DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY: PROGRESSION OF VOCABULARY

Bredbury Green Primary School | Nursery–Year 6 curriculum companion | National Curriculum aligned

Purpose and principles

At Bredbury Green, we recognise that a secure understanding of design and technology vocabulary helps children to think, talk and work like designers and makers. Vocabulary is taught explicitly and revisited regularly so that children can explain their ideas, make informed choices, use tools and materials safely and evaluate products with increasing precision.

This document supports our Design and Technology curriculum and identifies the key vocabulary children should know and understand as they move through school. It includes both Tier 2 vocabulary, which supports thinking and learning across the curriculum, and Tier 3 vocabulary, which is specific to design, making, technical knowledge and food and nutrition. Vocabulary is carefully sequenced so that children build on prior learning and use increasingly precise language when designing, making and evaluating.

The vocabulary reflects the content and sequencing of our school curriculum, organised through Food and Nutrition, Systems and Structures, and Critique and Evaluate. It also reflects the language of the National Curriculum for Design and Technology and, where our units align, key terminology used within Oak National Academy resources. Oak vocabulary supports rather than replaces the school curriculum.

In EYFS, vocabulary develops through purposeful making, construction, exploration, talk and first-hand experiences. Nursery provision has a strong focus on spoken language and concept development, informed by WellComm, while Reception builds these foundations through planning, selecting, joining, making and talking about what has been created. These EYFS foundations are complementary to the school curriculum and prepare children for the language and concepts they will meet in Year 1.

Whole-school conceptual vocabulary

Concept	Early language (EYFS–Y2)	Developing language (Y3–Y6)	Retrieval thread
Design and purpose	make, idea, choose, for, use	design, purpose, user, design criteria, specification, fit for purpose	idea → purpose → user → criteria → specification
Making and technique	cut, fold, join, build, fix	assemble, construct, accurately, technique, component, precision	join → construct → assemble → precision
Materials and properties	hard, soft, strong, bendy, smooth	material, property, strength, stiffness, stability, functional, aesthetic	material → property → suitability → functional/aesthetic qualities

Concept	Early language (EYFS–Y2)	Developing language (Y3–Y6)	Retrieval thread
Structures and systems	build, strong, move, part	structure, mechanism, system, component, reinforce, input, output, control	structure → mechanism → system → input/output/control
Food and nutrition	food, healthy, prepare, clean	ingredient, hygiene, nutrition, balanced, seasonality, processed, sustainability	food → ingredient/source → nutrition → production/processing
Critique and evaluation	like, change, better, test	evaluate, criteria, evidence, improve, refine, justify, critique	test → evaluate → improve → justify/critique

Vocabulary progression by year group and unit

Nursery | Exploring, Making and Building

Curriculum concept: EYFS foundations for designing and making

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
choose, make, change, try, help, same, different, more, less, because	build, join, cut, stick, fold, strong, weak, shape, material, tool, food, clean, safe

Retrieval and progression: Children develop functional spoken language through construction, creative making and food experiences. Adults model words for actions, properties and choices so children can explain what they are doing and notice simple cause and effect.

Reception | Designing, Making and Talking About Products

Curriculum concept: EYFS bridge into Design and Technology

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
plan, choose, explain, compare, improve, suitable, carefully, safely, purpose	design, make, evaluate, user, material, tool, join, structure, stable, ingredient, prepare, hygiene

Retrieval and progression: Builds from Nursery language for making and choosing. Children begin to plan before making, select resources for a purpose and talk about what worked or what they might change, preparing them for Year 1 design, structures and food preparation.

Year 1 | Food Hygiene and Preparation

Curriculum concept: Food and Nutrition

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
safely, hygienically, source, prepare, explain, connect, choose	food hygiene, preparation, ingredient, plant source, animal source, dish, healthy, varied diet

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves EYFS language around food, clean and safe. Children move from naming foods to identifying sources and explaining how safe preparation and food choices contribute to a simple dish.

Year 1 | Frame Structures: Bridges

Curriculum concept: Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
purpose, feature, carefully, generate, test, determine, strengthen	bridge, structure, frame structure, engineer, stable, strength, cut, fold, join, joining technique, mock-up, reinforce, material

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves EYFS build/join/strong vocabulary and develops it into structure, stability and strength. This language supports later work on freestanding and shell structures.

Year 2 | Where Food Comes From

Curriculum concept: Food and Nutrition

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
identify, describe, contribute, technique, accurately, safely, explain	bridge hold, claw grip, ingredient, grown, reared, caught, food source, recipe, preparation, hygiene

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves Year 1 plant/animal sources and food hygiene. Children use more precise preparation vocabulary and distinguish whether ingredients are grown, reared or caught, supporting later work on seasonality and food production.

Year 2 | Freestanding Structures: Playgrounds

Curriculum concept: Critique and Evaluate / Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
design, construct, affect, improve, suitable, purpose, explain	freestanding structure, stable, stability, shape, integrity, construction technique, material, strength, design criteria, product

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves structure, stable, joining and strength from Year 1. Children develop language for how shape and construction affect stability and begin to evaluate whether a structure is fit for its intended purpose.

Year 3 | Shell Structures: Packaging

Curriculum concept: Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
investigate, compare, impact, consider, develop, communicate, promote	shell structure, packaging, sustainability, sustainable material, environmental impact, prototype, user-centred design, net, functional property, annotated sketch, assemble, branding, logo

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves frame/freestanding structures, materials and joining. Children distinguish shell structures and use sustainability, functional properties and user-centred design to explain packaging choices. Vocabulary such as prototype, net, branding and functional property reflects the aligned Oak unit.

Year 3 | Pneumatics: Moving Toys

Curriculum concept: Critique and Evaluate / Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
develop, annotate, investigate, function, test, evaluate, improve	pneumatic, pneumatic system, air, pressure, mechanism, movement, input, output, component, tubing, syringe, annotated sketch, prototype

Retrieval and progression: Builds from KS1 mechanisms and moving parts into a system in which air creates movement. Children increasingly connect design ideas to technical function and use testing and evaluation to improve a product.

Year 4 | Seasonality and Eating Well

Curriculum concept: Food and Nutrition

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
influence, available, balanced, consider, select, justify, independently	Eatwell Guide, balanced diet, food group, seasonality, seasonal produce, fruit, vegetable, ingredient, dietary choice, preparation technique, nutrition

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves food sources, healthy choices and preparation. Children move from where food comes from to how seasonality affects availability and how nutritional knowledge informs a balanced dish.

Year 4 | Levers and Linkages: Interactive Books

Curriculum concept: Critique and Evaluate / Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
research, assemble, decision, outcome, review, refine, accuracy	lever, linkage, mechanism, pivot, fixed pivot, loose pivot, input, output, component, interactive product, annotated sketch, design criteria

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves mechanisms, components and annotated sketches. Children use more precise mechanical vocabulary to explain how movement is created and how design decisions affect the final product.

Year 5 | Food Production

Curriculum concept: Food and Nutrition

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
produce, process, consumption, location, influence, justify, precision	food production, processed, consumption, seasonality, location, ingredient, nutrition, balanced meal, sustainability, consumer, cooking technique

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves seasonality, food sources and balanced diet. Children broaden their understanding from ingredients and preparation to production and processing, using this knowledge to justify choices within a designed meal.

Year 5 | Pulleys and Gears: Electric Vehicles

Curriculum concept: Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
influence, contribute, effective, adapt, assemble, accuracy, specification	electric vehicle, pulley, gear, mechanical system, electrical system, circuit, switch, motor, component, chassis, axle, axle holder, belt, rotation, direction, design specification, aerodynamics, sustainability

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves circuits from Science/Computing and mechanisms from earlier DT. Children combine mechanical and electrical components within one functional system.

Year 6 | Systems and Controls: Sensor Alarms

Curriculum concept: Systems and Structures

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
integrate, monitor, control, secure, troubleshoot, modify, test, refine	system, control, sensor, alarm, micro:bit, microcontroller, programmable system, algorithm, program, input, output, switch, circuit, electrical component, offboard component, fault finding, debugging

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves circuits, programming and systems vocabulary. Children progress from components working together to programmable systems that monitor inputs and control outputs, using testing, debugging and fault finding to refine their product.

Year 6 | Products and People: Inspirational Design

Curriculum concept: Critique and Evaluate

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: design and technology / unit-specific
innovative, influence, impact, expertise, analyse, critique, justify, evidence	designer, architect, engineer, innovation, product, design decision, design criteria, user, function, aesthetics, evaluation, iteration

Retrieval and progression: Retrieves evaluation and design-decision vocabulary from across the curriculum. Children analyse how designers, architects and engineers have shaped products and fields, then use critique and evaluation to justify their own thinking with greater independence.

Design, Make and Evaluate: vocabulary progression

Phase	Priority vocabulary	Progression in use
EYFS	choose, plan, make, join, build, try, test, change, better	Talk about what they want to make, choose resources, make safely and say what worked or could change.
KS1	purpose, user, design, design criteria, generate, model, select, tool, equipment, material, component, cut, shape, join, finish, test, evaluate, improve	Design purposeful products; communicate ideas; select tools/materials; make and evaluate against simple criteria.
LKS2	research, annotated sketch, prototype, functional, appealing, fit for purpose, assemble, accuracy, investigate, analyse, evaluate, refine	Use research and sketches to develop ideas; select and use materials/techniques with increasing accuracy; evaluate informed by purpose and user.
UKS2	design specification, innovative, functional property, aesthetic quality, precision, system, integrate, justify, critique, iteration, user-centred	Develop and communicate increasingly detailed ideas; combine systems/components; justify decisions and critically evaluate products and improvements.

UNCRC connections

- Article 12 – children can express views and have these considered when discussing users, design choices and evaluation.
- Article 13 – children communicate ideas through talk, drawings, models, prototypes and digital approaches.
- Article 24 – food and nutrition learning supports understanding of healthy eating and well-being.
- Article 28 – children have the right to education and to develop practical, technical and creative knowledge and skills.
- Article 29 – education should develop children's talents and abilities and encourage respect for the environment; this links naturally to innovation and sustainable design.

Suggested retrieval routines

- Revisit 3–5 previously taught words at the start of a unit and ask pupils to use them when explaining a new design problem.
- Use real products, components and materials for "name it, describe it, explain it" retrieval.
- Retrieve vocabulary through quick comparisons: frame/shell/freestanding; lever/linkage; mechanical/electrical; input/output; grown/reared/caught/processed.
- Keep design vocabulary visible during practical work and expect pupils to use it when making choices, giving feedback and evaluating.
- Return to earlier products when introducing new mechanisms or structures so pupils explain what is the same, what is different and what has become more complex.
- Use sentence stems selectively: "I selected ___ because…", "This component functions by…", "Against our design criteria…", "I would refine ___ because…".

What progression should look like

- EYFS: children use spoken language to describe actions, materials, simple properties, choices and changes while making.
- KS1: children name tools, materials, structures and mechanisms and explain simple choices using purpose, user and design criteria.
- Lower KS2: children use technical vocabulary to explain how structures and mechanisms function, communicate ideas through annotated sketches and evaluate with increasing specificity.
- Upper KS2: children combine precise technical, design and evaluative vocabulary to justify choices, explain systems, consider users and sustainability, and propose reasoned refinements.

Implementation notes

- Teach vocabulary in the context of designing, making, testing and evaluating; avoid reducing DT to learning definitions in isolation.
- Model accurate pronunciation and meaning before expecting independent use, particularly for technical terms such as pneumatics, mechanism, chassis, microcontroller and aerodynamics.
- Use consistent language across subjects where concepts overlap, while making the DT meaning explicit; for example circuit, force, material, program, input and output.
- Use morphology where it helps pupils unlock meaning, for example construct/construction, evaluate/evaluation, sustain/sustainable/sustainability and innovate/innovation.
- Expect vocabulary to become increasingly precise: make → construct/assemble; strong → stable/stiff/reinforced; change → improve/refine; idea → design criteria/specification.
- The priority vocabulary in this document is a teaching and retrieval spine, not an exhaustive glossary. Additional words may be taught where they are needed for a particular product, tool, material or context.