



FALKNER HOUSE  
LONDON

# Music ABRSM Grade Guide

2025 - 2026



## Boys

20 Penywern Road, London SW5 9SU

## Girls

19 Brechin Place, London SW7 4QB



## Music ABRSM Grade Guide

If a child is taking music exams at Falkner House, the preparation is thorough. Whilst it is not the Falkner House philosophy to view music grades as an end in itself, taking grades can be a means of setting goals, giving encouragement, helping to master nerves, and confronting challenges. The exam curriculum is well thought-out so it develops all aspects of one's playing in quite a rounded, comprehensive way. It is important that children play a wide variety of pieces whilst learning an instrument so that they are not practising a small number of 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!

### *Marking Breakdown*

The ABRSM exam system is that the Grades run from "Initial" to Grade 8 and the breakdown of marking is as follows:

<b>Distinction</b>	<b>130 and above</b>
<b>Merit</b>	<b>120-129</b>
<b>Pass</b>	<b>100-119</b>

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

<b>Piece 1</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Piece 2</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Piece 3</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Scales</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Sight reading</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Aural test</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>18</b>

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 at the end of the first year of learning an instrument or even later. 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 control of nerves is a huge part of success in music and the best way to master nerves is 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 heed the advice from the Falkner House music teacher.



Keeping to your child's year group is, for us, a good rule of thumb e.g. Grade 2 / Year 2. Typically, when children reach the end of Year 5, they are at (maximum) Grade 5 level and we believe that in Year 6 the focus should not be on music exams and as such, no Grade exams should be expected in Year 6, not least because 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. If your child happens to learn outside and you wish for them to sit a music exam, please get in touch with the school as we may be able to offer you a slot internally. In any case, the exam should be on a Saturday and never on a school day.

### *Examination Preparation*

- Scales are to be presented from memory.
- The three pieces may be played from the music.
- Sight reading will form part of your child's individual lessons and this component of the exam will be covered in the lesson as it requires supervision.
- Aural training is the fourth component of the exam and it needs attention too.

While the instrumental teacher may incorporate Aural Training into their lessons, 15 minute sessions (during breaks) run by our music teachers will be offered to those sitting the exam at the end of that term. In addition to that, we strongly recommend the official **ABRSM Aural Training app**.



## *Examination Procedure*

### *If exams are taken at Falkner House*

Candidates generally take their ABRSM grade examinations at Falkner House (Breachin Place) in the Big Room on a Saturday chosen by the school towards the end of term to fit with the various school activities. These exams are three times a year (end of each term). 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. Grade examinations usually start at 9.00 am and, on prior request, we will try to schedule your child at a convenient time.

### *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 Big Room.
- The typical running order of the exam:
  - The three pieces (in any order) then the pianist leaves the room.
  - **Scales** – examiner will choose a few examples from the syllabus, starting with the scales, then arpeggios, then anything else that may be required.
  - **Sight-reading** – the excerpt will be seen by the candidate for the first time and 30 seconds will be offered to prepare it before the examiner invites the candidate to play it. It is worth mentioning that it is rare for a sight-reading excerpt to be played to perfection so the main goal is to never stop while aiming for good rhythm, intonation, dynamics and any articulation.
  - **The Aural Tests** don’t require the instrument as they will involve clapping, singing back, recognising changes and music features upon listening to the examiner who will be sitting at the piano.
- Parents are asked to leave their child at the school and to return to collect them after the examination. Parents 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 duration of the exam. The examiners are very friendly, encouraging and willing to hear good exams.





If arranged by Falkner House, the costs of the examination and a share of the cost of the steward and accompanist (if relevant) and an aural training charge will be added to the subsequent term's invoice. Results are released to the Falkner House music staff a few days after the exam and the school will notify the parents as soon as possible by email. The email will include the exam report and a few weeks after that, the certificates will reach the school and the original copy will be handed out to each child to take home.

If a pupil chooses to take music exams at a venue other than Falkner House the exam should be scheduled for out of school hours. Any absence from school for a music exam not arranged by Falkner House will be deemed unauthorised.