Cornerstones Education™

Years 1–6

Cornerstones Art and Design Curriculum Sequencing and Progression Rationale

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Curriculum rationale

The Cornerstones art and design curriculum is sequenced from Year 1 to Year 6 to develop children's visual understanding, practical skills and confidence as creative makers. Projects revisit colour, drawing, materials and techniques, the environment, and imagination, while introducing art and design from different times and cultures. Children progressively learn to observe, experiment, make informed choices, refine their work and communicate ideas through visual means.

Projects are not isolated activities. Each provides a context for revisiting artistic knowledge and processes with increasing control, intention and independence. Practical exploration is complemented by opportunities to look closely at artists' and makers' work, discuss creative decisions and evaluate outcomes.

Across the curriculum, children repeatedly encounter these connected themes:

- colour and its expressive and compositional possibilities
- drawing, observation, line, tone and visual recording
- materials, processes, techniques and purposeful experimentation
- the natural and built environment as inspiration and subject matter
- imagination, personal expression and creative decision-making
- artists, craft makers, designers and cultural traditions
- using sketchbooks as a place to develop ideas and practise techniques.

Overview

- In Key Stage 1, children explore primary colours, printing, pattern, imaginative cityscapes, composition, flowers and still life through accessible materials and observational experiences.
- In lower Key Stage 2, children extend colour knowledge through contrast and warm and cool palettes, explore mosaics and Islamic geometric design, and respond to plants and animals through varied approaches.
- In upper Key Stage 2, children develop more purposeful use of line, light and shadow, investigate expression and cultural motifs, and apply creative techniques to insects, environmental themes and Inuit art.

The sequence moves from discovery and exploration towards increasingly intentional choices about visual elements, processes, meaning and audience

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How the sequence builds artistic understanding

Year 1 : exploring colour, pattern and imaginative places

Colour Creators introduces primary colours and colour mixing through direct experimentation. Children discover how new colours can be made and begin to use colour deliberately.

Press, Print and Pattern extends material exploration through printing. Different materials and surfaces offer a practical introduction to texture, repetition and the effects of a chosen process.

Bright and Busy Streets brings colour and shape together in imaginative cityscapes, encouraging children to interpret the built environment rather than simply copy it.

The year establishes playful experimentation with visual elements and the beginnings of purposeful composition.

Year 2 : composing, representing and observing

Colour Quest revisits colour with a stronger emphasis on arranging it within an interesting composition.

Floral Forms uses flowers as a familiar natural subject through which children can compare materials and create 3D forms.

Creative Collections introduces still life as an opportunity to consider the arrangement and painting of objects, strengthening observation and compositional thinking.

By the end of Key Stage 1, children have encountered colour, print, shape, arrangement and representation in several connected contexts.

Year 3 : extending visual vocabulary and cultural knowledge

Colour Masters develops understanding of contrasting colours and their effects within artwork.

Masters of Mosaic connects colour and pattern to Roman mosaic traditions, providing a cultural and historical context for design.

Plant Patterns returns to nature as a source of motifs and visual ideas, building on the floral exploration of Year 2.

Children move towards selecting visual elements for effect and recognising how artists and makers use them across contexts.

Year 4 : communicating mood and exploring design systems

The Power of Colour develops the expressive possibilities of warm and cool colours and their influence on mood.

Animals in Art broadens representational approaches through the study of techniques used to portray animals in a range of different cultures.

Designs of the Islamic World investigates shape and symmetry in Islamic design, extending earlier learning about repetition and pattern, and cultural aspects of art and design.

Year 4 combines expression, representation and structured design, helping children understand that different artistic purposes call for different decisions.

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Year 5 : developing technical intention and expression

The Art of Light and Line focuses attention on how line, light and shadow can shape the appearance and impact of artwork.

Express Yourself explores the emotional and expressive power of art, encouraging consideration of how artistic choices communicate feeling.

Taotie Treasures examines taotie motifs in ancient Chinese art and design, extending the study of symbolism and culturally situated decorative forms.

Children are increasingly invited to consider not only how artwork is made, but what its visual language communicates.

Year 6 : applying artistic knowledge to ideas and issues

Winged Wonders draws on insects as a rich natural source for close looking and imaginative artistic responses for painting and drawing.

From Waste to Wonder positions art as a way to respond to environmental concerns and considers the creative potential of materials and making.

Inuit Art introduces Inuit carving and printing traditions, inviting comparison of processes, purposes and cultural contexts.

The final year brings together observation, materials, cultural understanding and creative purpose. It offers opportunities for children to make and justify increasingly independent decisions.

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Progression through recurring curriculum themes

Colour

Colour begins with mixing primary colours in ***Colour Creators*** and develops through composition in ***Colour Quest***. ***Colour Masters*** introduces contrast, while ***The Power of Colour*** explores warm and cool colours as tools for creating mood. Later projects such as ***Express Yourself*** allow children to apply colour choices for emotional and expressive purposes. The progression is from recognising and producing colour to choosing it for visual impact and meaning.

Drawing, observation and visual recording

The curriculum offers drawing opportunities through cityscapes, still life, flowers, plants, animals and insects. ***The Art of Light and Line*** explicitly explores line, light and shadow, supporting more controlled representation. To ensure progression, detailed teaching should specify how children develop mark-making, observational drawing, sketching, proportion, tone, annotation and refinement, rather than assuming these from project themes alone.

Materials, processes and techniques

Press, Print and Pattern provides an early focus on how surfaces and materials affect outcomes. ***Floral Forms*** and ***Animals in Art*** invite comparison of techniques; ***Masters of Mosaic*** and ***Designs of the Islamic World*** place making in distinctive design traditions. ***From Waste to Wonder*** encourages consideration of reused materials, while ***Inuit Art*** introduces carving and printing from a cultural perspective. Detailed planning should secure sustained experiences of drawing, painting and sculpture and ensure techniques become more demanding across year groups.

The environment as subject, inspiration and responsibility

Bright and Busy Streets uses the built environment imaginatively, while ***Floral Forms***, ***Plant Patterns***, ***Animals in Art*** and ***Winged Wonders*** draw on the natural world. ***From Waste to Wonder*** develops the relationship further by using art to consider environmental protection. Across these projects, the environment shifts from something to notice and represent to something that can prompt reflection and creative response.

Imagination, composition and expression

Bright and Busy Streets explicitly values imaginative interpretation. ***Colour Quest*** and ***Creative Collections*** strengthen the arrangement of visual elements, while ***The Power of Colour*** and ***Express Yourself*** explores mood and emotional communication. In Year 6, children can draw on these experiences to respond to natural forms and environmental ideas with greater personal intention. Opportunities for original choices and revision should be made explicit throughout.

Artists, makers and cultural understanding

Creative Collections draws attention to still life artists; ***Masters of Mosaic***, ***Designs of the Islamic World***, ***Taotie Treasures*** and ***Inuit Art*** place visual traditions in historical and cultural settings. Children should learn to discuss artistic practices respectfully and specifically, avoiding the treatment of culturally varied traditions as a single style. Named artists, craft makers and designers, and the progression of critical vocabulary, are identified in project-level planning.

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Relationship with the National Curriculum

The curriculum is designed to support the statutory National Curriculum for Art and Design in England (2014 programmes of study). Its aims include producing creative work, exploring ideas and recording experiences; becoming proficient in drawing, painting, sculpture and other techniques; evaluating and analysing creative works using artistic language; and knowing about great artists, craft makers and designers and significant artistic developments.

At Key Stage 1, pupils should use a range of materials creatively to design and make products; use drawing, painting and sculpture to develop and share ideas, experiences and imagination; develop techniques using colour, pattern, texture, line, shape, form and space; and learn about the work of a range of artists, craft makers and designers, describing differences and similarities and making links to their own work.

Colour Creators, ***Press, Print and Pattern***, ***Bright and Busy Streets***, ***Colour Quest***, ***Floral Forms*** and ***Creative Collections*** collectively provide clear contexts for colour, pattern, texture, shape, representation, composition and creative making.

At Key Stage 2, pupils should develop techniques, including control and use of materials, with creativity, experimentation and increasing awareness of different kinds of art, craft and design; use sketchbooks to record observations and use them to review and revisit ideas; improve mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials; and learn about great artists, architects and designers in history.

The Years 3–6 projects provide a broad structure for developing colour, line, tone, pattern, representation, expression, material choices and artistic traditions. Historical and cultural projects offer useful entry points for the study of art and design in context.

End point: what does a Cornerstones artist know and do?

By the end of Year 6, children should be able to generate and record visual ideas, draw on observation and imagination, and make increasingly thoughtful choices about colour, line, tone, shape, pattern, materials and techniques. They should be able to experiment, practise, refine and evaluate work using appropriate artistic vocabulary, and recognise that artworks are shaped by their makers' purposes, contexts and cultures.

The sequencing of the Cornerstones art and design curriculum therefore moves children from exploring what materials and visual elements can do towards using them deliberately to represent, design, express and communicate.

Foot note

While our art and design projects broadly reflect the national curriculum programmes of study as of October 2026, the sequence and content may change once the new art and design national curriculum (2027) is released.

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