

FALKNER HOUSE MUSIC ABRSM GRADE NOTES



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 and most have indeed never taken any grades. It is not the Falkner House philosophy to view grades as an end in itself, though if a child is taking music exams at Falkner House, the preparation is thorough. Taking grades can be a means of setting goals, giving encouragement, helping to master nerves, confronting challenges, etc. but, arguably, they have no intrinsic value. 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. These pieces 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.

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.

For those children that wish to take music examinations, the system is that the grades run from preparatory to grade 8 with candidates receiving from Grade 1 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”.

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 the initial grade or grade 1 in the first year of learning an instrument. Pupils may sometimes stay a year and a half 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. The best way to master nerves is to do it and to play in front of an audience at the earliest stage and youngest age. 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, for us, a good rule of thumb e.g. Grade 2 / Year 2. We do not prepare children for Grade 6 at Falkner House and it is important to note that the children find the higher grades disproportionately harder.

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.

Examination preparation

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

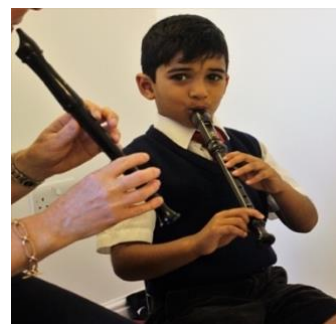
- Sight reading will form part of your child's individual lessons. There are many sight reading books available.
- Aural training also needs to be practiced. If your child is doing a higher grade then there may be specific classes at Falkner House. Your child's teacher will follow the ABRSM aural training books and cover what will be asked in the examination. Apps to help at home:
 - <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/abrs-sm-aural-trainer-grades-1-5/id491907493?mt=8>,
 - Scales: violin and piano and piano only <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/abrs-sm-scales-trainer/id1083019500?mt=8>
 - Metronome: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/abrs-sm-scales-trainer/id1083019500?mt=8>

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 generally examinations at least twice a year. 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. The control of nerves is a huge part of success in music. 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 learnt outside school should be scheduled outside school hours.

Examination day:

- Candidates should arrive 30 minutes early.
- A "steward" (will be there to show the room for warming up and be on hand for general assistance as well as an instrumental teacher to help your child to tune his/ her instrument and do a little rehearsal with the scales and pieces and a Falkner House pianist to allow for a mini rehearsal before the exam
- There will be the one examiner in the assembly room.
- There is no set order for the examination but we recommend that the candidate:
 - Plays the three pieces (in any order)
 - Plays the scales
 - Is shown the sight reading piece and is given 30 seconds to look at it in silence before playing it once without stopping.
 - Is tested on his/her aural skills with the examiner at the piano
- Parents are asked to leave their child at the school and to return to collect them after the examination. Parents 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 even for the youngest candidates.



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 £20 aural training charge will be added to the subsequent term's invoice. Results are sent to the Falkner House music staff approximately two weeks after the examination and parents will be emailed to parents as soon as possible.