

# FALKNER HOUSE MUSIC ARRSM GRADE NOTES

## Please note that Covid-19 considerations may alter arrangements

The grade system runs from preparatory to grade 8. From grade 1, candidates receive an overall grade of pass, merit or distinction.

Distinction	over	130
Merit		120-130
Pass		100-120

The grade is derived from 5 marks from the five sections of the exam

Piece 1	Maximum	30
Piece 2	Maximum	30
Piece 3	Maximum	30
Scales	Maximum	21
Sight reading	Maximum	21
Aural test	Maximum	18



The maximum total is thus 150 but, as perfection does not exist in music, a candidate will never be given the maximum. It is unlikely that candidates will pass every grade with “distinction”.

The scales need to be memorized but not the three pieces; sight reading and the aural test need careful preparation:

- Mastering sight reading, as with any skill in music, is a matter of practice and sight reading will form part of your child’s individual lessons.
- Aural training is another skill which needs to be practiced and we hold specific classes at Falkner House for those taking an exam that term. These classes follow the ABRSM aural training books and cover what will be asked in the examination. It is well known that the control of nerves is a huge part of success in music.

Exam preparation at Falkner House is thorough:

- The best way to master nerves it is to play and to play in front of an audience at the earliest stage and youngest age.
- Soon after the start of each term, the individual music teachers decide on who will sit which grade exams and parents are informed. You will be given as much notice of the date and time as possible
- Parents are informed as to the required aural training class.
- There are mini rehearsals, again with the relevant pianist, during school time, before the exam.

There is no hard and fast rule as to when to start taking grade examinations as it depends on maturity as much as instrumental ability. However, it is quite common to take a preparatory test or grade 1 in the first year of learning an instrument. Pupils may sometimes stay two years on one grade to ensure that the repertoire is assimilated, and we prefer to operate a cautious approach to grades rather than trying to ‘squeeze’ a child through with much resulting stress and effort. It is essential for a child’s long-term musical development that they do not take too high a grade too early and parents should need the advice from the Falkner House music teacher. Never going higher than your child’s year group is a good rule of thumb, e.g. Grade 2, Year 2. We no longer prepare children for Grade 6 at Falkner House and it is important to note that the children find the higher grades disproportionately harder.

It is worthwhile noting that even exceptional musical competence will not “get a child in” to a



secondary school. Children are judged on their academic performance first and everything else comes second. At the margin, clearly extra curricula talents can always be helpful but music should be enjoyed and pursued for its own sake. Parents, teacher and pupil, may, of course, have, very understandably, a different objective from grades and it is perhaps worth noting that many professional musicians do not really rate the process. It is important that children play a wide variety of pieces whilst learning an instrument as it is likely to be extremely off putting to be practising just the three grade pieces and relevant scales for possibly a year or more.



It is not the Falkner House philosophy, to view grades as an end in itself. Taking grades are a means of setting goals, giving encouragement, helping to master nerves, confronting challenges, etc. But, it is counterproductive in the long run only to work on grade pieces which represent but a small part of the broad repertoire needed for a full musical education. Your child may never wish to become a professional musician but our aim is that he or she will have a lifelong love of music.

### **Examination procedure**

Candidates generally take their ABRSM grade examinations at Falkner House, in the Big Room on a Saturday chosen by the school to fit with the various school activities. There are examinations in the Autumn, Spring and Summer Terms. Falkner House submits entries for music exams approximately eight weeks in advance and shortly afterwards parents will be notified of the location, time and date. Aural training is on offer as part of the programme. Grade examinations usually start at 9.30 am and continue until 5.00 pm and, on prior request, we will try to schedule your child at a convenient time. Music exams for second instruments should be scheduled outside school time.

If arranged by Falkner House, the costs of the examination and a share of the cost of the steward and accompanist (if relevant) and the £50 aural training charge will be added to the subsequent term's invoice. Results are sent to Falkner House and will be emailed to parents as soon as possible.

### **The day of the examination:**

- Candidates should arrive 30 minutes early. A member of the Falkner House music staff (the "steward" according to ABRSM) will be there to tune your child's instrument, show him/ her a room for warming up and be on hand for general assistance.
- A Falkner House pianist will be there to allow for a mini rehearsal.
- There will be only one examiner in the assembly room.
- Parents are asked to leave their child at the school and to return to collect them after the examination. They are not allowed in the examination room and past experience shows that however well intentioned, parental presence has a detrimental effect upon performance! With the exception of the pianist during the three pieces, the student is alone with the examiner for the aural training, scales and sight reading. The ABRSM allows no exceptions to this.

### **During the examination**

the candidate plays his/ her three pieces (with sheet music and piano accompaniment). We recommend the following order:

1. The candidate plays the memorized scales.
2. The candidate plays the three pieces (in any order)
3. The candidate is shown the sight reading piece and is given 30 seconds to look at it in silence before playing it once without stopping.
4. The candidate is tested on his/her aural skills with the examiner at the piano

