

# Music Examination Preparation

## Parent and Carer Café notes

Congratulations! Your child is working on grade repertoire and we feel that, if they continue to work hard, they are nearly ready to sit an exam. The exams will take place here in school at the end of the Spring Term, possibly Monday 30th, Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March, Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> or Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 (date to be confirmed by the ABRSM Examining Board). We would ask you, therefore, to avoid making other appointments for your child during that week.

There is a cost for the exam and we also request a contribution of towards the cost of an accompanist for the children.

We would urge all of our candidates to keep up the regular practise now, focussing on the tricky bits within their **pieces**. If they want to achieve higher marks, then they must also observe all of the expression marks too: loud and soft passages (dynamics), slurred and staccato passages (articulation) etc... If they know their **scales** well: played accurately and fluently, then they are easy marks to secure. (These are something that you could help with by testing the children. They won't be asked all of their scales/arpeggios, but they need to know them all by memory so that they can respond quickly to the ones that they are asked to play). Another idea to encourage the children and get them used to performing in front of different audiences would be to have an informal 'mini-concert' at home. It is also worth them practicing **sight-reading** by looking at sections of other pieces in their books and playing them as if they were in a test situation. Their tutor will have gone over this with them, please ask them to check if they are not sure.

Your child will be issued with an 'Aural Test Survival Book' which we would very much like them to read and use as a reference guide in the run-up to the exams. It really does give you some handy hints and indeed, explains the musical vocabulary that the children will need to use: this should be familiar to the children. Since these booklets were published, the tests have altered very slightly and have been simplified in places, but the material within these guides is all still relevant. **These booklets need to be returned to us after the exam period.**

The ABRSM has sight-reading and aural trainer apps which some children find useful to work on as part of their practice. They can be found in the app stores for about £7.99, there is also a free lite version. It is by no means compulsory for you to purchase either of these.

The children are **not allowed to play from photocopies** in the examinations and it is **absolutely essential** that the children have their **own personal copies of the music**.

Please check in with your child to make sure they know when their music lessons are each week and that they are attending. Our tutors can only do so much to support them if the children are not present at their lessons. Timetables have been issued and there are spare copies available on the website if they have misplaced them. If you feel your child could benefit from working with a music mentor, especially on scales and sight-reading, please feel free to get in touch. They are also welcome to play their piece/s in assembly as a practice performance.

We hope this information is useful for you all. Please don't hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or concerns regarding the examinations.

# **ABRSM Exams in Brief**

## **Focusing on all-round musicianship**

ABRSM exams are *music* exams rather than instrumental or singing exams. Examiners assess the quality of the music-making, not how it's achieved. For this reason, examiners aren't restricted to assessing only their own instrument but are required to examine all instruments.

ABRSM graded music exams designed to motivate instrumental and singing students of all ages and a wide range of abilities. They're available at eight levels – Grades 1 to 8 – and provide:

- Progressive goals to aim for
- Recognition for achievement
- Carefully structured syllabus requirements
- One-to-one assessment by an expert professional
- An objective guide to a candidate's skills and progress.

There are no age restrictions and students can start with any grade or skip grades if they want to. (When sitting exams through school, this is FULLY at the tutor's discretion!)

## **What's included in the exam?**

To succeed in ABRSM exams, candidates need a combination of skills and understanding. Broadly, they assess:

- Performance skills through pieces or songs
- Technical skills through scales and arpeggios
- Notation skills through a sight-reading test
- Listening skills and musical perception through aural tests

## **How many marks are available?**

Total marks in all individual Practical exams are 150.

- 100 marks are required to pass
- 120 marks are required to pass with merit
- 130 marks are required to pass with distinction

## How to Support Your Child at Home

All of our tutors work hard in lessons to ensure children have been taught what they need to know to pass an exam. What they don't have time to do is solidify that understanding, which can only come through rehearsing those skills in their own time.

When supporting your child at home, there is not one way of experiencing success. You will need to find what works best for them and you. Short bursts more often work well for some children, others like preparing to perform in mini-concerts, some children need more/less variety... What is key is that they spend time looking at all aspects of their music and don't just stick to things they feel confident with. We all know that children like playing things they are already good at and avoid the things they find difficult so try to encourage a balance. They will pick up more points in an exam for things they do well, which combats any marks lost through mistakes, but they need to be careful not to lose too many marks overall because they've avoided an element of the exam.

Below are a few ideas for practising that may help:

### Pieces and performing

These are generally seen as the most interesting elements of the exam and are also worth the most points. Bearing this in mind, improving these is really essential!

- When learning a new piece, focus on small sections at a time. Your child's tutor will often have broken it down in lessons, encourage the child to do the same. Spend extra time on more difficult sections.
- If your music book has a cd with it, listen carefully to the piece to get a feel for how it should sound when played all together. Each piece can be [purchased to download from the ABRSM store](#) as well.
- Listen to different versions of the piece and try to identify any variations (some will have more instruments, some will have been simplified etc)
- The difficult sections of pieces should be practised first. Once this has been done, the piece should then be played through at a speed suitable to the difficult part.
- Encourage your child to practice performing their pieces at home. This could range from performing to an imaginary audience or family members.
- Recording pieces and then listening to them is also a good learning experience.
- Encourage your child to perform their piece in an assembly.

### Scales and Arpeggios

Please encourage your child to learn by heart and regularly practice their scales and arpeggios. Although they are not very exciting to play, they are important for a number of reasons: Scales and arpeggios are the building blocks of many pieces so knowing them will help improve pieces; they will help with sight reading; they help to improve technical ability. They are also very easy marks in an exam!

Practising scales and arpeggios in the same way can become tedious! Here are a few suggestions to make this process more fun:

- Children should play a scale and arpeggio very slowly listening to their own sound, this can improve the tone of playing in their pieces.
- Write the names of your child's scales and arpeggios on slips of paper and place them in a bag. Pull the titles out of the bag and ask your child to play them
- Play scales and arpeggios back-to-front
- Play in a different rhythm, speed, character or mood

## Sight reading

While ABRSM will assess the children's ability to sight-read at a level appropriate to their grade, encourage your child to regularly look at a new piece in any music book as sight reading practice. They don't actually even need to be able to physically play it in order to get better at sight reading if they get into the habit of asking questions about the piece:

- What is the time signature?
- How fast will my pulse be?
- What is the key signature? What scale is this piece based on?
- Where do I need to play sharp or flat notes?
- Are there any tricky sections that I might want to practice first?
- What are the highest and lowest notes?
- Can I clap the rhythm accurately?

When sight reading, encourage your child to 'keep going' and not to stop to correct mistakes. The ABRSM has a sight-reading trainer app which some children find useful to work on as part of their practice. This is better for some instruments than others so please check details before purchasing!

## Aural

This is tricky for children to practise alone but we do quite a lot of work in school during class, instrumental and singing lessons anyway and there are ways to spend time working towards it at home:

- Use the 'Aural Test Survival Book' we will be loaning your child to use as a reference guide in the run-up to the exams. It really does give you some handy hints and indeed, explains the musical vocabulary that the children will need to use: this should be familiar to the children. Since these booklets were published, the tests have altered very slightly and have been simplified in places, but the material within these guides is all still relevant. **These booklets need to be returned to us after the exam period.**
- Actively listen to small sections of a variety of types of music on the radio/YouTube etc. Encourage your child to ask and answer questions about the piece
- The ABRSM has an aural trainer app which some children find useful to work on as part of their practice. It can be found in the app stores for about £7.99, there is also a free lite version. It is by no means compulsory for you to purchase!

## Apps

If you know your child is motivated by technology, you may wish to visit the [ABRSM store](#) to see if any of their several apps could be useful to purchase. Please look carefully as some of them are only suitable for certain instruments like piano and violin!

## And Finally

It's worth reminding you and your children that an ABRSM exam is not to check if the candidates are PERFECT at any/all of the elements! An error here and there is normal and the mark schemes are designed to reflect that. Encourage children to move on if they've made a mistake rather than stopping as that will show perseverance and could actually gain marks!

Please let us know, via your child's green contact book, if you or your child are having any particular issues. Many things can be resolved in lessons as long as the children are doing some practise at home – at least 15 minutes EVERY DAY is recommended. We also have provision in place for the children to do extra practise during some lunch/assembly times with our Year 6 Music Mentors.