

# Health and safety in art, craft and design for primary schools

## Handy hints



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# Health and safety in art, craft and design for primary schools



In art, safety is about more than rules and regulations. It is the responsibility of teachers to know and point out potential hazards and ensure precautions are observed. A part of a child's education should involve safe practice when using materials. Good practice is safe practice. It is a teacher's responsibility to ensure that children act safely.

We greatly recommend the National Society for Education in Art and Design's (NSEAD) *Guide to safe practice in art and design*. This can be downloaded at:

[www.nsead.org/hsg/index.aspx](http://www.nsead.org/hsg/index.aspx) .

This document aims to provide you with guidance to support you with health and safety (H&S), when delivering art, craft and design with the primary school age range.

We have included some general and some specific health and safety guidance to highlight some of the risks, and some handy hints to help you manage the risks.

**This document is not intended as an exhaustive list, just as some areas to consider when planning your lessons.**

Alongside this document, please do refer to further help available on the HIAS art website:

[www.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/art/healthandsafety](http://www.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/art/healthandsafety) .

Health and safety advice in respect of art activities is also available from:

Jayne Stillman, County Inspector/Adviser for Visual and Performing Arts on:

E-mail: [jayne.stillman@hants.gov.uk](mailto:jayne.stillman@hants.gov.uk)

Tel: 023 8081 6136.

# General health and safety guidance

## Working at height

Any work at height, such as mounting and fixing displays, should be carried out using appropriate, maintained equipment, eg: stepladders or step stools. This type of equipment should only be used by competent persons, who have been provided with stepladder/step stool training, by a competent person who has attended the ladder/stepladder course. There is a presentation that is available on the Hampshire health and safety website, which can be used by the competent person to provide this training:

[http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/stepladdersstepssafety-usertrainingpresentation\\_cshsteam\\_-28.ppt](http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/stepladdersstepssafety-usertrainingpresentation_cshsteam_-28.ppt) .

## Moving and handling

When moving and handling heavy or awkward tools and materials, you must ensure that you assess the weight, distance of travel and route. Consider if the load can be broken down to make smaller and more manageable loads. Consider the distance and if equipment could be used to transport items, eg: trolleys. Consider the route you are going to take to ensure the distances are at a minimum and think about the timing of the activity, for example, avoid playtimes.

Where moving and handling of heavy or awkward tools and materials cannot be reduced to a manageable level, staff involved in the activity should be provided with training, in addition to the e-learning course which all staff should complete. Attendance courses are available through the Hampshire Teaching and Leadership College:

[www.hants.gov.uk/education/htlc/supportstaff.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/education/htlc/supportstaff.htm)

the Caretaking Support Services:

[www.hants.gov.uk/propertyservices/management/caretaking.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/propertyservices/management/caretaking.htm)

or the Hampshire Learning Zone:

<http://cas.hants.gov.uk/learningzone/> .

## Storage

All storage areas should be routinely monitored and kept tidy. Organising materials into manageable sized boxes, which are clearly labelled, will assist in cutting down the amount of moving and handling required. Where boxes are on shelving, arrange items so that heavier items are on lower shelves. Having well-organised storage and clear labelling will keep moving and handling to a minimum and ensure the working area is free from trip hazards. Consider the safe storage of tools which have pointed ends or cutting edges. There may also need to be lockable storage depending on location, working environment and the children who have access to the area.

## Electrical equipment and electricity

All electrical equipment must be periodically PAT tested (Portable Appliance Testing). Always check individual pieces of electrical equipment to ensure that the cable and plug are in good condition, with no visible defects. Pay attention to the location of electrical equipment, eg: tools that heat up, irons, batik pots, to ensure that they are safely positioned and to ensure that leads are not a tripping hazard or children cannot fall against them. Pay attention also to their location in relation to water sources.

## Lighting

Ensure that there is adequate lighting for when tools and materials are used, for example, when using equipment such as scissors, needles, threads or cutting wires.

## Slips and trips

Any spillages should be dealt with immediately by cordoning off the area and using appropriate equipment/materials to remove the spillage. This should be done by adults only. Be aware of shiny materials, eg: laminated pictures, that may cause a slipping hazard if they fall on the floor. Ensure work spaces are organised effectively to prevent children tripping on trailing leads, boxes of materials, etc.

# **COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health)**

All hazardous materials, eg: Modroc and plaster of Paris, must have an up-to-date safety data sheet and COSHH assessment completed. This assessment will provide you with important information on first aid requirements should an accident occur. All schools should have a trained COSHH assessor, who should have conducted the assessments or worked with the art leader to produce the COSHH assessments. Any material classified as hazardous under COSHH must be stored in a suitable lockable cupboard/ cabinet and have appropriate safety signage in place.

## **First aid**

Be aware of who the trained first aiders are within the school you are working at, in case of an emergency.

## **Behaviour and supervision**

When planning any activity, consider the age, any special needs and behaviour of children within the group. Appropriate supervision and the working environment should be considered to ensure it is adequate to suit the needs.

# General handy hints

- Ensure there is enough space for the activity to prevent overcrowding.
- Hands should be washed after art activities.
- Be alert to any unusual reaction to art materials.
- All art materials should be clearly labelled.
- Safe product alternatives should be purchased wherever possible. Collection of any materials, such as packaging, milk cartons, toilet roll holders, should be carefully monitored to ensure safety, cleanliness and hygiene. When using egg boxes or toilet rolls, it is recommended that sensible precautions are taken, such as a basic visual check for contamination on the boxes or sleeves, and then there is no reason why such items should not be used. Sources of cardboard tubing are available from educational supplies. The HSE (Health and Safety Executive) issue some information, to dispel any myths about using the inside of toilet rolls and egg boxes, that may be of use:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/myth/august.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/myth/august.htm) .
- All art activities should be supervised. Appropriate adult-to-child ratios are dependent on types of children (age, physical ability, etc) and on the tools/equipment being used.
- Any cuts, scratches or eye splashes should be dealt with immediately.



# Handy health and safety hints for specific activities

## Drawing

- Teach children to select and get drawing equipment for a task where possible.
- Have a range of drawing equipment in the centre of the table to avoid movement around the room – perhaps in trays.
- Set a calm atmosphere after the children have started to draw to encourage thinking time and safe working.
- Use of electrical sharpeners by children needs careful consideration based on the group, age and behaviour of children. They should always be used under close supervision.
- Any pens with detachable nibs should be assembled and disassembled by the class teacher. When not in use these should be stored away securely.
- Any fixative to be used to seal charcoal or pastel artwork should be done only by adults, in a well-ventilated space, ideally away from classrooms areas.
- Consider the need for ventilation of activities when using some felt tips and marker pens.



## Painting

- Establish a safe routine for setting up a painting table, considering space and number of children sharing equipment.
- Use deep tubs of water, with wide bases, on tables so that children do not need to move around the room continually changing water, thus reducing the risk of spillages.
- Organise space and systems efficiently, including washing of equipment and drying areas.
- Place lots of paper towels in the middle of the table, so if any spillages occur children can immediately mop up themselves. They can also be used to wipe brushes/fingers.
- Layer newspaper so that any wet layers can be easily removed.
- Attach carrier bags/black sacks to the ends of tables so that children can dispose of rubbish with minimal movement.
- Train children to never leave paint brushes standing upright in water to limit spillages and accidents.
- Larger amounts of powdered paint should be mixed by an adult. It is appropriate for children to mix small amounts of powder paints, however, do consider the group of children, especially vulnerable groups, eg: asthmatics, age or behavioural issues. This should be based on a risk assessment and included in the lesson plans.
- The spraying of paint with an airbrush can produce a fine mist. Ventilation should be provided; children should wear masks and one-to-one adult support provided.



## Textiles

- Keep needles in the material while work is in progress, rather than loose on the table. Needles need to be stored securely when not in use.
- Provide appropriate scissors for fabric cutting. Sharper scissors need to be stored securely.
- Teach children to cut fabric by working in pairs, one to hold the fabric taut whilst the other cuts the fabric, keeping well away from the scissors.
- Teach children to carry scissors in a closed hand and with points facing down.
- Exclude the use of textures and fabrics which, when cut or pulled apart, create an airborne dust, eg: fur fabric.
- Use thin plastic gloves when using inks and dyes. Consider specific allergies.
- Dye powders are very fine and therefore dangerous if inhaled. Aim to pre-mix and use a dust mask. Heavy duty rubber gloves should be used to avoid skin contamination. Personal protective clothing should be worn.
- When using hot wax for batik, give careful consideration to the location and working environment, in terms of having enough space and ventilation. Position near a wall and near an electricity supply, avoiding trailing leads. Ensure that long hair and loose clothes are securely fastened out of the way. The adult-to-child ratio should be based on the age group and behaviour of the children.
- When using knitting needles, crochet hooks, needles, pins, etc, ensure they are appropriately used and stored securely.
- Cut ribbons and fabrics to a manageable length to suit the task.



## Printing

- Layer newspaper so that inky paper can be easily removed.
- Attach carrier bags/black sacks to the ends of tables so that rubbish can be disposed of with minimal movement.
- Organise space and systems efficiently, including washing of equipment and drying areas.
- Consider use of gloves for children with allergies.





## Collage

- Keep glue in small pots to avoid excessive pouring and spillages.
- Ensure scissors are appropriate for the task. Sharper scissors need to be stored securely.
- If scoring equipment is to be used, ensure appropriate equipment is used for the type of material. Only adults should use craft knives.
- Exclude the use of textures and fabrics which, when cut or pulled apart, create an airborne dust, eg: fur fabric.



# Sculpture

## Clay

- Plastic aprons are better for clay work to minimise the build up of dust.
- A damp sponge in a shallow dish, within reach, enables children to keep their hands moist while modelling and lessens clay dust.
- Work on layered newspaper instead of clay boards so that newspaper can be folded and disposed of, limiting dust. If boards are used, wash after use.
- Rolling clay slabs and tiles is best done on squares of cotton fabric to avoid sticking. Wash the fabric after use.
- Always supervise use of clay knives and sharp tools. Count them out and count them back!
- Attach carrier bags/black sacks to the ends of tables so that rubbish can be disposed of with minimal movement.
- When using glazes, adhere to safety and storage advice from the supplier.
- If glazed work does stick to the kiln shelf, care should be taken to remove this. Adults to check fired glaze work for sharp edges and, whilst wearing protective gloves, file smooth before handing to children. Consider the purchase/ use of kiln shelf paper which avoids any sticking.
- After using clay, all surfaces and tools should be cleaned using a damp sponge to remove clay dust. Do not use a brush as it will create dust in the air.
- Prior to the use of clay, the group of children in the class needs to be considered for allergies which could be triggered by the use of clay, eg: asthma, eczema.
- Kilns need to be regularly serviced and checked. Service records should be kept in a central place. Suppliers of kilns can provide assistance on how to operate the equipment safely. A trained adult should operate the kiln and ensure that safe practices according to manufacturer's instructions are adhered to. It is useful for the site staff to know about the kiln and its properties, so that they can assist with safe practice procedures when the kiln is operated in non-school times.

- The kiln room should be locked to prevent unauthorised entry. The kiln room should not be used for storage as this could potentially be a fire hazard.
- Wire clay cutters should only be used by adults and stored securely. However, a safer option may be to use the wire ties from the tops of the bags.



## Willow

- Long lengths of willow should be cut to lengths appropriate to the task prior to the lesson by an adult.
- Ensure space between children working is sufficient to avoid sharp ends coming into contact with body or eyes. Working outside provides more space.
- Masking tape can be used on the end of willow to minimise the risk of sharp ends.
- It is advised that children work in pairs to support each other and minimise risk of injury.



## Modroc

- Establish a safe routine for Modroc, considering cutting strips to suitable sizes prior to the lesson.
- Organise space and systems efficiently considering space, number of children sharing equipment, washing and drying areas.
- Ensure space between children working is sufficient to avoid Modroc splashing into eyes, etc.
- Prior to the use of Modroc, the children in the class need to be considered for allergies which could be triggered by the use of Modroc, eg: asthma or eczema.
- After using Modroc, all surfaces should be cleaned using a damp sponge/cloth to remove dust. Do not use a brush as it creates dust in the air.





## Plaster of Paris

- The teacher should ensure a clear path for the carrying of the plaster pot to the area in which it is required.
- This should be handled by the teacher, wearing protection, ie: gloves, mask and apron.
- Store in a locked cupboard when not in use.
- Plaster should be mixed by a teacher, away from the class.
- Ensure there is good ventilation when mixing because it is a powder. Disposal of unused and surplus plaster needs to be carried out by an adult.

## Wire

- Use masking tape on ends of wire to avoid injury to body and eyes.
- Wear safety glasses when cutting wire and when there is risk of injury to the face and eyes.
- Working in pairs allows children to support each other, minimising risk.
- Space between children needs to be sufficient to avoid injury.
- Cut wire to appropriate lengths prior to activity.
- Use suitable cutters for the gauge/thickness of wire. Store wire cutters securely.
- Ensure lesson planning allows time for demonstration and discussion of health and safety considerations, including correct and safe use of tools.



## Junk

- Refer to the *General handy hints* section on page 6 when considering safe materials to use for an activity.
- Ensure collected materials are clean, hygienic and suitable for the task.
- Only cool melt glue guns should generally be used in primary schools, as these are adequate for sticking lighter materials such as fabric, paper and card. Glue guns should be set up on a table against a wall to avoid trailing leads. Adult supervision must be constant and the task organised with small groups at a time.
- Hot melt glue guns should only be used for heavier materials such as wood and plastic. Children using hot melt glue guns should be supervised by an adult on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis.
- If stronger glues or fasteners are required, this should be carried out away from the children, by an adult.
- Storage of scrap materials should be considered as part of normal *housekeeping* and regular clearouts should be made.



## Wood

- Some hardwoods produce dust and may be a respiratory hazard – provide protective masks.
- There is a risk of dermatitis and other adverse reactions, along with splinters, when working with wood. Be prepared for first aid referral as necessary.
- Cutting, shaping and piercing wood should only be done when mechanical devices are securely holding the material.
- One-to-one adult support should be provided for working with wood and primary-age children for art activities.





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