

ISM – The National Curriculum for Music

An assessment and progression framework

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An Overview of Musical Learning in the Early Years and Primary Schools

Music is a practical subject. Musical learning is about thinking and acting as a musician. This means that music lessons should be about learning in and through music, not solely about music. Music lessons in school should be focussed on developing children's imagination and creativity. Children come to school with a lifetime of musical experience, which is practical and experiential, and which has contributed to their aural memory. Their music lessons in school, therefore, should not assume that they know nothing and have no prior musical experience.

Part of your role as a classroom teacher includes needing to ensure that musical learning is relevant to the pupils in your school, builds on what your pupils have done previously, and points them in the direction of what they will be doing next. This could mean that your curriculum will look very different from that of another school, maybe even those nearby.

Whilst in Primary school, many children will experience whole class ensemble tuition (also known as first access or wider opportunities). This is an integral part of their music education that builds on their musical education, knowledge, and experience to this point, and provides firm foundations for later musical learning too.

In many Early Years and Primary school contexts, cross-curricular learning (sometimes called learning journeys or the creative curriculum) is used as a basis for the curriculum. Music might sometimes be used as a 'vehicle' to support learning in other areas (for example, to memorise the parts of the water cycle, or to provide a soundscape for a particular book scene during a literacy lesson). However, the knowledge, skills and understanding involved in musical learning needs to be properly planned for, and sufficient and regular time allocated in order to enable the musical learning outcomes to be specified regardless of whether is taught as a separate subject or linked to the creative curriculum or other organisational strategy.

Music education in early years and primary contexts must include singing, playing a range of instruments, and using appropriate music technology. Listening to music should include that which they have produced themselves, performances by, say, teachers or visitors, as well as carefully chosen recordings selected for their appropriateness (in terms of a wide range of cultures, times, and places, including musics which exist in the children's lives outside of school). Such listening should inform children's composing and performing, bearing in mind that it is practical work such as improvising, composing and performing where the children think and act as musicians.

Learning by ear is a valuable musical activity, and children will often reproduce music they have heard. This is an important facet of musical learning both in and out of school.

Musical notation exists to support musical learning. This means that staff notation, as well as other musical notations, should be used as appropriate to help understand relationships between sounds made by the children, and the symbols used in whatever system of notation is being employed.

Therefore learning musical notation is not an end in itself; it should be done to support music-making and making sounds.

Music making is a powerful and personal experience, and music lessons that create links with children's lives and enable them to experience quality music making support schools and classrooms to become rich sources of musical and artistic meaning.

Section 2a:

A Guide to Planning for Musical Learning, Assessment, and Progression

Assessment of musical learning should be rooted in the reality of musical activity that the children undertake. Consequently, assessment should be of the musical attainment they have evidenced in a range of learning activities in which they have been singing, playing, performing, composing, and listening. Progress is made over time, and evidence from a series of assessments should be used to show this.

Musicality should be the centre of attention here; participation and enjoyment, whilst important, are only a part of what should be the assessment focus. There should be sufficient opportunities through practical music-making, listening to children talking and playing, and watching children responding, to be able to form assessment judgements which are appropriate to the work they have done, and can be used to inform the next stage of their musical journey.

Such assessments can be used over time to build up a portfolio of assessment data which demonstrates progression. As this is music, assessment data is likely to include audio and / or video recordings of children's work.

In the previous National Curriculum, attainment levels in music were written and designed for use at the end of key stages only. Later they were inappropriately adopted for individual pieces of work. In addition, sub-leveiling, which has been singled out by educators, academics and Ofsted as being particularly counter-productive and damaging to a high quality music education, became the norm. As the new National Curriculum comes into place there is an exciting opportunity to make musical assessment relevant and meaningful to children.

This means that assessment should be based on work done by the children, and not, as was the case, be used to 'prove' linear progression. In the new system, it should be possible for children to be assessed on suitable musical criteria, rather than simply at one sub-level higher than before.

Well-designed lessons and units of work, planned using the framework, should be appropriately differentiated for the children in a specific learning situation. In other words, specifically targeting learning to the particular learners is essential for everyone to feel successful and appropriately challenged, and teacher graded assessments will reflect this.

These materials are intended to help you create an exciting, relevant and challenging music education within your own setting. We hope you find them useful.

Section 2b:

Using the Framework

The framework is presented as a series of questions for class music teachers to address. There are five key processes suggested; these are singing, playing, improvising, composing and listening. Teachers may wish to add their own musical processes to this list as they see fit. From this, teachers are able to plan their own approaches to developing musical skills, knowledge and understanding. These will be based upon topics, repertoire, curriculum materials etc. as appropriate to the planning context of the school.

Although the modes of assessment and musical activities have been separated out in the framework, these should be considered holistically.

Throughout all lessons during each unit of work, the teacher should assess children's musical learning through a variety of means including listening to and observing children talking about music, making music, exploring music, responding to music, and, if appropriate, using staff and other notations. Teachers may wish to add their own sources of evidence to this outline.

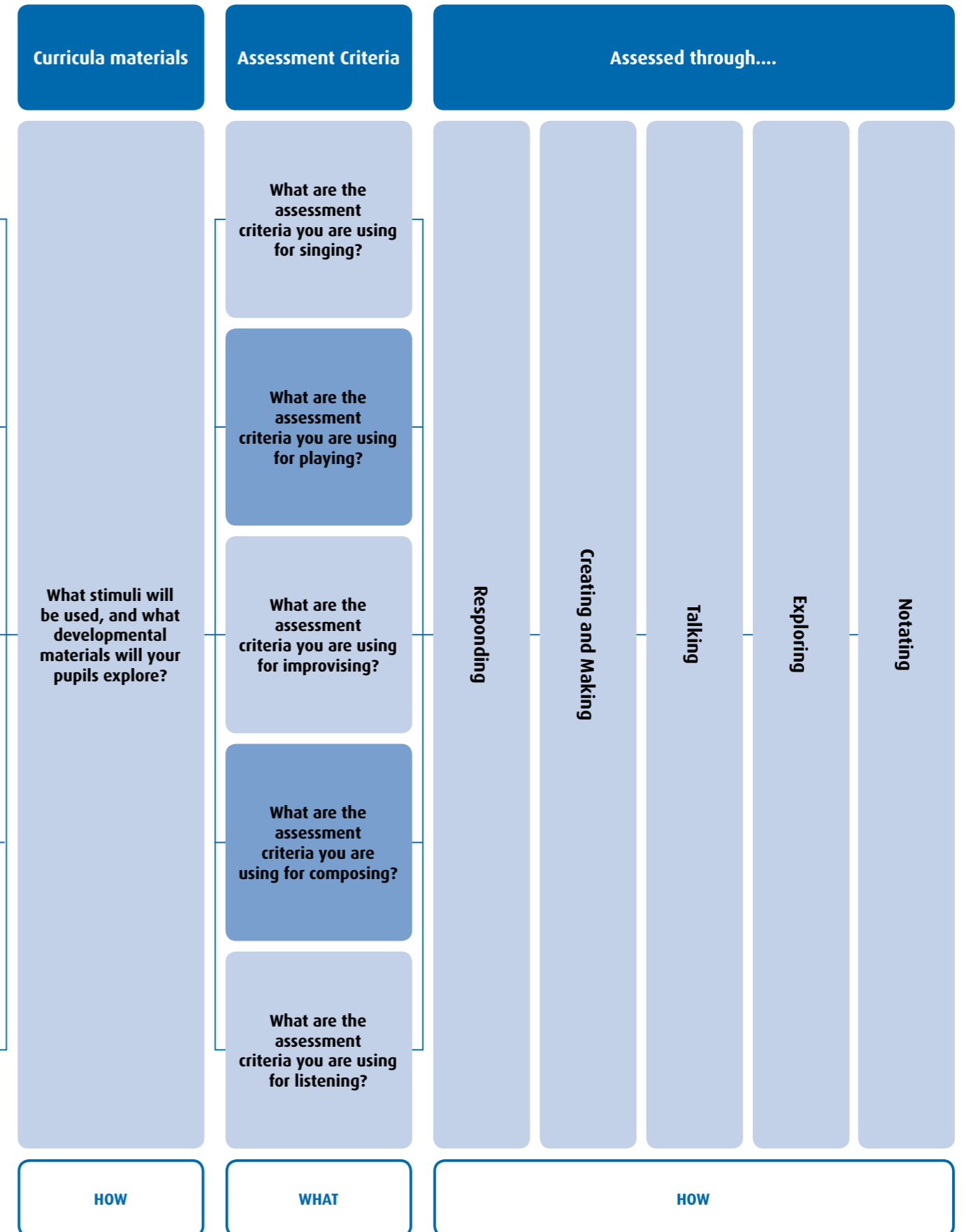
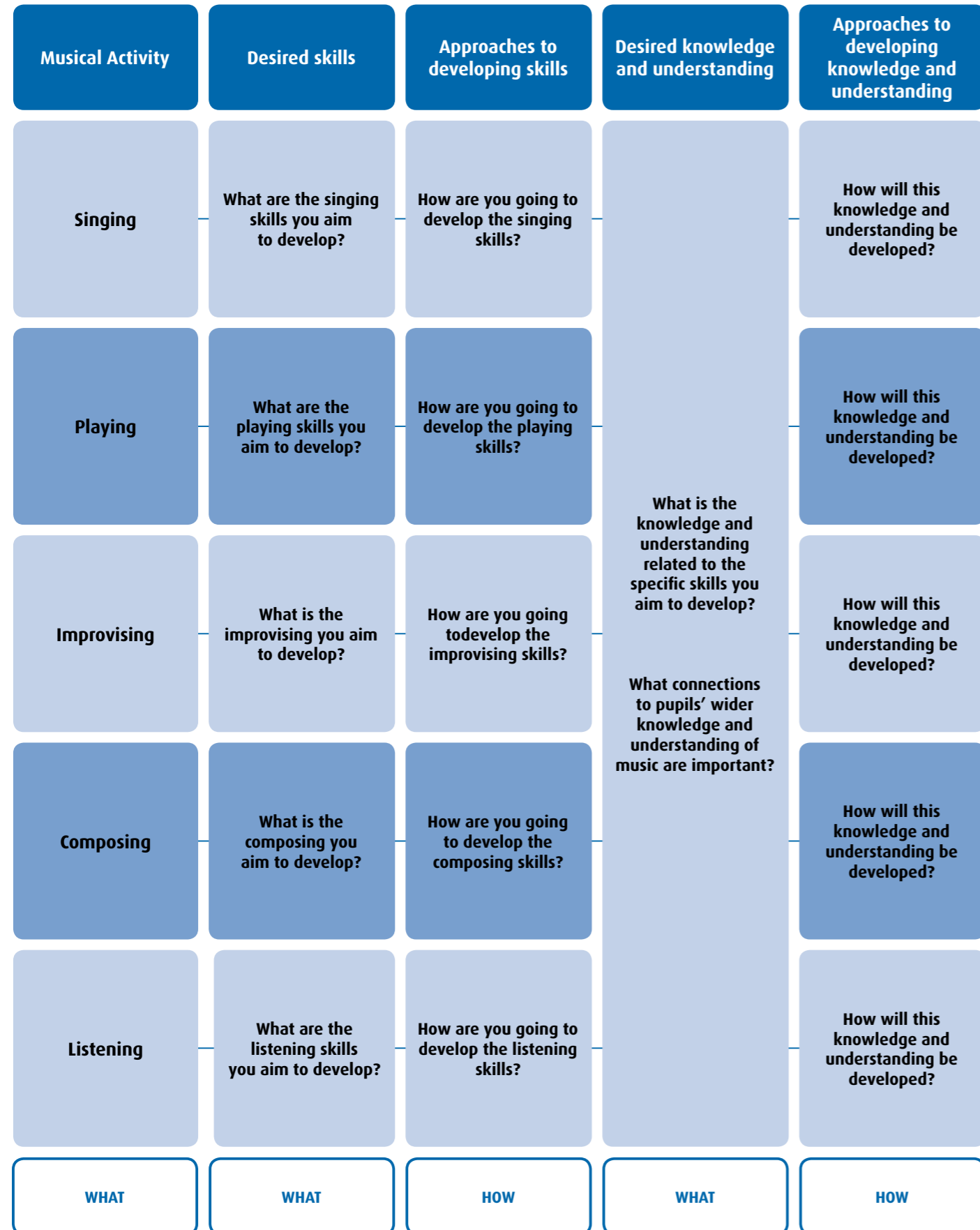
Examples of possible assessment criteria statements across different stages of learning are shown in the exemplar tables within this document. It is important to note that it is up to each school to decide what it is that will be assessed, as well as how it will be assessed. The examples given have been positioned at four separate stages of learning which are labelled A, B, C and D. These do not specifically relate to each other or to year groups or key stages in schools. They are intended to act as examples which can be graded using a variety of marking systems. Many schools will want to adopt a 3-point scale, based on 'not yet able to', 'able to' and 'confidently'. This three point scale is sometimes labelled as 'working towards', 'working at' and 'working beyond', other such scales also exist, and your school may have its own. Some schools may wish to have more complex grading systems. It is important to note that such grading exercises (summative assessment) should only be undertaken periodically and not every lesson. Grades awarded should relate to a fairly substantial body of work from across a period of time.

As it is intended that this grading is for a unit of work, programme of study, or other medium-term planning goal, progression can be shown by a series judgements, based on the three-point scale grades arising from each unit as discussed above. Progression, therefore, happens over a period of time. Along with associated commentaries on these grades, which relate directly to musical development over time, teachers will then be able to establish pupils' progression in terms of both breadth and depth. (It should be noted this marks a substantial change from the way which many schools used National Curriculum levels previously.)

Formative assessment can also be undertaken using the framework, as the skills, knowledge, understanding and assessment criteria all apply directly to the work being undertaken. Using the language of these, teachers can give appropriate developmental feedback within and between lessons to help all learners to succeed at a level appropriate to them.

Section 3:

Assessment and progression framework



Example Criterion Statements

Example statements stage A

1. Enjoy singing, playing, trying out and changing sounds; explore sounds and music through play.
2. Recognise and broadly control changes in timbre, tempo, pitch and dynamics when playing instruments and vocally.
3. Sing broadly in tune within a limited pitch range.
4. Follow and offer simple musical instructions and actions.
5. Keep a steady pulse with some accuracy, e.g. through tapping, clapping, marching, playing (develop 'internalising' skills).
6. Listen to ideas from others, taking turns as appropriate to the context, e.g. passing around instruments, sharing, listening to others playing/singing/sharing ideas.
7. Show awareness of the audience when performing.
8. Create music, and suggest symbols to represent sounds (e.g. a large foot for the Daddy bear, small foot for baby bear).
9. Make physical movements that represent sounds (e.g. move like a snake, an elephant, grow like a tree in response to music).
10. Comment on and respond to recordings of own voice, other classroom sounds, musical instruments etc.

Example statements stage B

1. Enjoy making, playing, changing and combining sounds; experiment with different ways of producing sounds with voice, musical instruments, simple music technology, 'body sounds' (tapping, clicking, marching, stamping etc.).
2. Sing in tune within a limited pitch range, and perform with a good sense of pulse and rhythm.
3. Join in and stop as appropriate.
4. Follow and lead simple performance directions, demonstrating understanding of these through movement, singing and playing (including, but not limited to, dynamics and tempo, starting and stopping, adhering to 'starts and stops' -i.e. sound and silence). Pupils could suggest and try out their own ideas.
5. Listen with increased concentration, responding appropriately to a variety of live and recorded music, making statements and observations about the music and through movement, sound-based and other creative responses.
6. Respond to musical cues.
7. Musically demonstrate increased understanding and use of basic musical features as appropriate related to a specific music context (e.g. graduation of sound – getting louder, softer, higher, lower, faster, slower, describe the quality of sounds and how they are made, combined etc. and names of common classroom instruments), supported by verbal explanation, pictures, movements etc. as appropriate.
8. Begin to recognise and musically demonstrate awareness of a link between shape and pitch using graphic notations.
9. Begin to recognise rhythmic patterns found in speech, e.g. saying / chanting names, counting syllables in names etc.
10. Demonstrate understanding of the differences between pulse and rhythm through physical movement, playing, singing.

Example statements stage C

1. Use voice, sounds, technology and instruments in creative ways.
2. Sing and play confidently and fluently, maintaining an appropriate pulse.
3. Suggest, follow and lead simple performance directions.
4. Sing within an appropriate vocal range with clear diction, mostly accurate tuning, control of breathing and appropriate tone.
5. Demonstrate musical quality – e.g. clear starts, ends of pieces / phrases, technical accuracy etc.
6. Maintain an independent part in a small group when playing or singing (e.g. rhythm, ostinato, drone, simple part singing etc.).
7. Create simple rhythmic patterns, melodies and accompaniments.
8. Communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings through simple musical demonstration, language, movement and other art forms, giving simple justifications of reasons for responses.
9. Offer comments about own and others' work and ways to improve; accept feedback and suggestions from others.
10. Aurally identify, recognise, respond to and use musically (as appropriate) basic symbols (standard and invented), including rhythms from standard Western notation (e.g. crotchets, quavers) and basic changes in pitch within a limited range.

Example statements stage D

1. Experiment with voice, sounds, technology and instruments in creative ways and to explore new techniques.
2. Maintain a strong sense of pulse and recognise when going out of time.
3. Demonstrate increasing confidence, expression, skill and level of musicality through taking different roles in performance and rehearsal.
4. Maintain an independent part in a group when singing or playing.
5. Use a variety of musical devices, timbres, textures, techniques etc. when creating and making music.
6. Create music which demonstrates understanding of structure and discuss the choices made.
7. Listen and evaluate a range of live and recorded music from different traditions, genres, styles and times, responding appropriately to the context. Share opinions about own and others' music and be willing to justify these.
8. Be perceptive to music and communicate personal thoughts and feelings, through discussion, movement, sound-based and other creative responses such as visual arts.
9. Critique own and others' work, offering specific comments and justifying these.
10. As appropriate, follow basic shapes of music (including staff and other notations) through singing and playing short passages of music when working as a musician.

Section 5:

What is it for

This assessment and progression framework is designed to help you plan and assess musical learning in your classroom. It can be used in a number of ways: For individual lessons, for medium-term planning, and for long-term planning.

How do you use it?

The boxes on the left-hand side of the framework, singing, playing (etc.), are curricular components of musical learning. They are presented individually here in order to help you ensure that they are both included in your planning, and assessed. However, it is vital to note that musical learning happens in a holistic fashion, and that units of work and their assessment should not be atomistically separated. Teachers should be mindful of this through all planning, delivery, and assessment. However, by showing them in this fashion, teachers can use the framework to check and assess over time, as some units of work will focus on different aspects of musical learning, but they should all be present (albeit to a greater or lesser extent) throughout the music curriculum.

The framework also artificially separates skills, knowledge, and understanding. Again, this is intended to be of use to you during the thinking processes which occur throughout planning for learning, teaching, and assessment. At all stages during the planning and teaching processes, you need to be aware of the differentiated skills, knowledge, and understanding you are seeking to develop, so the framework asks you to delineate these separately. What this means is that planning for learning must precede deciding upon which curricula material (e.g. activities or repertoire) will be used.

The assessment criteria boxes must link back to the skills, knowledge, and understanding you have defined in the earlier stages of the framework. In the Overview to this document it was suggested that a three-point scale be used to grade outcomes. What this means is that the assessment criteria statements need to be measurable. This means that the most straightforward way of writing each assessment criterion is to produce one statement in which the outcomes are clearly differentiated by attainment level, not by writing three separate outcome statements. For example, in the Example criterion statements document, D3 would be written as:

Play and sing with a consistent and appropriate tone:

- Is not yet able to...
[working towards]
- Is able to...
[working at]
- Is confidently able to...
[working beyond]

All the teacher then needs to do is mark when they notice this taking place. What this also means is that teachers do not necessarily need to await a specific assessment lesson to do this, but they can assess 'on the hoof' as learning progresses. This may also be captured by a variety of means including informal audio or video recordings. It also means that formative and summative purposes of assessment can be contained within the framework.

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