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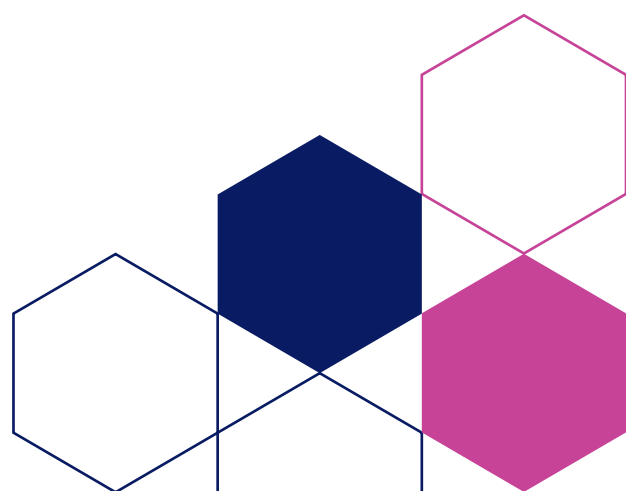
Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028

An entitlement to excellence and equity

Music

Draft curriculum framework for Public Consultation

This document forms part of a suite of curriculum materials published for consultation





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Vision statement

Music is a universal form of human expression. When singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument, or simply listening for pleasure, music creates a deep connection between mind and body. As a unique form of sonic self-expression, music has the power to shape identities, foster connections and build a sense of community. It is in the creation and reception of music that many cultures find their most distinctive expression. The evolution of musical styles, and repertoires of songs and instrumental works, reflect how human beings have made meaning of their lives and times through music.

To understand what it is to be part of a common culture is to sing its songs, to move to its rhythms, to rejoice in celebration and share pain in its grief. This knowledge is part of the shared, background knowledge (history, stories, symbols, traditions, values) that enables fluent communication and understanding within a culture, acting as an 'unspoken vocabulary' to help pupils make connections, think critically, and participate fully in society, bridging gaps between different groups.

Everyone should be afforded the opportunity to engage in the joy of musical experience. It is the primary responsibility of music in the school curriculum to realise pupils' innate musicality by developing musical knowledge and understanding through a systematic engagement with musical ideas, elements, concepts and styles. From this, pupils learn to play, perform and compose music with greater control, fostering their capacity for self-expression. They learn to listen to music with increasing enjoyment through discernment and informed appreciation. All pupils come to school with prior musical knowledge, drawn from the music they have experienced in their lives so far and in their lives outside of school. The music curriculum develops this tacit musical knowledge systematically, increasing depth and complexity over time.

The study of music in school has many benefits for pupils beyond the music classroom and in a lifelong capacity. Playing or singing in a class ensemble engenders respect, through turn-taking and listening to others. Practising and developing instrumental or vocal mastery develops perseverance, self-discipline and the capacity to take feedback in order to improve. Listening to and studying a wide range of music from different cultures, past eras or for different audiences, enables pupils to recognise, understand and develop awareness and openness to their own and others' expressions of identity, place and culture.



Subject-specific categories

The music curriculum presented here is organised into three subject-specific categories:

- communicating through music
- pattern
- place and purpose

These categories provide an overarching structure that unites the core musical processes of performing, composing and listening. Each category offers a different lens through which pupils develop and apply their musicianship, while together they ensure a balanced and deeply connected musical experience. Together, these categories cut across performing, composing and listening, enabling pupils to develop more profound, connected and well-rounded musicianship.

Communicating through music

Communication is the conveying, sharing or receiving of musical ideas. Pupils' ability to communicate using music will develop over time through improved technical competence, deepened musical understanding and increasingly sophisticated engagement with musical quality and beauty.

This category contains three sub-strands:

Singing and playing

Singing and learning to handle sound on instruments ensure that learning takes place through music making.

Representing and reproducing sound

Whether by ear or using notation pupils need a medium for learning new music. A strong curriculum that helps pupils to do so builds their independence as musicians.

Listening, responding and describing

This curriculum divides the concepts of musical elements into two sets. This first set covers the elements under the control of the performer: articulation, dynamics, pitch, tempo and timbre/instrumentation as well as aural awareness of mood/tonality. The second set is outlined below, in Pattern.

Pattern

The development of musical understanding is dependent upon an awareness of pattern in sound and silence. Over time pupils will gain an increased aural awareness of the constituent components of musical works, the ability to describe their effects and to combine them in the creative process. This category contains sub-categories that cover the musical elements that fall within the remit of the musical creator (composer/improviser): rhythm, melody, harmony, tonality, texture and structure.

Place and purpose

The curriculum will include an emphasis on place, purpose and people as it seeks to enable pupils to engage with meaning and interpretation. As pupils perform, create and listen to music, their knowledge of place and purpose in music will then interact with their own relationship to music. This will become part of their journey towards developing their own sophisticated musical understanding.

To understand better how these new subject categories encapsulate the three activities of performing, composing and listening/appraising, please see below.

Communicating through music

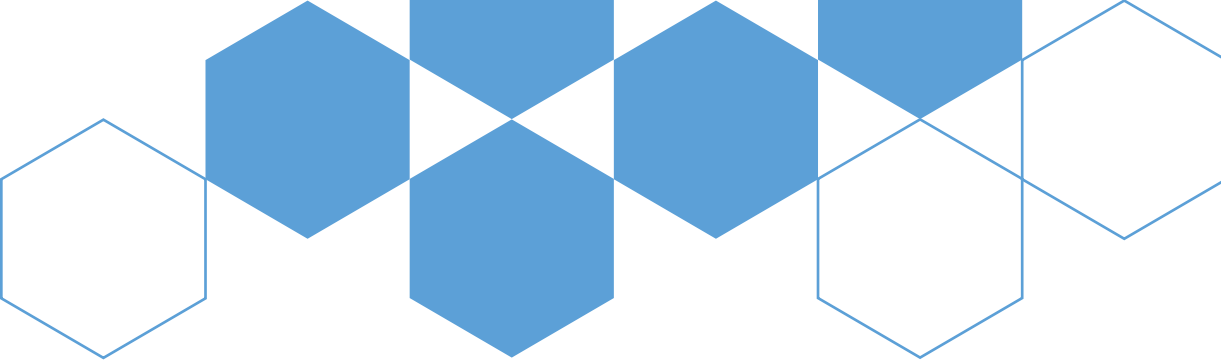
Performing	Playing fluently and with expression
Composing	Presenting creative work fluently and with expression
Listening	Developing aural perception

Pattern

Performing	Understanding the music you are playing and how it creates its effects
Composing	Learning, embedding and applying the components of composition, enabling confidence and creativity in finished work
Listening	Perception of the effects of devices and components that underpin musical processes

Place and purpose

Performing	Understanding where the music came from so that you can communicate its purpose and meaning
Composing	Understanding the traditions in which your creative work sits
Listening	Having the knowledge of place and purpose which enables a more authentic listening experience, engaging with musical meaning



Foundation Stage

Foundation Stage music is where pupils learn to listen, distinguish between sounds, explore their feelings, and develop their self-expression through music. It is the youngest children who are most naturally inclined to spontaneous singing and uninhibited music-making. Whether it is humming as they work, re-creating sounds to represent elements of our natural world, or moving toys together to create rhythms that resonate with them, Foundation Stage pupils are naturally disposed to engage with sound through play. By singing simple rhymes and chants, listening and moving to music, as well as making their own vocal, body or instrumental sounds, pupils begin to understand how music works. Consequently, through purposeful and playful musical activities, pupils will begin to understand the place of music in their everyday lives.

Communicating through music

Singing and playing

Pupils should learn:

- to chant in unison (e.g. as they say 'good morning' to their teacher, play games such as 'Ring-a-ring-a-roses', the 'Hokey Cokey', 'Sleeping Bunnies')
- to distinguish between their speaking and singing voices
- to sing nursery rhymes and songs (including action songs) in unison with a small vocal range (e.g. 'Happy and You Know it' or 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes', 'The Wheels on the Bus')
- how to play untuned percussion instruments (e.g. shaking the bells or tapping the drum), and to use them to play rhythmic patterns in time
- to play rhythmic patterns on body and untuned percussion
- to respond to stop and start signals
- to learn new music using call and response

Representing and reproducing sound

Pupils should learn:

- gestures and movements for responding to music (e.g. clapping, tapping, clicking, stretching, curling and pointing)

- to make sounds represented by pictures (e.g. images of clapping hands, stamping feet in a rhythm grid).

Listening, responding and describing

Pupils should learn:

- to communicate using musical language to describe the sounds that they hear and the feelings they evoke, including:
 - high and low
 - loud and quiet
 - fast and slow
- names of untuned percussion instruments in their classrooms (e.g. wood blocks, claves, castanets, rhythm sticks and drums)
- to listen and respond to everyday sounds in the classroom, home and wider environment (e.g. using their voices to reproduce sounds; using digital technology to record and replay)

Pattern

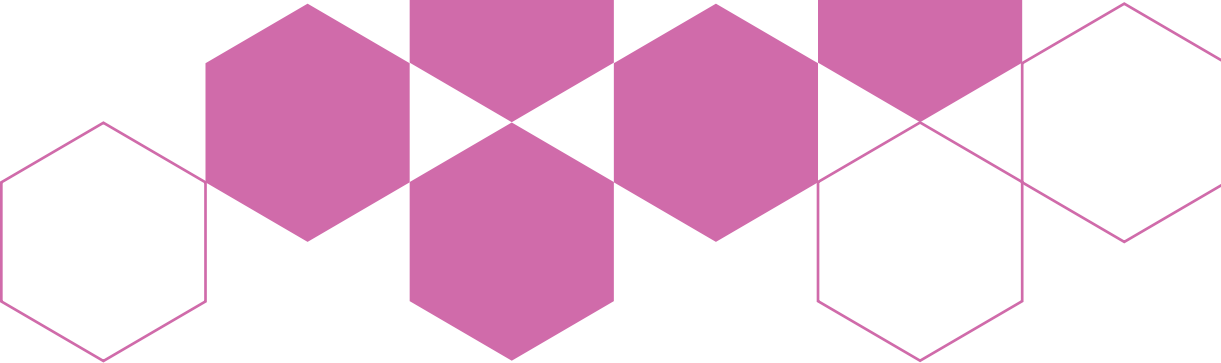
Pupils should learn:

- that pattern in music can first be felt in the pulse, the steady heartbeat of the music, which they might feel while marching to a song (e.g. 'The Grand Old Duke of York', 'Old MacDonald')
- to recognise rhythmic patterns through pictures (e.g. hand foot hand foot [with hand indicating a clap and foot indicating a stamp])
- to combine sounds rhythmically for purposeful effect to accompany a narrative (e.g. *The Three Little Pigs*, *Handa's Surprise*)

Place and purpose

Pupils should learn:

- about place, purpose and people when playing, creating and listening (e.g. 'Ring-a-ring-a-roses' and nursery rhymes which induct pupils into the common culture of their locality as well as knowledge of musical culture in the wider world; *Fossils* or *Aquarium* from *The Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saëns or *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi; folk tunes which have origins in religious narrative, such as 'She'll Be Coming Round The Mountain')



Key Stage 1

At Key Stage 1, natural curiosity will transform into a deeper appreciation of sound as children come to know and understand a greater range of musical terms. By moving from simply hearing sounds, to listening and talking about them, pupils develop knowledge and understanding of the key components of music participating in a shared musical language. When singing and playing simple percussion instruments, a deeper understanding of these elements will result in sounds becoming more intentional and controlled. As pupils perform and compose music, they will begin to express feelings and ideas with increasing intuition and confidence. At Key Stage 1 pupils will progress from playing alongside each other to playing with one another, participating in group music-making. They will also develop their group music making skills through creating musical ideas in small groups and as a whole-class. Pupils will learn about how musical sounds and silence can be represented with signs and symbols. They will expand their knowledge of musical styles (repertoire) by learning to sing longer rhymes, songs and chants, from a range of local and global contexts.

Communicating through music

Singing and playing

Pupils should learn:

- to sing a range of songs in unison increasing in challenge from the Foundation Stage with the use of call and response (e.g. 'He's got the Whole World in His Hands'), increased pitch range (e.g. 'I Wanna Be Like You') and longer phrases (e.g. 'Yellow Submarine')
- to sing short phrases using one breath (e.g. 'my Aunt Jane she called me in', 'she gave me tea out of her wee tin')
- to prepare for singing by warming up the voices and adopting a good posture that allows for breath support
- to play longer (e.g. two bar) rhythmic patterns on body or untuned percussion
- to play short, three or four-note melodic patterns on a tuned instrument (e.g. chime bars, recorders, in groups with boomwhackers)
- to control the dynamic with which they sing and play, presenting their music with more expression as a result

- to respond to the following directions when playing:
 - a count in
 - an ending
 - increases/decreases in volume (dynamics)
 - increases/decreases in speed (tempo)

Representing and reproducing sound

Pupils should learn:

- to play longer musical patterns and phrases using symbols, gestures and pictures as an aid
- to use syllables, for example ta ti-ti ti-ti ta, to learn music containing two, one and half beat notes
- purposeful gestures/movements for responding to music
- to identify and understand that silence in music is a rest

Listening, responding and describing

Pupils should learn:

- to communicate using musical language to describe the sounds that they hear and the feelings they evoke:
 - **dynamics:** whether the sound is loud (forte) or quiet (piano)
 - **mood:** whether the music is upbeat/happy or more sad-sounding
 - **pitch:** whether the sound is high or low
 - **tempo:** whether the music is fast or slow
 - **timbre/instrumentation:** the names and sounds of common tuned instruments (e.g. xylophone, piano)

Pattern

Rhythm

Pupils should learn:

- to identify independently the pulse or steady beat in a piece of music by clapping, marching, moving or playing
- that 'a rhythm' is a short pattern of sounds and silence
- that these sounds have 'rhythmic values' defined by their duration (e.g. short and long notes, one/two/four beat notes)
- to play accurately music built entirely on rhythm using their bodies, voice or simple percussion such as tambourine, maracas or claves
- to arrange rhythmic ideas, with pictorial aids, into contrasting sequences
- to combine rhythmic patterns to accompany a story, pairing them with well-chosen timbres

Melody

Pupils should learn:

- to describe the main tune of a piece of music as the melody
- that the songs they sing have phrases

Texture

Pupils should learn:

- that musical texture refers to the independent layers in a piece of music
- to combine more than one layer of rhythmic patterns, (e.g. playing from a musical sound grid combining contrasting rhythmic layers using a digital audio workstation)

Place and purpose

Pupils should learn:

- about place, purpose and people when playing, creating and listening (e.g. 'Mickey Marley's Roundabout' song which narrates communal efforts in the wake of disaster; instruments with distinct cultural origins which help link timbre to place, such as castanets or the bodhran; pieces based on national folk tales and folklore such as *In the Hall of the Mountain King* by Edvard Grieg)



Key Stage 2

At Key Stage 2 pupils' understanding of the core musical elements will expand to encompass more nuanced musical concepts and devices. Pupils will learn to sing in simple parts, and play simple tuned instruments with greater control, confidence and accuracy, using musical notation and by ear. Through listening to and performing longer musical pieces, they will gain an understanding of how music moves through real time and learn about common musical structures. Pupils will move beyond performing and composing simple tunes to adding and creating layers of sound, exploring melody and accompaniment and developing their understanding of texture. Pupils will learn how measured sounds and silences are represented in staff notation and will be encouraged to notate sounds using a small range of notes and rests. Encountering a broader range of musical styles, pupils will begin to learn how musical traditions evolve in time and place.

Communicating through music

Singing and playing

Pupils should learn to:

- sing a range of songs in unison, round or two-part harmony with increasing pitch accuracy, including notes that are higher and lower than in earlier stages, (e.g. partner songs such as 'It's a long way to Tipperary' or 'Pack up your troubles'; simple rounds such as 'Catch a Falling Star' or 'Frere Jacques' use longer controlled breaths, sustaining musical lines through phrases)
- combine posture and breath preparation in creating a sustained sound
- perform a well-known folk song or traditional melody, vocally or on an instrument (e.g. 'I'll Tell Me Ma')
- create sound on percussion instruments with appropriate technique (e.g. striking a xylophone lightly to allow it to resonate)
- play simple song accompaniments on untuned or tuned percussion instruments
- play short melodies with a minimum of four pitches (e.g. 'Hot Cross Buns', 'Jack and Jill', the chorus of 'Jingle Bells')
- increase control over dynamics and articulation in creating musical phrases

Representing and reproducing sound

Pupils should learn to:

- recognise pitches on the treble clef (Lines: E-G-B-D-F Spaces: F-A-C-E)
- recognise music containing semibreves, minims, crotchets and pairs of quavers
- learn music by ear, building up the music they can reproduce aurally to complete 2 or 4 bar phrases

Listening, responding and describing

Pupils should learn to:

- communicate using musical language to describe the sounds that they hear and the feelings they evoke as detailed below:
 - **articulation:** smooth or detached
 - **dynamics:** whether sound is loud (forte), quiet (piano), getting louder (crescendo) or getting quieter (diminuendo)
 - **mood:** whether the music is upbeat/happy, more sad-sounding and whether it changes
 - **pitch:** whether sound is high, low, ascending and descending
 - **tempo:** whether the music is fast, slow, getting faster or getting slower
 - **timbre/instrumentation:**
 - folk instruments from the musical traditions of Ireland
 - the main orchestral families: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion
 - the difference between acoustic and digital instruments

Pattern

Rhythm

Pupils should learn:

- to play short rhythmic patterns from staff notation (e.g. two crotchets and four quavers)
- to combine these short patterns into full phrases (e.g. pairing two or four patterns in a row)
- to improvise a rhythmic pattern over a steady beat and the effect of using short notes or long notes

Melody

Pupils should learn:

- that melodies can move by step or by leap
- that melodic phrases can end on the home note (tonic), creating the effect of a feeling of closure (e.g. 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star', 'Amazing Grace')
- to recognise the question-and-answer pairs in melodic phrases (e.g. 'Who Will Buy?' from the musical *Oliver*)
- to create melodic phrases in question-and-answer pairs, drawing inspiration from repertoire learnt in the curriculum

Texture

Pupils should learn:

- that a melody which can be sung with a staggered start, creating multiple layers, is called a round or canon
- that these layers are called 'parts'
- to combine melodic and rhythmic layers to create a melody and accompaniment texture (e.g. using a sung melody with live untuned percussion accompaniment; by recording a melody using digital technology and adding rhythmic layers)

Structure

Pupils should learn:

- that musical structure, or form, is created using repeated sections, for example verse and chorus
- to use repeated sections in their own creative work (e.g. reprising a tune or chorus in a simple composition; creating and repeating a pattern using a musical programme on a digital device)

Place and purpose

Pupils should learn:

- about place, purpose and people when playing, creating and listening (e.g. 'Amazing Grace' has an extraordinary history both in its provenance and through its countless arrangements and performances; Irish jigs/reels and Ulster Scots marches/dances form an important aspect of the local cultural fabric; *Peter and the Wolf* by Prokofiev uses narrative and characterisation to introduce central instruments of the orchestra)
- to recognise common musical genres (e.g. popular music, jazz, classical music and musical theatre)





Key Stage 3

As pupils transition from Key Stage 2 into Key Stage 3, they build on established experiences of singing, playing, recognising pitches on the treble clef and exploring the core elements of music. Having sung in unison or simple harmony, performed on tuned and untuned instruments and explored pulse, rhythm, pitch, dynamics and structure, pupils are prepared to deepen their musical understanding and technical control. These foundations are developed through regular singing, instrumental and ensemble work, enabling pupils to communicate musically with increasing confidence, accuracy and sensitivity.

Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils strengthen their musical knowledge and aural awareness through reading and reproducing sound, learning music by ear, transposing melodies and creating original music using patterns, chords and scales. Understanding music in context and its cultural positioning shapes pupils' ability to create, participate in and appraise the music they engage with. Within this strand, pupils investigate the contextual and cultural environments that influence purpose and intent in music, exploring works from past and present and considering music as a reflection of times, places, social groups and shared experiences. Listening and describing are central to learning, with pupils using precise musical language to articulate what they hear and feel, drawing on music encountered at home, in school and in the wider community. Together, these strands provide a vital bridge between early musical experiences and more specialised study, fostering creativity, collaboration and cultural understanding beyond the classroom.

Communicating through music

Singing and playing

Pupils should learn:

- to use pure vowels, clear diction, controlled breathing and effective dynamics in their vocal performance
- to sing in three-part rounds or in simple harmony (e.g. 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door', 'Kookaburra')
- to play melodies on the keyboard, starting with the range of a fifth and introducing changes of hand position
- to transpose melodies by ear on a keyboard to different keys to build their understanding of key and scale (e.g. playing 'Ode to Joy' in F or D major instead of C)
- to play or sing in ensembles, developing their awareness of pulse, dynamic and timbre through their musical interactions in the moment with peers

Representing and reproducing sound

Pupils should learn:

- to recognise notes from C4 to A5 on the treble clef, including sharps and flats



- to read music containing semibreves, minims, crotchets, quavers and their associated rests
- to learn music by ear, developing a strong understanding of melodic shape that enables them to transpose a melody into a new key
- symbols for *forte*, *piano* and the hairpins

Listening, responding and describing

Pupils should learn:

- to communicate using musical language to describe the sounds that they hear and the feelings they evoke as detailed below:
 - **articulation:** staccato and legato
 - **dynamics:** common Italian terms from *piano* to *forte*, including changes of dynamic
 - **pitch:** melodic movement in steps or leaps
 - **tempo:** common Italian terms that might be used as reference points beyond music (e.g. *allegro*, *andante* and *adagio*)
 - **timbre/instrumentation:** widely used instruments, and techniques for playing them, specific to a variety of genres and traditions, including:
 - orchestral music
 - styles, instruments and techniques from the musical traditions of Ireland
 - standard rock/pop band line up, including synth replacements for acoustic instruments

Pattern

Pupils should learn:

- to create patterns on digital devices and using music programmes where appropriate

Rhythm

Pupils should learn about:

- ostinato as a musical device and the contexts in which ostinato is used
- dotted rhythms, triplets and syncopation in music they hear
- the effect of contrasting rhythmic patterns (e.g. the use of syncopation in certain styles of dance music)
- the idiomatic rhythms associated with, for example, jig, reels and marches

Melody and harmony

Pupils should learn:

- to play chords and use the primary chords to create new music
- to improvise melodies over a chord sequence using a restricted range of notes, (e.g. the pentatonic, blues scales)
- about major and minor tonality, the effect of each on the listener and at least one example of each to use when creating new music
- to combine melody and harmony either live with multiple instruments or using melodic and harmonic layers using digital technology

Texture

Pupils should learn:

- that texture refers to the number and manner in which instruments combine and to recognise contrasting examples of texture from different genres (e.g. melody, basso continuo and harmonic filling in Baroque music; melody and the constituent part of the accompaniment [harmonic, bass and rhythmic] in typical line-up of rock music)
- to differentiate between a melody and an accompaniment in a range of styles

- to compose using contrasting textures (e.g. in a percussion ensemble moving between unison and polyrhythm; using digital technology to combine textural layers for musical impact)

Structure

Pupils should learn to:

- use the terms verse, chorus, middle 8, A and B to refer to the sections of music they hear
- use these sections in music they create

Place and purpose

Pupils should learn:

- about the contextual and cultural environments that shape music, including purpose, intent, social meaning and historical background, exploring these through playing, creating and listening (e.g. 'When the Saints Go Marching In' can be sung, played and explored through its historical origins and role as a 20th century jazz standard; 'Drowsy Maggie' or 'The Star of County Down' exemplify the musical features of reels and marches)





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