

# ISM – The National Curriculum for Music

A revised framework for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment across primary music

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**Introduction:**

**Music is fundamentally important throughout the curriculum for all children and young people in *all* schools and academies.**

However, its place is becoming increasingly at risk in a growing number of schools, regardless of type, organisation, or governance. This is not only sad, it is wrong, as our political leaders have repeatedly stressed the importance of the place of music, as the statements on this page demonstrate.

**Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools**

*The government is committed to ensuring that high-quality music education is not the preserve of a social elite, but is the entitlement of every single child. (2018)*

**Amanda Spielman,  
Ofsted chief inspector**

*...there was a dearth of understanding about the curriculum in some schools... We saw curriculum narrowing, especially in upper key stage 2, with lessons disproportionately focused on English and mathematics... Some secondary schools were significantly shortening key stage 3 in order to start GCSEs. This approach results in the range of subjects that pupils study narrowing at an early stage and means that they might drop art, history or music, for instance, at age 12 or 13. (2018)*

**Amanda Spielman,  
Ofsted chief inspector**

*... there is and will be no 'Ofsted curriculum'. What we will be interested in is the coherence, the sequencing and construction, the implementation of the curriculum, how it is being taught and how well children and young people are progressing in it. So please, don't leap for quick fixes or superficial solutions just to please Ofsted. That would be the wrong response. From September, we'll be just as interested in where you are going and how you intend to get there, not just whether you've arrived there yet. (2018)*

**Susan Aykin, Ofsted National Lead for Visual and Performing Arts**

*A school that has all of its eggs in English and Maths would be unlikely to get an outstanding judgment because the wider curriculum is very important... It would be difficult to be judged as an outstanding school if you did not pay heed to the importance of the arts in your curriculum. (2018)*

## Introduction

A strong musical presence in school classrooms creates a living musical culture in those schools. Music lessons and musical activities delivered on a regular and sustained basis by classroom teachers is the backbone of this work, and must continue to be so. These teachers know their children and young people, design and deliver learning programmes and activities specifically tailored to the wants and needs of their school communities, work with children and young people day-in-day-out, in order to sustain an inspiring music education throughout the years that those youngsters will be learning with them.

The essence of the music curriculum as it appears in the current National Curriculum framework is an excellent basis for the teaching and learning of music in all schools. Composing, Performing, and Listening are all key aspects of musical knowledge, skills, and understanding, and the emphasis placed on these needs to remain strong in all our classrooms.

We hear on a daily basis that teachers and schools are facing issues regarding curriculum and assessment in music. This revised document is constructed upon sound research-based principles and evidence into effective teaching, learning, and assessment. It provides a framework that is designed to help you, your department, and your SLT, think about what you want from music education. It helps you address matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, bringing together theory and practice within your own setting.

We hope that you find it useful, and that there are ideas, provocations, and suggestions here that you can take and adapt to suit your own circumstances, and that it will prove helpful for you providing a strong music curriculum and musical activities in and beyond your school.

## References

<b>Aykin, S. (2018)</b> <b>in Romer, C.</b>	<i>Ofsted culture lead: 'I've not seen arts side-lined in schools'</i>	Arts Professional Magazine
<b>Gibb, N. (2018)</b>	<i>Robert Craft Tribute, Frank Bridge Book, James Gaffigan</i>	BBC Radio 3
<b>Spielman, A. (2018)</b>	<i>HMCI commentary: curriculum and the new education inspection framework</i>	www.gov.uk
<b>Spielman, A. (2018)</b>	<i>Amanda Spielman launches Ofsted's Annual Report 2017/18</i>	www.gov.uk

## Section 1:

### An overview of musical learning in the early years and primary schools

Music is a practical subject; it is academic, creative, technical, intellectual and challenging. Musical learning is about thinking and acting musically. 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, building up pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Children come to school with a lifetime of musical experiences, which is practical and experiential, and which have 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.

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 should, and in 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 as appropriate) should be used 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.

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.

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-levelling, 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:

### A planning and assessment spiral

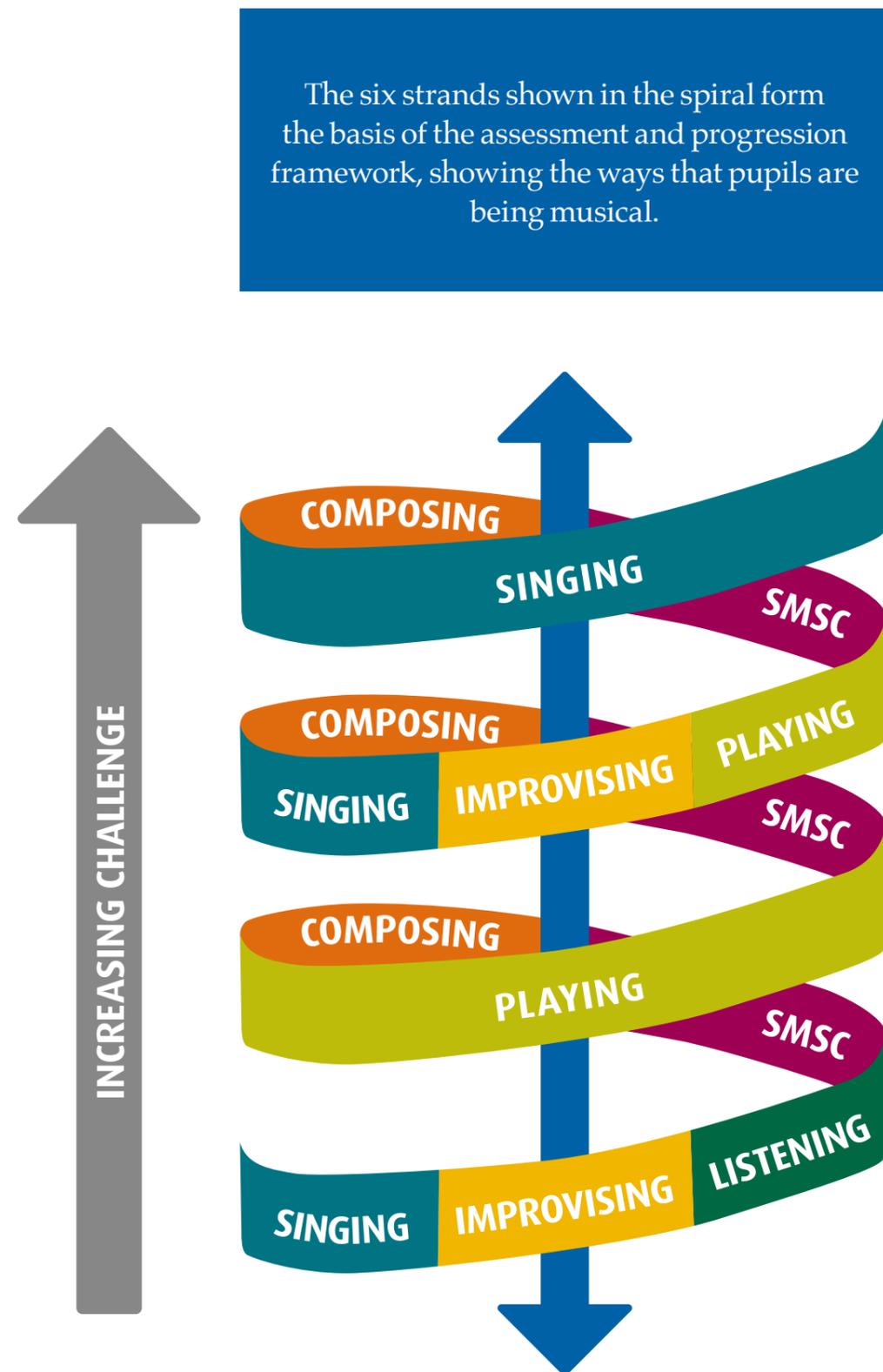
Musical learning in primary schools is often built around six main strands, which are interrelated and overlapping. These are:

- Singing
- Composing
- Improvising
- Playing
- Critical engagement,
- Social, moral, spiritual, and cultural (SMSC)

Singing, composing, improvising, and playing should be self-explanatory. The notion of critical engagement as we are using it encompasses listening, appraising, evaluating, describing, identifying, aural perception and many other aspects of musical learning. Whilst in this framework critical engagement is assessed separately, in practice it can be seen to permeate throughout all aspects of musicking. In a similar vein, SMSC can also be considered as running throughout musical learning like an *idée fixe*.

The idea of a spiral curriculum is well established both generally, and in music education in particular (Bruner, 1960; Bruner, 1975; Thomas, 1970; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Charanga, 2015). We are presenting the six strands of musical learning at KS3 in the form of a spiral. This is important, as the notion of progression using a spiral means that pupils can go back and forth, up and down, in three dimensions, and over time. Often as learners encounter a new situation their apparent attainment can be perceived as dipping, but by invoking the notion of a spiral this does not mean that their actual attainment has worsened, merely that in the specific instance in question the pupils have shifted location on the spiral.





## Section 2c:

### Using the framework

The framework is presented as a series of questions for 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, at Key Stage 2, using staff and other notations if appropriate. Teachers may wish to add their own sources of evidence to this outline.

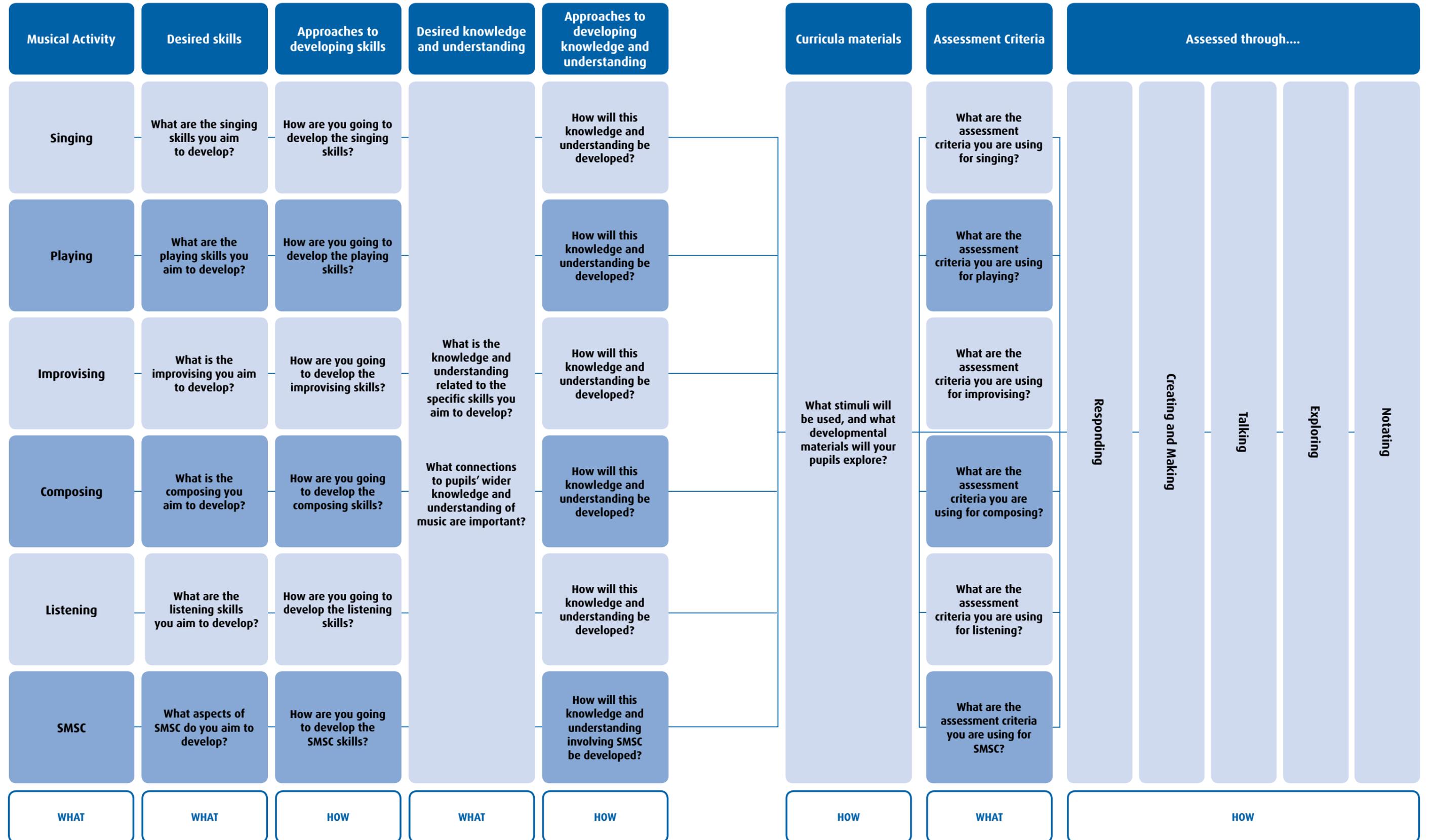
Examples of possible assessment criteria statements across different stages of learning are shown in the exemplar tables within this document. It is important to note that it is up to each school to decide what it is that will be assessed, as well as how it will be assessed. The examples given have been 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.

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.

Figure 1: A Planning and Assessment Spiral

Assessment and progression framework



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 and self correct when going out of time.
3. Demonstrate increasing confidence, expression, skill and level of musicality through taking different roles in performance and rehearsal.
4. Lead an independent part in a group when singing or playing. (e.g. rhythm, ostinato, drone, simple part singing, etc.)
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, and simple staff notation, 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 an 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 section C3 would be written as:

Suggest, follow and lead simple performance directions:

- 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.

### Martin Fautley

Professor Martin Fautley is Director of Research in the School of Education and Social Work at Birmingham City University. He has a wealth of experience in music education, both in terms of pedagogy, and of music education research and evaluation projects.

For many years he was a secondary school music teacher, subsequently undertaking Doctoral research working in the education and music faculties at the University of Cambridge, investigating the teaching, learning and assessment of classroom music making.

He is widely known for his work in researching assessment and is the author of ten books, including *Assessment in Music Education* published by Oxford University Press. He has written and published numerous journal articles, book chapters and academic research papers on a range of aspects of teaching and learning. He is Co-editor of the *British Journal of Music Education*.

### Dr Alison Daubney

Dr Alison Daubney has a portfolio career. Having worked as an instrumental and then classroom music teacher, Alison became involved in teacher education and is currently working part time at the University of Sussex.

She completed a PhD at the University of Surrey, exploring how composing is taught in Key Stage 3. Alison has worked extensively in the UK and abroad with University of Cambridge International Examinations on overseas curriculum and assessment development, training and action research. She is on the steering group of her local music education hub, SoundCity:Brighton and Hove. She works with schools, music education hubs, music services and arts organisations, implementing and advising them on training, education, research and evaluation.

Alison has published many materials for music educators. Her book *Teaching Primary Music* was published by SAGE in 2017. In 2018, the ISM Trust published her and Gregory Daubney's (CPsychol, MSc) ground-breaking book *Play: A psychological toolkit for optimal music performance*.

### The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM)

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) is the UK's professional body for musicians and a nationally recognised subject association for music.

Since 1882, we have been dedicated to promoting the importance of music and protecting the rights of those working in the music profession. We support over 9,000 members across the UK and Ireland with our unrivalled legal advice and representation, comprehensive insurance and specialist services.

Our members come from all areas of the music profession and from a wide variety of genres and musical backgrounds. As well as working musicians, our membership also includes recent graduates, part-time and full-time music students, and retired musicians.

We campaign tirelessly in support of musicians' rights, music education and the profession as a whole. We are a financially independent not-for-profit organisation with no political affiliation. This independence allows us the freedom to campaign on any issue affecting musicians.

[ism.org](http://ism.org)

### The ISM Trust

The ISM Trust, the Incorporated Society of Musicians' (ISM) sister charity, was created in 2014 to advance education, the arts and to promote health. Our primary focus is to deliver high quality professional development by leading practitioners from the ISM and in partnership with other organisations.

We are dedicated to creating pioneering resources to support music and all those who work in the sector including music educators, performers, and composers. We deliver this work through webinars, regional seminars, training events and advice packs.

[ismtrust.org](http://ismtrust.org)

# Primary Music Toolkit by Dr Alison Daubney



The ISM Trust, supported by the Schools Music Association (SMA), commissioned the Primary Music Toolkit to help primary school teachers better understand what music teaching is and how it can be utilised even more to bring the primary curriculum to life.

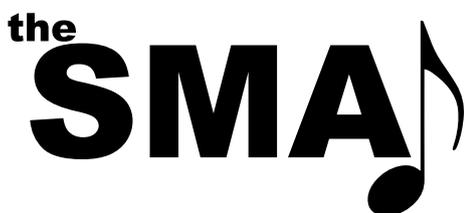
Teachers can visit the ISM Trust website at [ismtrust.org/primary-toolkit](http://ismtrust.org/primary-toolkit) to access this free resource.

## The toolkit comes in six downloadable parts:

- Setting up musical learning in the primary classroom
- Leading and developing vocal work
- A brief guide to using musical instruments
- Composing and creativity – doodling with sound
- Using technology in music primary education
- Musical learning in the creative curriculum



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