How learning builds in Music

A guide for parents and carers | Years 3 to 6

Children learn to listen, sing, play and create music. Across Years 3 to 6, they build their understanding of beat, rhythm, melody and musical styles, using this knowledge with increasing control, expression and independence.

Area	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Listening and understanding	Find and move to a steady beat. Recognise sections such as verses and choruses, name some instruments and describe how music feels.	Recognise styles such as pop, grime and gospel. Describe changes in speed, volume and layers of sound; distinguish the beat from rhythmic patterns.	Compare songs and styles using musical vocabulary. Explain how voices, instruments and song structure contribute to a mood or message.	Compare musical features in greater detail. Explain how rhythm, sound quality and structure communicate ideas, feelings and personal identity.
Singing and playing	Sing together, listen to others and follow a leader. Play short instrumental parts with a steady beat and begin using note names or simple symbols.	Sing with increasing accuracy and expression. Maintain a part in a group and build glockenspiel skills, using notes C to G in the pieces studied.	Sing with a secure sense of the beat and awareness of other parts. Rehearse instrumental parts from memory or notation with increasing control.	Sustain a vocal or instrumental part accurately and expressively. Balance it with others, respond to cues and contribute to focused rehearsals.
Creating music	Make up short musical answers on the spot. Help create a simple tune and record it using symbols, note names or audio so it can be played again.	Develop short tunes and rap lyrics. Choose notes and rhythms, record ideas and explain how they fit the music or communicate a message.	Compose melodies using up to five selected notes. Organise ideas and choose speed, volume and layers of sound to create a mood or tell a story.	Create and organise original ideas for a chosen purpose. Refine musical patterns, lyrics and structure, explaining how choices communicate an intention.
Performing and improving	Share music with an audience, following signals to start and finish. Describe what went well and suggest one change.	Rehearse with others and perform with clear words and expression. Review a recording and explain a useful musical improvement.	Prepare performances purposefully and communicate meaning to an audience. Compare recordings and explain how rehearsal has improved the music.	Help make rehearsal and performance decisions. Consider the audience and venue, justify improvements and explain progress using musical examples.

Revisiting knowledge

Children return to listening, singing, playing and creating in every year group. A steady beat supports accurate group performance; short musical patterns become starting points for longer ideas. Productions provide opportunities to apply these skills for an audience.

Applying learning in new contexts

Each unit gives children a different reason to use their musical knowledge. They explore contrasting styles, create their own ideas and learn how rehearsal can improve a performance.

Area	Earlier learning	Later application
Beat and ensemble playing	Year 3 · Let Your Spirit Fly and Glockenspiel Stage 1 Keep a steady beat, copy short patterns and follow a leader when singing or playing.	Years 4 to 6 · Instrumental parts and productions Maintain a part while listening to others. Develop a secure sense of the beat and respond to group cues.
Instrumental skills and notation	Year 3 · Glockenspiel Stage 1 Locate C, D, E and F. Play short patterns using simple notation or letter names.	Year 4 · Glockenspiel Stage 2 and later instrumental work Extend to C, D, E, F and G in the pieces studied. Rehearse parts from memory or notation with growing control.
Musical styles and messages	Years 3 and 4 · Three Little Birds, Mamma Mia and Lean on Me Recognise contrasting styles and discuss lyrics, voices and instruments.	Years 5 and 6 · Rock, ballads, grime and hip hop Compare how musical features create a style and communicate a message. Apply this understanding to singing, playing and creating.
Composition and expression	Years 3 and 4 · Short melodies and Stop! Create simple tunes and rap lyrics. Record ideas and describe choices about notes, rhythm or words.	Years 5 and 6 · A Spooky Story and Music and Me Organise musical ideas to suggest atmosphere, tell a story or express identity. Listen again, make changes and explain the intended effect.
Rehearsal and performance	Years 3 and 4 · Christmas productions Learn songs, follow a leader and communicate the words clearly. Identify strengths and possible improvements.	Years 5 and 6 · Christmas and summer productions Maintain a part with greater independence and expression. Help shape rehearsals and evaluate how effectively the music reaches the audience.

Understanding music and musical identity

Children encounter music from different traditions and styles, including reggae, gospel, rock and hip hop. They discuss how music communicates feelings and ideas. In Year 6, Music and Me explores personal identity and the work of women in music.

Developing confidence and independence

Children use demonstrations, repeated practice, suitable instrumental parts and visual prompts to support learning. They increasingly make musical choices, rehearse with others and explain how their work could improve.

Based on Kempshott Junior School’s music overview and progression document, informed by the Charanga music scheme.