

# Assessing Musical Learning and Progression

at Key Stage 3

Module 5

## Module 5

In this module music teachers will consider ways in which pupils' musical progression at Key Stage 3 can build on musical learning at Key Stage 2, and also lead into Key Stage 4 qualifications and assessment.

### Consolidating pupils' musical progression from Key Stage 2, through Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4

As a secondary Music teacher you are responsible for assessing your pupils and their musical progression. Assessment of pupils' musical progression through Key Stage 3 does not, and must not stand alone. You have to know what pupils have done, learnt and understood by the time they reach you at secondary school in order to build on this and you must also ensure that your KS3 pupils are equipped to move on to KS4 music courses, if they choose to do so. Firstly, it is important to try and define exactly what is meant by musical progression. We are clearly expecting pupils to become better musicians, but what is it that we want them to get better at?

#### TASK 1

Complete the following table. List all of the things that you would wish pupils to get better at as they progress in their musical learning between the ages of 4-18.

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**What do you want pupils to get better at?**

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e.g. Singing with confidence and secure intonation

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e.g. Being able to reflect emotions in their own compositions

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Your list will, hopefully, include a huge range of different things. It will undoubtedly include musical skills, transferable skills (e.g. working effectively in a group), factual knowledge about the music that your pupils encounter and less tangible things like musical expressiveness.

## TASK 2

Consider your current KS3 scheme of work. From your list for Task 1, which are the areas in which your pupils make most progress through their learning throughout your scheme of work?

From your list for Task 1, which are the areas in which pupils make least progress through their learning throughout your scheme of work?

Identify three areas in which you would like your pupils to show more progress throughout KS3 and come up with some ideas about how you might be able to develop pupil progress in these areas:

Pupils make least progress in:	How might this be addressed?

If you want pupils to make really effective progress in their curriculum music lessons at KS3 it is important to know what pupils have done, learnt and understood by the time they come to the end of KS2.

Janet Mills observed that it was a common perception of many secondary music teachers that pupils 'do nothing at primary school' (Mills, 1996). In research a decade later Marshall and Hargreaves observed that 'most [secondary] teachers still appear to find it necessary to "start from scratch"' (Marshall and Hargreaves 2007). Whilst it is obvious that pupils will have had varied musical experiences at KS2 it is very important to understand that all pupils bring a wealth of musical experience to the secondary school. This may have been gained in school or out of school and in a formal, non-formal or informal context.

For instance, all pupils in maintained schools in Kent have had the opportunity to take part in whole class instrumental learning in *MusicPlus* classes at KS2. This is in addition to their musical learning within the curriculum.

## TASK 3

Access the Soundhub website:

<http://soundhubkent.com>

Click on the Schools tab and then on the key stage 2 link.

Read the *MusicPlus* Programme framework.

1. List aspects of the *MusicPlus* Programme that you were unaware of before reading it.
2. What aspects of the *MusicPlus* Programme could you build on with your Year 7 pupils at the start of KS3?
3. Which instruments are being taught in the *MusicPlus* Programmes in your feeder primary schools?

It is important to consider how you can build on the whole class instrumental learning experiences that most of your pupils will have had. Once you have found out what instruments pupils have had a chance to learn to play you might investigate (perhaps by surveying your Year 7 pupils) whether pupils have encountered notations (e.g. stave notation, tab, rhythm grids etc.) and what other activities they have been involved in within their whole class instrumental learning sessions (e.g. class singing, improvisation etc.).

Pupils will additionally have had a wide range of musical experiences out of school. They may have sung in choirs or in stage productions, have had private instrumental or vocal tuition, have taken part in instrumental lessons such as those offered by Kent Music, learnt alongside others in brass bands or cadet bands, learnt from friends or taught themselves. Do not dismiss any sort of instrumental or vocal learning. For instance, pupils who have learnt from friends or have taught themselves often have highly developed aural skills, since much of their learning will have involved playing by ear. As Anice Peterson and Leonora Davies suggest:

‘when children move on...[we] need to take into account all the integrated experiences that children bring with them from their home, their school, social and musical life to enable continuity and progression.’ (Paterson and Davies 2005: 5)

How can you assess what your Year 7 pupils have done, learnt and understood? A starting point might be to try and devise some sort of ‘musical passport’ that pupils carry with them from each phase of their education. This would allow you to record and celebrate your pupils’ music making during their transition from primary to secondary school, both in and out of school. This requires collaboration with primary colleagues but can help to ensure that secondary music teachers do not ‘start from scratch’ at the start of Key Stage 3.

## TASK 4

Meet with the person responsible for co-ordinating music in one of your feeder primary schools. Devise a simple musical passport that could be sent to and filled in by pupils at all of your feeder primary schools. Think about what you might want to include within the passport e.g.:

What musical opportunities has the pupil had within the KS1 and KS2 curriculum?

What instrument(s) has the pupil learnt to play within and beyond their primary school?

What singing activities has the pupil taken part in within and beyond their primary school?

Has the pupil gained any grades of other recognition (e.g. Music Medals) for their instrumental or vocal learning?

Does the pupils wish to begin or to continue instrumental or vocal tuition at their secondary school?

Devise other questions that are relevant to your particular schools and context.

It is important that you offer your Year 7 pupils instrumental and vocal activities that build on their prior experiences. Consider how group learning similar to the whole class *MusicPlus* programmes offered throughout Kent at KS2 can be continued at KS3. You may be able to rekindle pupils' enthusiasm to play instruments that are available at your school and that they have played before. Pupils may be able to start learning new instruments that they have always wanted to learn. From the start of KS3 encourage your pupils to use their prior instrumental and vocal experience in their curriculum lessons. Pupils may be able to bring their own instruments to curriculum lessons. Your school may be able to provide a small number of larger instruments to be used in curriculum lessons e.g. bass guitars, cellos etc. It can be very depressing to observe a class of pupils all struggling to compose on keyboards when in fact many of the pupils could be working and progressing more effectively on instruments that they have already learnt to play, either formally or informally.

A musical passport will go a small way towards finding out 'where your pupils are at' in order to ensure progression in their musical learning but you will need to go much further than this. Coll (2007) states that many secondary music teachers simply ask their pupils about their prior experience during their first music lesson in Year 7 but she suggests that this can be problematic. It is certainly not a good idea to 'survey' your pupils in their first Year 7 music lesson since you want to begin to build strong relationships with your new pupils and establish your music classroom as an active, purposeful place where music-making is central.

The most effective way to assess your pupils' prior experience and to establish a valuable baseline is to involve them in singing, playing, composing, reviewing and evaluating within a carefully constructed initial KS3 unit of work.

This initial unit of work should allow pupils to work creatively and imaginatively on open-ended tasks rather than be constrained by more common closed tasks, typically based around notation or the elements of music. Very importantly, this will allow you to assess your pupils' creativity as well as their skills.

## TASK 5

Critically analyse your own initial unit of work for your Year 7 pupils. Consider whether the unit allows you to assess pupils' singing and playing skills, their skills of reviewing and evaluating and, perhaps most importantly, pupils' creativity.

What revisions would you have to make to this initial unit of work in order to be able to assess all of these things and gain real understanding of 'where your pupils are at'? (e.g. you might need to expand the unit of work to cover a 10-12 week period.)

In Modules 1 and 2 we have already considered how you can plan for and assess your pupils' musical progression throughout KS3. It is also important to think about whether your KS3 scheme of work really does equip all of your pupils to progress on to KS4 music courses if they choose to do so. There may be many good reasons why you choose BTEC courses involving music as the most appropriate route for your pupils. However, ever since the GCSE courses replaced 'O' levels and CSEs, it has been intended that GCSE courses should be able to be followed by all pupils if they chose to do so.

At the present time the take up of GCSE music courses is extremely low with only about 8% of pupils nationally choosing to follow GCSE music courses. There are obviously many factors that affect this figure, not least parental influences, but it is worth considering how you might encourage a higher percentage of pupils to follow KS4 music courses in your own school.

Edexcel is the most popular exam board choice for GCSE music in Kent schools. Because of that, we will focus on this GCSE Specification but the similarities with other exam boards' GCSE Specifications are clear. In the current Edexcel linear GCSE Specification pupils have to engage in:

### **Performing Music 30%**

- 1 solo performance
- 1 ensemble performance

### **Composing Music 30%**

- 2 compositions
- or 2 arrangements
- or 1 composition and 1 arrangement

Candidates have to submit either:

- a notated score (either handwritten or printed)
- or a written commentary containing sufficient performance directions to allow for a realisation of the piece plus a recording

### Listening and Appraising 40%

A one and a half hour written paper relating to set works (68 marks for a listening exam relating to audio examples and 12 marks for a written answer requiring extended writing)

Very often music teachers comment that the listening and appraising paper is the stumbling block for their pupils. However, it should be reiterated that only 12/80 marks in one paper relate to any extended writing. All other answers can be bullet-pointed and many will relate to multiple choice or questions scaffolded in different ways. Music teachers often worry about how to develop pupils' understanding of the musical terminology required by the GCSE examination. It is essential not to see the listening and appraising paper as something separate from the other papers. Throughout KS3 pupils should be introduced to terminology bit by bit and only after the musical terms have been musically explored. Pupils will gain very little from learning musical terms and their definitions without musically understanding what the terms mean.

## CASE STUDY

Year 7 pupils are engaging in a unit of work exploring musical textures. Their music teacher finds that almost all pupils have encountered the term 'texture' in their KS2 curriculum music lessons but are not always able to recognise and describe thick and thin textures in the music that they listen to.

As a starter activity the music teacher plays a solo piece on her flute and the pupils concurrently handle small pieces of silky material. The teacher asks the pupils to describe the texture of the flute piece and to describe the texture of the material that they have handled. Pupils come up with responses such as 'thin', 'smooth' and 'plain'. The teacher gets the pupils to refine their answers into those that relate solely to the texture of the music and material.

Pupils are split into groups of 4 and are given a range of classroom instruments. Each group is given an identical piece of fabric. The fabric is a very thick textured tweed. Pupils have 5 minutes to make up a short composition that represents the thick texture of the material.

After an interim plenary to share practice the pupils develop their compositions relating to the tweed material to additionally reflect its repeating striped pattern.

In the final part of the lesson each group of pupils chooses an additional piece of material and have to devise a composition that reflects the textures of the materials laid out in a line in any way they choose. Interestingly, only one group thinks to choose another silky scrap of material to add to the tweed and they devise a cohesive ternary piece.

This case study demonstrates how pupils can gain understanding of terminology having musically experienced the terms.

The case study also establishes an important principle about composition that can be adopted in the KS3 music classroom and subsequently be used in the KS4 music classroom. Pupils can gain a huge amount of understanding about music (e.g. terms, structures, instrumentation etc.) through engaging in short composition tasks. Many pupils seem to spend many months working on the two GCSE compositions that they have to finally submit. There is a common misconception that endless additions and revisions will result in more effective compositions. Consider using short composition tasks to allow pupils to learn musical things that they will need to be able to recognise in their Listening and Appraising exam.

In order to be able to assess pupils' musical progress more effectively through KS3 and into KS4, and now that the restrictions of levelling have been removed, some schools are choosing to assess pupils throughout these two key stages in a progressive way that leads directly into GCSE assessment processes. You might wish to consider whether there are aspects of GCSE assessment that you could use with your pupils at KS3, in order to facilitate this progression.

## Bibliography

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## Notes

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