



Early Years Music Syllabus

Developing Creativity Through Assessment

**Endorsed by
Montessori Global Education**



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Who we are

Our Vision

'We stand for a world where music education and graded examinations are accessible to everyone'.

Welcome to the International School of Musicians. We are an examination board and education provider based in Newham, East London. Previously known as The Every Child a Musician Programme, we have been delivering examinations and music education since 2011 throughout East London in 65 primary schools. Now operating as the International School of Musicians, we are a digital company working internationally in 94 countries, delivering quality certified assessments in the performing arts. Our examinations are available through our digital platform as live online or through pre-recorded video submissions, meaning children can find what is best for them. Further ensuring everyone can take part regardless of their abilities and capturing children in a natural learning environment without disrupting their school day. Our mission is to provide learners worldwide with access to high-quality qualifications that enrich their education, leading to life-long independent learning.

ISoM's ethos is about bringing down the barriers to performing arts education. We see the performing arts as a powerful force for good. Children and their families face significant financial barriers in order to attain performing arts qualifications. ISoM provides access to free resources supporting exam preparation to address those issues and overturn those barriers. By offering our qualifications, we can provide learners with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their chosen pathway and give learners around the world confidence in their abilities.

Why ISoM?

Our Mission

'We bring music education and assessment for learning into everyone's life – anytime, anywhere'.

The current approach to conducting exams through physical attendance creates several barriers for children, families, teachers, and schools. These include the need to ensure that each student can attend the examination, which can be challenging for those in remote areas or with limited resources. Moreover, a minimum number of candidates is often required to send examiners to a physical location, which adds an extra layer of difficulty for all involved. In addition, the negative carbon footprint resulting from physical attendance exams is a significant environmental concern, as it contributes to transportation-related pollution. The traditional approach to music education and examinations can also limit a child's creativity and passion for music. This often leads to a lack of engagement and disinterest in pursuing music education.

What do we offer?

Our Solution

'A digital examination platform and free learning materials supporting young people and teachers to explore their curiosity in performing arts'.

ISoM provides an innovative solution to the significant financial and geographic barriers faced by children and families in accessing traditional performing arts exams. With a digital-first platform, our state-of-the-art performing arts examinations offer complete flexibility, enabling children to take exams anytime, anywhere, eliminating additional lesson costs. All learning materials, including PDF books and backing tracks with exam materials, are free, allowing worldwide access to necessary learning materials without additional expenses. ISoM's flexible approach permits children to play the music they enjoy when they want to capture them at their best. Children can also compose their own music or create lyrics for songs, fostering creativity and growth. Our commitment to making performing arts education accessible to everyone ensures that everyone can pursue their passion for performing arts regardless of location, financial situation, or skill level.

How our exams support learning

Music is a powerful tool that activates the whole brain. On a neurological level engaging with music stimulates the parts of the brain that are responsible for speech, movement, processing emotions and memory. The sensory impact of the different sounds from different instruments invites children to explore and excite their curiosity about the wonderful world of music.

At the International School of Musicians, we believe all children should be able to access music education and certified assessments that celebrate their achievements, embedding a love of learning and engagement with music throughout life.

Our assessments for early years are designed to do just that! Linked to both the EYFS and the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum for music, our assessments require children to perform two or three pieces of music to demonstrate their performing skills, musical attainment, and engagement.

All children receive an examination report form that provides genuine assessment for learning (AfL) feedback. All children receive a certificate celebrating their achievements. For those that would like to keep a record of their journey, a badge can be included.

Research shows that music impacts both the function of the brain and human behaviour. Music improves cognitive and fine motor skills, spatial-temporal learning, and neurogenesis, the process by which new neurons are formed in the brain. By encouraging young children to play music, we can assist in developing creative independence and instilling a love of learning for life.

We have created many free resources for you to use; come and have a look!

www.internationalschoolofmusicians.org

The Assessment Process

There are two levels of assessments, level 1 and level 2. Children perform two pieces of music for level 1 and three for level 2. Depending on their level of engagement, every child will either receive a pass, merit or distinction certificate mapped against the assessment criteria.

Level 1

- Performance 1
Sing a song with actions and movement.
- Performance 2
Play a song on any instrument, tuned or untuned

The Assessment Criteria

Pass	Merit	Distinction
Children sing with some expression and a limited range of actions demonstrating an awareness of pulse.	Children sing with an increasing level of expression and a range of actions with a good awareness of pulse and rhythm.	Children sing creatively with an increasing level of expression and a wide range of actions and movement. Children demonstrate a strong awareness of pulse and control of rhythm.
Children play with some musicality and dynamic contrast demonstrating an awareness of pulse.	Children play with an increasing level of musicality and dynamic contrasts with a good awareness of pulse and rhythm.	Children play with assured musicality and a range of dynamic contrasts. Children demonstrate a strong sense of awareness of pulse and control of rhythm.

Level 2

- Performance 1
Sing a song with actions and movement
- Performance 2
Play a song on any instrument, tuned or untuned
- Performance 3
Sing or Play a call and response song. This can be with a teacher, parent/carer, older child or from a pre-recorded track. Alternatively, children can sing or play any other song explaining why they like the song. Or, children can sing or play a song they have made up and talk a little about their song.

The Assessment Criteria

Pass	Merit	Distinction
Children sing with some expression and a limited range of actions demonstrating an awareness of pulse.	Children sing with an increasing level of expression and a range of actions with a good awareness of pulse and rhythm.	Children sing creatively with an increasing level of expression and a wide range of actions and movement. Children demonstrate a strong awareness of pulse and control of rhythm.
Children play with some musicality and dynamic contrast, demonstrating an awareness of pulse.	Children play with an increasing level of musicality and dynamic contrasts with a good awareness of pulse and rhythm.	Children play with assured musicality and a range of dynamic contrasts. Children demonstrate a strong sense of awareness of pulse and control of rhythm.
Children respond with some engagement and expression.	Children respond with engagement and expression.	Children respond with engagement and an increasing level of expression.

If you have any questions regarding the format of the examination, please get in touch with the ISoM team at: info@internationalschoolofmusicians.org

How we align with the Montessori approach

External examinations do not usually spring to mind when following a Montessori approach to education. We are aware of how all schools are under pressure to demonstrate evidence of learning to key stakeholders including government regulatory bodies such as Ofsted. Our exams are designed to provide evidence of a quality music education that recognises children are able to learn independently when allowed to explore their curiosity with sound in a prepared classroom environment. Sounds from musical instruments are there to be explored. For example, a child can shake a tambourine, tap firmly or lightly with their hand, or by drumming their fingers, hit with a beater, or stroked with a brush. Each movement will create a different sound, and we invite children to explore these sounds rather than the image of a strict music teacher defining how the instrument should be played.

By exploring a range of creative sounds, our research shows that children are usually inclined to invent their own musical patterns, often adding lyrics to make a song. Once children have settled on a mix of sounds and patterns, they like, they will often attempt to recreate songs they know.

Introducing the most basic of musical instruments to young children allows them to understand the science of sound and musical vibration. It focuses their listening along with developing fine motor skills.

Creativity is a process to be explored, not an outcome. Although our examinations do deliver an outcome, our research in Newham primary schools demonstrates that children actively seek to develop their musicality and curiosity after their assessment providing further evidence of independent learning.

Demonstrating the Montessori approach

Have a look at how 3-year-old George explores sound in the following video.

<https://www.internationalschoolofmusicians.org/s/Demonstrating-the-Montessori-approach>

He begins by playing 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' but using different pitches. You can hear how he matches the rhythm exactly, but with his choice of musical notes. This demonstrates his ability to internalise a rhythmic pattern and use his creativity to improvise his own music! Once he has played his version of 'Twinkle,

Twinkle, Little Star’ he continues to explore making a new song with the pitches he has discovered. Traditionally, music teachers aim for children to read music and learn to play the melody correctly. Of course, as educators, we support learning to read music to create literate musicians. However, applying a Montessori approach allows George the freedom to play the ‘*wrong notes*’ and an opportunity for him to play and learn music spontaneously. He knows exactly what he is doing, making up his own melody to a rhythmic pattern that is easy for him to recall. He is fully engaging his brain and developing his cognitive skills through creative music playing.

Our early years exams encourage this approach to music. We want to inspire children and capture them in their moment of creativity. Assessment should provide empowering opportunities for children to become independent learners creating their own construct of knowledge rather than a transmission of knowledge from their teacher. Drawing on the educational theories of Montessori (1917), Dewey (1934), and Piaget (1950), we value a constructivist-based pedagogy where education is based on experience and understanding is shaped through assimilation and accommodation.

Driven by Action Research

Our examinations are the result of an action research study undertaken within a mass participation music programme situated in East London. The action research project aimed to improve the way in which children are assessed in music and provide opportunities to gain social and cultural capital, which can often be difficult to access. The action research methodology was employed over three cycles of research leading to the creation of a new model of assessment focussing on performing music. The main findings of the research demonstrated that, when effectively implemented into the school day, our examinations provide cultural capital and social justice for children in music education, developing and building their learning power and independent learning. Our examinations were introduced into sixty-five primary schools as a form of assessment across East London, impacting the practice of 180 teachers and the learning journey of over 18,000 children (Bonfield-Brown, 2018).

Our research in Newham demonstrated that when children performed for their assessment, they became more engaged in the activity of music making, whether playing or singing songs or creating their own, showing enjoyment and

confidence in performing. When children are engaged, they are fully involved physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially. Data analysis provided evidence of children becoming independent learners, building their learning power, and gaining cultural capital. At ISoM, we see building learning power as far more than acquiring the skills needed in order to play a musical instrument. It is about enjoying the experience to seek out further opportunities for learning. Assessment through performance can enhance and build on a child's learning power by providing an empowering opportunity that leads to independent learning and acquiring cultural capital.

Cross-curricular benefits

There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the benefits of music learning for children and the positive impact it has on their academic achievement (Hallam and Rogers, 2016). Children taking part in regular music learning activities achieve significantly higher results in mathematics, (Abeles, 2007), and in English for both reading and writing (Kolb: 1996; Hansen *et al.*, 2014), and all school subjects except sports (Wetter *et al.*, 2009).

Clinical research in neurology has demonstrated that learning to play music, including singing, strengthens neural pathways, cognitive function, and memory (Kraus and Slater, 2015). Cognitive functions such as planning, focusing attention, memory and managing behaviour are executive functions that are vital for learning and development (Gioia *et al.*, 2000). Music education improves the development of executive function through the activation of multiple cortical and subcortical areas in the brain, including the prefrontal cortex (Mezghani *et al.*, 2022; Särkämö *et al.*, 2014;). The benefits of music education are significant in that research has shown there is a far transfer effect on functions other than musical ones, such as spatial-temporal, mathematical, and non-verbal abilities (Criscuolo *et al.*, 2019).

Playing and listening to music can be understood to provide children with multi-sensory experiences enhancing their learning abilities and encouraging cognitive development. The creative processes embedded within music education and the arts are a core foundation for developing other subjects, assisting in developing the whole child and therefore, further aligning with the Montessori approach.

Despite all the scientific evidence on the benefits of music learning, the teaching

of music has long been the target of criticism. There have been continual disagreements between different organisations over the importance of their particular 'style' of music education which, supported by diametrically opposed philosophies, have frustrated policymakers and educators alike (Savage, 2021). Our examinations assist in both promoting the Montessori approach and providing genuine assessment for learning in the form of external evidence to decision-makers in what constitutes good practice in developing the whole child through a range of subjects, including the arts.

Furthermore, our examinations can support early years educators in their teaching through collaborative practice. It's not just an exam; the focus is on genuinely supporting learning and developing the curiosity that leads to independent learning for both the child and the educator, including their families.

Impact through innovation

When we think of innovative methods in the field of music education, it is often the pedagogy that is the primary catalyst to encourage new and exciting ways to deliver teaching. In our experience, less consideration is given to developing approaches in the assessment of music education that both enhances new ways of delivery through equally engaging and appropriate innovation to match.

Our music assessments for early years provide meaningful and constructive feedback so that young musicians develop their performing skills fostering a sense of confidence and ownership. If roles are shared between the listener and performer, an empowering and enlightening assessment provides the understanding that generates knowledge and meaning for the young musician. There is the potential here to engage and encourage children to prepare for lifelong learning rather than focus on a narrow set of technical abilities.

Music education should be a holistic and creative process where children are able to understand and interpret music. Children should be able to develop their own meanings rather than acquiring the passage of skills and knowledge from the teacher in a master and apprentice model, which is a passive model of learning.

Turning the tables on education and placing assessment at the heart learning is one suggested way to bring about innovation and embed music education into

the Montessori approach. Assessment, in the form of external examinations can be viewed as an extension of the daily observations Montessori educators make. The innovation lies in utilising the prepared classroom allowing children to create spontaneous musical performances, supporting their musical journey and demonstrating to policymakers the importance of music education.

Our global reach

The International School of Musicians provides quality music education and assessments in 94 countries. We regularly provide free CPD training for our network. Click on the link below to see a shortened presentation we delivered to Early Years Educators throughout China in December 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZj8LLAO6nM>

You can read more about what we do and our extensive network in our online monthly digital magazine.

<https://issuu.com/digitalreporter>

Have a look at the events we offer, from our Winter Wonderland Festival, World Music Day Celebrations, and International Jazz Day!

<https://www.youtube.com/@internationalschoolofmusic3987>

You can see more examples of George exploring music here

<https://www.internationalschoolofmusicians.org/montessori-exam-resources>

For further information please do have a look on our website

<https://www.internationalschoolofmusicians.org/>

or you can contact us on info@internationalschoolofmusicians.org

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