ARTS FOR ALL - NATIONAL SCHOOLS ART COMPETITION RETURNS FOR ITS 5TH YEAR

Wednesday 22 October, 2025

Art Bytes, an inclusive national art programme for school years 5 and 9, has opened registrations for its 2026 competition for schools across England.

More than 6,825 students from 273 schools have entered the competition to date and, as more schools recognise the boost it gives to students, the number of entries has doubled each year - with more than 200 schools expected to participate in 2026.

Art Bytes is open to all schools in England, and has a national voting system in place for its shortlist. Regional and national winners are chosen by a judging panel that includes representatives from the educational sector, professional artists, and the National Society of Education in Art and Design (NSEAD).

Past winners include James Murphy, the first winner of the forerunner programme, dot-art Schools. James now runs a successful film company, and cites his success at winning the art competition as the catalyst for the confidence he needed to pursue his chosen career.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has pledged to “place the arts back where they belong” and the Government’s eagerly awaited Curriculum and Assessment Review is expected to confirm the importance of art education.

However, despite arts being widely acknowledged as a vital and beneficial part of a child’s education, helping to develop creative thinking - investment in the arts in education has been on a downward trajectory, with recent research by AccessArt showing the average spend on a primary school student as little as £1.80 per year.

Lucy Byrne, managing director of Art Bytes, said: “The Art Bytes programme is inclusive, accessible and supportive, and proves that art really is for everyone. Giving children the opportunity to build confidence, showcase talent and rightly feel proud of their achievements, is a wonderful gift for a school to give its pupils.

“At a time when the arts are so badly funded and represented, it is vital that the formative years of students’ lives are not devoid of art. Every child deserves to see themselves as creative, and we’re proud of the part Art Bytes plays in achieving that.”

The competition culminates in events at high-profile arts venues across England, such as Kettle’s Yard in Cambridge, The Saatchi Gallery in London and The Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. Exposure in leading galleries and museums helps demonstrate that the world of arts is not exclusive, and is open to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special educational needs.

A virtual gallery allows schools to display their students’ submissions and encourage friends and family to vote for them, which unites the wider school community in participating.

Penny Hamilton of Monkton Park Primary School in Wiltshire, commented: “Art Bytes has become an integral part of our school calendar. The children promoted the voting this year which was wonderful. They led an assembly, planned a gallery event for parents to see the artwork and vote, and made banners and information booklets for parents.”

Representation from SEND schools in Art Bytes has been increasingly strong, and two of the eight overall competition winners to date have been from SEND schools, who value the opportunity to show what their teachers and students can achieve.

Paula Morgan, Assistant Head Teacher at Crosby High School in Merseyside, explained: “As our pupils are all SEN, I am very protective of them and was wary of submitting their work, and having it judged against mainstream pupils. How wrong I was! I was beyond proud to see them competing and holding their own in this forum, and will definitely ensure they participate every year.”

Registration couldn’t be simpler - schools can register online, for a small fee that covers all of the school’s entrants: artbytes.co.uk/registration/

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To ensure their school is included, teachers are encouraged to sign up before 31 December, in advance of submitting pictures of students' artwork by February 2026 half-term.

Ends.

About Art Bytes

Art Bytes is a national art and EdTech programme for year 5 and year 9 students in all educational settings, combining an inter-school art competition with a bespoke, immersive virtual gallery and in-person Celebration Events in cultural venues across England. It is based on 13 years' experience in the North West and is proven to nurture talent, raise ambition and develop confidence and cultural capital, as well as support mental health and help develop vital skills for future employment. Art Bytes gives young participants the opportunity to see their art exhibited online and engage with new technology from the safety and convenience of their own home or school and well as allowing them to see galleries and museums as places "for them" and encourage future cultural engagement.

After a shortlisting panel and an online public vote, the winning artist from each school sees their work displayed in our virtual gallery. Art Bytes culminates every June with a Celebration Event at a high-profile cultural venue in each of the nine regions of England, which is also available to schools to live stream or play back in the classroom or assembly. National and regional winners are announced, certificates and prizes are presented, and the virtual gallery goes live.

The competition is open to Year 5 and Year 9 students in all educational settings.

See: https://artbytes.co.uk/

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