

## Assessment in Music – A practical guide

Assessment can be tackled in two ways :

1. As a summative, rounding-off procedure at the end of a unit of work
2. As a process which involves pupils setting themselves targets, motivates them and takes place during and at the end of a unit of work.

Clearly the 2<sup>nd</sup> option is the most beneficial all round. Too often, though do we see it as a paper exercise which has to be done to satisfy school procedures or so we can write something in the pupils' reports.

The purpose of this guide is to give quick, practical advice on assessing pupils effectively in the classroom using this 2<sup>nd</sup> option. After reading this guide, you should be in a position to :

- Decide on which methods of assessment are appropriate for each of your units of work
- Formulate assessment criteria for each of your units of work
- Devise a practical and efficient way of recording your assessments
- Integrate assessment with pupil target setting

### Recording assessments

The recording of assessment scores will take different forms, depending on the school policy on assessment. The most common method of recording is a 4 or 5 point rising scale for each unit of work, which at some point is translated into a National Curriculum Level.

Whichever method is used, it is inevitable that a National Curriculum level will need to be calculated from the acquired assessments. This may need to be done each year for the school records and for the annual report. It makes things much easier if all assessments are entered into a spreadsheet. In this way, the assessment scores can be sorted into class order, highest to lowest etc. Assessment scores stored in a spreadsheet can continue throughout the key stage, giving the pupil and the staff a good picture of progress made.

Here is a simple spreadsheet of a class, sorted alphabetically by surname. It details the units covered over the Key Stage. In this example, each pupil has been given an assessment score between 1 and 5, with 5 being the highest.

## Music Department KS3 Assessments - 1998 entry

### UNITS

Surname	Forename		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Abbott	Kirsty		1	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	3
Arafia	Sofia		4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Bernstein	Elmer		2	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4
Cushman	Mandy		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Elfman	Danny		2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2
Fredericks	Michael		4	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5
Gluck	Sandra		3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2
Jones	Grace		5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
Patel	Alanda		2	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2
Phillips	Jonathan		4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	3	4	5
Santos	Enrique		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4
Sawhney	Nitin		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Williams	John		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1

Later, we will see how you can convert this data into the reporting of National Standards. First, let's investigate what Assessment is all about.

Assessment should :

- involve pupils in the process
- be understood by pupils and staff
- be consistent between all staff
- involve target setting for pupils
- be carried out by staff, pupils' peers, and the pupils themselves
- flag up inconsistencies in attainment between subjects
- tie into any school policy on assessment

### Assessment should involve pupils in the process

The pupils should be involved in the assessment process from the beginning, or near the beginning of a unit. In the early stages of the unit, the pupils can be told **how** they will be assessed and **what** they will be assessed on. Work produced in the early stages of the unit can be assessed by the pupils and the class and if fact can be part of the appraisal process during a performance.

Example : The class are composing simple variations on Frere Jacques using keyboards and are performing them to each other.

Following each performance, the teacher could suggest a mark for the work, then ask "What would he need to do to get the next mark up?" In this way, target setting is built into the process of assessment.

Pupils can be involved in very practical ways, such as entering assessment scores into a computer or giving a written account of another pupil's work.

### Assessment should be understood by pupils and staff

Clearly the language used for specialist teaching staff and for pupils needs to be different. Even when it is intended that the teacher will carry out the assessment, it is important that the pupils understand what the grades/marks actually mean, so this should ideally be posted up on the classroom wall for all to see.

For pupils, a simple rising 5 point scale for assessment of a performance could be written like this :

1	I can play half the tune
2	I can play all the tune
3	I can play all the tune and all the bass
4	I can play all the tune, all the bass and the chords
5	I can play all the tune, the bass and the chords and can play with 2 hands together on a keyboard

In this way, it is easy for pupils to see exactly what their mark actually means and, correspondingly how they would be able to improve the mark (target setting again).

Rigid criteria for assessment are also important to ensure all teaching staff in the department are marking to the same standard. Music is one of those subjects in which personal opinion and subjectivity can play a big part in the outcome of assessment. It is certainly not as clear cut as Modern Foreign Languages, for example, where the use of the perfect tense in a sentence automatically triggers a level 4. For this reason, we must find things which are assessable in each unit and write them down in a criteria.

### Assessment should be consistent between all staff

The credibility of assessments among pupils (and therefore parents) can be seriously affected if it appears that one teacher is being more severe or lenient than another. Having specific criteria for assessment will certainly help towards consistency as will having 'pupil friendly' criteria posted on the notice boards. Visible signs that assessment is being carried out in a controlled way does wonders for the credibility of the system.

From time to time, it is also important to moderate assessments between staff to ensure that standards are the same across the department. This is especially important in large music departments or in schools where a number of part-time staff teach music. For this purpose, it is a good idea to record assessments of performing or composing from time to time and use some in service training sessions (all schools have them) to moderate work. One session a year should be sufficient to ensure marking standards are the same.

### Assessment should involve target setting for pupils

Target setting should be linked to assessment. In a simple form, you are target setting if a pupil is told "That is worth a mark of 3; but if you add a 2<sup>nd</sup> section then later go

back to your 1<sup>st</sup> section you could get a mark of 4". We do verbal target setting in this way all the time, but by linking it into actual assessment scores, it gives an actual tangible score to reach.

It is easy to see how this can be formalised. It is feasible for example for pupils to write down their targets at the end of each lesson.

Assessment should be carried out by staff, pupils' peers, and the pupils themselves

Many assessments will be carried out in the traditional way, by the teacher. If we are now opening up a dialogue with the pupils about assessment, then it makes sense to involve them also in the assessment process.

Three methods of assessment can be identified :

- Teacher assessment : The teacher carries out the assessment and the recording
- Self-assessment : The pupil assesses himself
- Peer assessment : The pupils assess each other

Self assessment and peer assessment should also involve the teacher, but only in so far as moderating or verifying a sample of marks. When embarking on self and peer assessment, it is a common worry among teachers that pupils will attempt to cheat the system or will over-estimate their ability by awarding themselves higher marks than they are able to attain. In practice, the opposite is true. Pupils will generally tend to *under* estimate their ability.

A simple method for self assessment on a performance or composition is in the form of an assessment card which the pupil is given at the beginning of the lesson and completes by simply ticking appropriate boxes according to individual 'milestones'.

A very simple example of this is given below. Here, the mark is also verified by another member of the class thus adding an appraisal to the system.

Name _____		<u>Unit 8 Self assessment</u>	
	Tick	Checked by	
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can play half the bass part
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can play half the tune part
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can play all the bass part
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can play all the tune part
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can play the tune and the bass at the same time

The target setting in this example is built into the system, since the target is simply the next category.

### Audio examples of assessment

In most schools it is not feasible to make an audio recording of every assessment made, although it is always a good idea to keep examples of assessment at different levels across the age range. This will provide evidence to inspectors and management that assessment is being carried out in a controlled and well thought out way. It will also provide examples of different marks to assessing staff so that everyone is marking to the same standard.

### Reporting National Standards

Most countries with a National framework for subjects now have to report standards to central government or state education authority in some form or other. In the UK, this is the reporting of National Curriculum levels. With a subjective subject like music, this can be complex and time consuming; time we don't often have! The system proposed here is not perfect, although it is as accurate as you can be and saves lots of time, effort and subjectivity.

1. Using a spreadsheet, calculate the totals of all the assessments made. Absent marks should be amended to average marks. There will be an 'Auto sum' function on the spreadsheet to enable you to do this very quickly.
2. Sort all the pupils into rank order, starting with the lowest scoring pupil.
3. This is the hardest part. Decide what National Level the highest ranking and the lowest ranking pupil should be, and then spread the levels accordingly in the rank order you have created.
4. You will now need to manually review all the marks for anomalies, for example, pupils who have shown particular strengths in instrumental music which have not necessarily been shown in the classroom. In these cases, you can adjust the national level accordingly.

Here is our original list of pupils which has been sorted into rank order and a National Level applied.

#### Music Department KS3 National Reported Levels

#### UNITS

Surname	Forename	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total	Level
Cushman	Mandy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	12	3
Williams	John	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	12	3
Abbott	Kirsty	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	3	21	5
Elfman	Danny	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	23	5
Patel	Alanda	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	25	5
Gluck	Sandra	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	30	6
Santos	Enrique	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	35	6
Bernstein	Elmer	2	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	36	6
Arafia	Sofia	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	37	6
Phillips	Jonathan	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	3	4	5	46	7
Jones	Grace	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	49	7
Fredericks	Michael	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	50	7
Sawhney	Nitin	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	55	8

### Assessment of Effort

Many schools have devised a simple grading system for assessing effort, along the lines of :

A= Making very good effort

B= Appears to be making a reasonable effort

C= Does not appear to be making a consistent effort

D= Work shows little or no effort

It could be argued however, that it is very difficult to give a quantifiable account of effort in a mark or a grade and that this can be assessed much more satisfactorily by using a statement. Nevertheless, school procedures may require you to give a grade to effort, in which case pupils will need to be placed in a 'best fit' category; however, their individual problems or needs should be amplified in a statement in the report.

### What do Inspectors want to see?

Quite simply, school inspectors (OFSTED in England and Wales) want to ensure that

- The progress of all pupils is being monitored in a way that is understandable to staff and pupils.
- All pupils have short, medium and long-term targets in music.

This does NOT mean that any written work should have evidence of marking and red pen all over it – in fact a proliferation of marked written work would probably be detrimental to another aspect of the inspection! A unit by unit assessment is the perfect way to track progress or otherwise. If inspectors need to see evidence of this before a visit, then an audio recording of sample standards is always sufficient.

As for targets, it is not necessary to meet with each individual pupil and negotiate targets. If you teach 700+ pupils per week, setting individual targets is clearly a silly suggestion. The assessment process can easily incorporate target setting in the way described in the section 'Assessment should involve target setting for pupils'. Long term targets can be written by the pupils at the beginning of a unit. The aim of a unit often provides such suitable targets. A simple statement by the pupil at the beginning of a unit, such as "By the end of this unit I will be able to : ..." is often sufficient.

### Assessment of Exam students

It is important to assess exam students by using the actual criteria set by examination boards. Students should see how the final mark was calculated and should be able to relate it to exam criteria. It is sometimes also helpful to relate this mark to an actual grade if this information can be obtained from the exam board, and it usually can. Self and peer assessment can be done well by exam students. For example, in a class performance, it is a good idea to give the students a copy of the marking criteria, and ask them to give the performers a mark. A member of the class can then calculate an average mark for the performer. It is of course important to build in some appraising, so that students must articulate and justify their mark using as much relevant musical vocabulary as possible.