represent a familiar object.	Shape and join material to show form, texture and space.	Plan and alter form to suit a subject or artistic intention.
Artists and craft makers	Enjoy varied images, objects and illustrations.	Notice a colour, material or pattern used by an artist.	Discuss one named artist or maker and try a related technique.	Compare how two artists/makers represent a subject and connect this to own work.
Cultural pattern	Notice patterns in fabrics, art and everyday life.	Repeat and arrange simple shapes and colours.	Study geometric or rangoli-inspired pattern respectfully and make an original design.	Compare patterns from chosen works and adapt shape, colour and repetition with intent.
Choose and revise	Choose a tool or colour during play.	Say what works in a picture and add a detail.	Explain a material or technique choice; improve one aspect after review.	Use feedback and close observation to make a purposeful refinement.
Talk about art	Name colours, marks and materials with adult support.	Describe what was made and how.	Use words such as line, pattern, texture, shape and form accurately.	Compare techniques and explain how choices affect what others see.

What counts as evidence. Evidence is a child explaining a technique, comparing an artist's work, or showing what changed between a first and refined attempt. The finished artwork alone does not show what the child chose, observed or learned.

Provision and independent application

Skill	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
Drawing and mark making	Offer large paper, chalk, crayons and natural tools.	Add objects, mirrors and picture prompts for closer looking.	Revisit portrait, building and plant observation with varied media.	Choose a subject/tool, draw independently and annotate choices.
Paint and collage	Explore colour, brush movement and tearing/sticking.	Mix colour and arrange materials for an idea.	Use taught mixing, layering and printed pattern in a new context.	Plan a composition, test a technique and refine it.
Malleable and clay	Playdough, dough tools and safe natural impressions.	Practise pinch, roll and join with malleable materials.	Progress from playdough to clay; model joining and safe tool use.	Select clay or another medium for a purpose; refine form and finish.
Artist encounters	Share picture books and reproductions for visual talk.	Compare what two pictures show and how they were made.	Display a named artist/maker with open-ended technique prompts.	Compare two works and make an independent creative response.
Continuous provision to Year 2	Adults enrich child-led making through talk and access.	Offer a new material after a taught technique.	Provide challenge prompts that revisit a taught skill without a fixed outcome.	Set independent exploration, choice and evaluation with a brief review.

Curriculum links and coverage

EYFS. Expressive Arts and Design supports creating with materials and expressing ideas; Physical Development supports tool control. The early learning goals are end-of-Reception assessment goals, not a Nursery checklist.

KS1 art and design. By the end of Year 2 children should use materials creatively; draw, paint and sculpt; develop colour, pattern, texture, line, shape, form and space; and learn about and compare artists, craft makers and designers.

Check in planning. Name the artists/makers and actual media in yearly plans. Include sculpture and comparison explicitly, not only finished paintings or seasonal crafts.

Sources. EYFS 2026 statutory framework; DfE Development Matters; DfE KS1 art and design programme of study.

Official programmes. EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective September 2026; national curriculum in England for Key Stage 1. Development Matters is non-statutory guidance.

EYFS <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Key Stage 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-art-and-design-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-art-and-design-programmes-of-study>