
Music Development Plan



The McAuley Catholic High School



September 2026 - 2027

Music development plan summary: The McAuley Catholic High School

Overview

Detail	Information
Academic year that this summary covers	2026-27
Date this summary was published	September 2026
Date this summary will be reviewed	September 2027
Name of the school music lead	Mr W Taylor
Name of school leadership team member with responsibility for music (if different)	Dr M Howse
Name of local music hub	South Yorkshire
Name of other music education organisation(s) (if partnership in place)	NA

This is a summary of how our school delivers music education to all our pupils across three areas – curriculum music, co-curricular provision and musical experiences – and what changes we are planning in future years. This information is to help pupils and parents or carers understand what our school offers and who we work with to support our pupils' music education.

Part A: Curriculum music

This is about what we teach in lesson time, how much time is spent teaching music and any music qualifications or awards that pupils can achieve.

A summary of the music curriculum for each year group is available on the school website alongside similar summaries for all subjects [here](#).
Information on how the school increases access for disabled pupils and supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEND) can be found in the SEND policy [here](#).

In Key Stage 3, pupils receive 2 hours of curriculum music per fortnight.
At Key Stage 4, this increases to 5 hours for those who opt to take the subject at GCSE.
At Key Stage 5, BTEC Music students receive 10 hours per fortnight.
Whilst the music curriculum is informed by the [model music curriculum](#) (March 2021), the [Ofsted Music Education Evidence Report](#) (March 2020), the [Ofsted Music Education Research Review](#) (July 2021) and the [Ofsted Music Subject Report](#) (September 2023), it goes significantly beyond these frameworks in one important respect.

The McAuley Music Curriculum is a real-life scenario, design brief based approach rarely found anywhere else, but a very common approach in other curriculum areas such as Food and Design Technology.

Students are trained to think like musicians, using a creative, servant leadership approach to musical problems faced by real-life artists both contemporary and historical.

For the last 40 years, McAuley musicians have become the most active and loyal group of alumni known to the school. The current permanent staff and several of our peripatetic teachers are former pupils. Some of our alumni are full-time musicians working in the armed forces or in musical theatre and music education. However, the vast majority have successful careers in a wide range of fields including banking, engineering and medicine.

We believe that successful musicians are successful learners who understand their contribution to the greater good, something which resonates with our catholic ethos and sits at the very heart of our curriculum.

We believe this is the reason why music continues to thrive at McAuley when it has been significantly reduced elsewhere in recent years.

In all year groups, our students learn to sing together and play keyboard together on a regular basis, as well as other opportunities to play as an ensemble using percussion.

However, unlike many other schools, (see Ofsted Subject review 2023) composing and improvising sits at the very core of what we do with students composing music using both traditional notation methods, even with pencil and paper, right up to the use of the most sophisticated software used by today's industry professionals.

The department has a suite of 15 dedicated music computers and 30 music laptops, all with their own keyboards. This allows us to provide all our Key Stage 3 classes with a laptop and keyboard in pairs and gives our Key Stage 4 students access to a computer each. The units are very well maintained and make full use of the most recent developments in digital learning and music technology.

McAuley continues to work in very close partnership with our local music hub who provide us with our team of instrumental teachers and other opportunities such as the Stage Invasion rock programme in which we participate fully.

All students are welcome to opt to take GCSE music in Year 10 and 11 with no conditions of entry. Those who do not already play a musical instrument outside curriculum lessons are offered a free weekly 20 minute lesson on their choice of guitar, piano or singing.

Music is an increasingly popular option subject with numbers higher than the national average and the demographic of the cohorts being truly representative of the school overall. This includes students with SEND, with English as a foreign language and the full ability range.

At post-16, we offer the Pearson BTEC Extended Certificate in Music Performance as our main Post-16 qualification offer. We believe this qualification best meets the needs

of our wide range of learners who wish to continue with music beyond GCSE. There has been a strong uptake for this course which is now in its second year.

Students who learn a musical instrument with our team of peripatetic teachers are encouraged to take instrumental grades with any of the popular providers such as ABRSM, Trinity and RSA. We support students in doing these with either a live examiner or taking them online. Students whose parents cannot afford to enter for exams are still provided with a video recording of their child's exam as a record of their achievement at reaching a milestone standard.

As Lead School for Music in Doncaster, we offer bespoke curriculum support for other secondaries in Doncaster. In the last year we have offered a full support package to Armthorpe School, supported with GCSE training and teacher training with Astrea Academy Woodfields, shared good practice with Sir Thomas Wharton Academy, Danum Academy and Ridgewood School and collaborated closely with Hall Cross Academy.

Part B: Extra curricular music

This is about opportunities for pupils to sing and play music, outside of lesson time, including choirs, ensembles and bands, and how pupils can make progress in music beyond the core curriculum.

All students are encouraged to join The McAuley Chorus, who are trained to sing specially arranged popular songs in three part harmony requested by the membership. They perform at least one song every half term including in live concerts and online recordings. The choir have always participated in the Doncaster iSing massed choir festival whenever this has been available. We provide all members with online resources so that they can work on the songs outside rehearsal time.

Students who are able to sing independent parts unaided are encouraged to join our chamber choir who perform more formal and challenging arrangements for our busy programme of liturgical events throughout the year, as well as our regular concerts. These students therefore regularly sing in front of the whole school. Last year, we invited staff, parents and alumni to join forces with the Chamber Choir to sing for our annual Advent Service which included advent choral songs as well as traditional carols.

All students are encouraged to attend the Keyboard Ensemble which is an extension of what is taught in the classroom curriculum. We produce our own carefully notated and differentiated arrangements of synth pop anthems which make the very most of the range of timbres found on modern keyboards and give students of all abilities the chance to perform music almost indistinguishable from the original track. The programme is unique and innovative, rarely found in any other school. Students learn their part using computer tutorials where they can slow down the recording and learn the piece section by section along with the on-screen notation. Once they are confident, they perform live with other musicians before making a recording or performing live in one of our concerts.

The ensemble has been funded by one of our alumni, allowing us to purchase specialist keyboards and develop a unique live performing rig giving us total control over the sound of the ensemble.

Last year, we developed a percussion ensemble open to all students. This makes use of our full set of African Drums, our Samba Kit and Boomwhackers. This further widens the scope of our offer to accommodate even more student's musical interests.

The school has its own rock band studio permanently set up with drum kits, electric and bass guitars, keyboards and microphones. Students in all year groups are encouraged to form bands and given regular support, feedback and opportunities to perform. Those who perform in our concerts can then go on to participate in Stage Invasion, where they are given 3 hours of composition coaching with a professional songwriter and perform their original track live on stage at The Dome in a massed Doncaster rock concert known as The Big Gig.

The school has 3 practice rooms which students can use to rehearse individually or in groups. At least one music classroom is open at all times throughout the week for students who wish to compose or practise using the classroom keyboard and computer facilities.

Students who receive free instrumental tuition for GCSE and A-Level music are given expert support and advice as to how to get the very best results for the qualification as well as fully enjoy the experience of learning to play. Singers and guitarists are often taught in small groups to support their ensemble skills development.

All students have access to subsidised lesson on all orchestral instruments. Slots are provided by the local Music Hub so that not only can we meet demand, but also give students a free 3 week taster experience of their chosen instrument. Last year there were 77 students participating in our instrumental tuition programme, but a further 38 students enjoyed the benefit of having an introductory opportunity on an instrument of their choice.

The school buys 21 hours of tuition a week from the Music Hub, supplemented by a further hour a week from our own music staff.

The cost for this tuition, including the free lessons comes from a combination of school budget, alumni donations and parental contributions.

Parents of students not taking GCSE or A-level pay for 75% of the cost of the lessons, which this year is £330 with the school subsidising the rest. This can be paid using our online system in any combination of instalments throughout the year. This makes the lessons highly competitive in price compared to even the most reasonable private options.

That said, there is a 50% discount available for Pupil Premium students and additional support for parents who request it using our alumni fund. At McAuley, we do all we can to ensure money is not an obstacle to students participation in instrumental music. We raise money through our concerts, donations from parents and alumni and donations from local businesses.

Instruments are provided by the Music Hub either free of charge or at a very reasonable hire rate. Wherever possible, we offer our own instruments from our own stock so that families do not incur any charges.

Last year we purchased 7 new violins and 2 new cellos to replace the loan instruments currently being paid for by parents. Strings are by far our most popular instrument.

In addition, weekly instrumental ensembles are offered completely free of charge using our own staff volunteering their free time to prepare rehearsals. This includes Orchestra, Strings, Band, Percussion, Jazz and woodwing ensembles.

We participate fully in the Orchestras for All Modulo programme designed to provide fully differentiated and flexible music for school orchestras and give players the opportunities to come together to perform in a regional orchestra twice a year.

Instrumentalists are also encouraged to fully participate in the ensembles offered by the local Music Hub outside school time throughout the week.

Part C: Musical experiences

This is about all the other musical events and opportunities that we organise, such as singing in assembly, concerts and shows, and trips to professional concerts.

All students sing in our liturgies occurring throughout the year. We are one of the few secondary schools which enthusiastically sings its adopted school song in every liturgy.

Each year we have four music concerts for all our ensembles, our annual evening Advent Service, a fully staged musical with a live band (every two years) and our annual orchestra week concert.

Our concerts include performances from all our ensembles plus soloists whose commitment to our ensemble music making is an inspiration to others. Frequently these soloists perform music that they have been learning with outside music and theatre organisations locally.

As always, our year culminates in our annual Orchestra week, where our instrumentalists spend an intensive week rehearsing for a Sunday afternoon orchestra concert supported by 40 of our alumni musicians and volunteer instrumental teachers. During the week, the orchestra rehearse for the equivalent of nearly two years worth of lunchtime rehearsals making enormous progress as a result, not to mention the invaluable inspiration and support they receive from alumni musicians who return to play alongside them at the weekend.

In addition, the group take part in team-building experiences such as bowling and laser tag and spend one of the days visiting a city of culture including museums and a professional Musical Theatre performance. In July 2025, the group went to London for a guided tour of the Royal Albert Hall, a visit to the Royal College of Music and a performance of the legendary musical, Hamilton.

This year we are developing a strong relationship with St Michael's Primary School in Rossington which also has a school orchestra. We have already visited them for a joint concert and played with them again at Christmas alongside the Salvation Army orchestra which already contains several players from both schools.

Every year we are committed to offering our students the chance to hear a professional orchestra at a nearby city. This year, 40 students will visit Manchester for the GCSE and A-Level Set Works concert by the Halle orchestra. Last September, we took a coach of students to Hull for the RPO's Last Night of the Proms concert. We are working with one of our alumni who is Head of Programme at B:Music, the music charity responsible for Town Hall and Symphony Hall, Birmingham. We are hoping to create a bespoke event for our students to enjoy a concert, tour and a chance to meet some performers!

In the future

This is about what the school is planning for subsequent years.

McAuley is constantly seeking to enhance and improve its musical offer at all levels.

Over the next year we will firmly embed the Pearson BTEC Level 3 qualification in Music Performance which started last year. We want to encourage as many GCSE music students as possible to consider this course as a strong contender at Post-16.

The course strongly reflects the brief-based curriculum we deliver at Key Stage 3 and as a result, we can train students to project manage our calendar of concerts and visits. This will increase our capacity to offer an outstanding experience to all our students.

At GCSE, we will be further improving the way we prepare students for their listening exam through a minimum baseline knowledge standard which is established very early in the course.

At Key Stage 3, we have been training students to use vocabulary software and music theory software to consolidate their knowledge and better prepare them for GCSE. This year, we will be continuing to teach them to work on these skills independently using their own devices at home. All the tasks and resources are prepared for this year and we hope to fully embed this initiative in the next 12 months.

We continue our commitment to our 40 year legacy of having a school orchestra despite the major challenges of the current climate in education. This year, we will continue to refine our fund-raising strategy, improve the way we recruit and retain new players and build strong relationships with other ensembles in the local area.

We will continue to use our influence as the Lead School for Music in Doncaster to build a support network for schools in Doncaster in order to improve the offer for all Doncaster students. This year we will do a feasibility study for an online A-level music course.

We will also be actively involved in the South Yorkshire Hub network meetings to share good practice and take full advantage of all new initiatives for our students.

Further information (optional)

The Department for Education publishes a [guide for parents and young people](#) on how they can get involved in music in and out of school, and where they can go to for support beyond the school.

The South Yorkshire [music hub](#) should also have a local plan for music education in place from September 2024 that should include useful information.