

Departmental Curriculum Statement 2025-2026 Performing Arts

Curriculum Intent Statement

Intent

At Cowley, we believe the performing arts are for everyone. Our curriculum has been deliberately designed to be inclusive, ensuring all students can access, enjoy, and succeed in music, dance, musical theatre and drama, regardless of background or starting point. With Drama now embedded across Years 7–9, we have widened access further and created clear progression across all key stages.

We recognise that many young people today struggle with confidence, oracy, and face-to-face communication, often as a result of increasingly digital and isolating lifestyles. Performing Arts plays a vital role in addressing this. Our curriculum actively promotes collaboration, discussion, and performance, giving students regular opportunities to share ideas, work independently, and build confidence through practical experience.

Implementation

The curriculum has been carefully constructed using a mastery-based model, where **technical, theoretical, and expressive** skills are developed as building blocks and revisited with increasing challenge as students' progress. Rather than jumping between disconnected topics, students revisit and refine key skills over time, allowing confidence, independence, and depth of understanding to develop securely.

Across all key stages, students are encouraged to take ownership of their creative choices, reflect on their progress, and work both independently and collaboratively. This approach ensures that all learners are appropriately supported, challenged, and stretched, while also developing essential skills that prepare them for future employment.

Lessons are practical and performance-focused, with assessment used both *for learning* and *of learning* to inform next steps. While key assessment points are built into the curriculum, these are applied flexibly so that students are assessed when they are ready, rather than at a fixed moment in time. Ongoing formative assessment allows teachers to adapt learning, enabling students to move on to more challenging work as soon as they are secure, while others are given time to consolidate core skills. As a result, learning may look different across groups or individuals at times, but this flexibility ensures that all students are appropriately supported, challenged, and able to make sustained progress. Teaching is grounded in real-world performing arts practice, with regular opportunities to rehearse, perform, reflect, and refine work.

Impact

Students leave Performing Arts with a clear sense of progress in their technical skills, subject knowledge, and expressive confidence across music, dance, musical theatre, and drama. They are able to perform with purpose, talk confidently about their creative choices using appropriate subject terminology, and apply what they have learned to new and more challenging contexts.

By the time students move on from the department, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They have developed independence, resilience, and the confidence to respond positively to challenge and feedback. Alongside a genuine enjoyment and appreciation of the performing arts, students take with them a strong set of transferable skills that support further study, future employment, and confident participation in everyday life.

Key Stage 3 (Year 7, 8 and 9)

At Cowley, our Key Stage 3 Performing Arts curriculum aims to cultivate an appreciation for a wide variety of styles, practitioners and genres while fostering development as performers, creators, and producers through an innovative, skills-based curriculum.

Music

Our Music curriculum aligns with the statutory **National Curriculum for Music and the Model Music Curriculum**. We have established clear end-points and component knowledge that underpin all schemes of work, ensuring a building-blocks mastery-model approach. This enables students to identify their current stage of learning, recognise gaps, and understand how to make progress. The breadth of study leads pupils to an understanding and importance of all types of music, and to respect the role music plays spiritually, morally, socially, and culturally (SMSC). The curriculum is designed to ensure that students recognise the value of music and are able to use and apply their musical skills, knowledge, and experience across a variety of meaningful contexts.

Students receive one lesson per week in Years 7–9, during which they develop their technical, theoretical, and expressive skills across **Composing, Listening, Singing, Performing, and Music Technology**, while engaging with the **inter-related dimensions of music**, which run as golden threads throughout the curriculum.

The musical elements are introduced from the very start of Year 7, providing students with key terminology and foundational knowledge that help them understand how music is created, performed, appreciated, and analysed, enabling them to articulate their understanding of the music

they hear. Pupils have regular opportunities to sing as part of their musical development. From Year 7 onwards, students have the opportunity to sing and perform as a whole class and in smaller groups, strengthening their musicianship, ensemble awareness, and confidence while supporting the development of band and performance skills.

Skills and knowledge are taught using a building-blocks approach and are regularly revisited and embedded over time to ensure that students develop strong, secure musical foundations and continue to make sustained progress. Students learn a range of instruments, with keyboard skills embedded and revisited across all years at KS3. In Year 7, pupils learn the ukulele, providing a foundation that supports progression to guitar and bass in Year 8 allowing students to continue performing on bands instruments in Year 9.

The curriculum is tailored to pupils' strengths, interests, and areas for development, enabling them to progress confidently in Music at KS3 and to become lifelong learners with a deep understanding and appreciation of the subject. The curriculum model is purposefully sequenced to prepare students for Eduqas Performing Arts Level 1/2, where they study composition, key practitioners, rehearsal technique, and live performance.

The practical nature of Music enables students to develop confidence, communication, resilience, self-reflection, and teamwork through practical, skills-based topics using pop and rock band instruments or digital audio workstations (DAW).

Drama

KS3 Drama at Cowley is designed in line with the National Curriculum, with clear links to English and the wider arts through spoken language, discussion, collaboration, and performance. The curriculum follows a mastery approach, with clearly defined end points and component knowledge forming the pillars of all schemes of work. Skills and knowledge are taught as building blocks and revisited over time to ensure secure foundations and sustained progression.

Drama is taught for one lesson per fortnight, with students studying three core strands each year: **improvisation** to develop confidence, communication, and teamwork; **devising**, informed by practitioners to explore creative intention, style, and cultural understanding; and **text-based** work using real play scripts to develop characterisation, interpretation, and understanding of dramatic structure. These strands are revisited consistently in Years 7 and 8 to strengthen performing, creating, responding, and reflecting skills. In Year 9, students bring all prior learning together through a full-class play, taking on both performance and production roles, providing a clear and purposeful bridge into KS4. The

curriculum is deliberately sequenced to prepare students for KS4 BTEC Tech Award in Performing Arts, where they study practitioner theory, the practical application of professional repertoire, and the creation of original performance work in response to a brief. This approach supports a broad and balanced curriculum, promotes collaboration, critical reflection, and participation in performance, supports SMSC development, and prepares students for future opportunities and responsibilities.

Key Stage 4 (year 10 and 11)

At Key Stage 4, Cowley offers vocational Performing Arts courses for students who enjoy the subject, regardless of prior experience. The courses combine practical, workshop-based learning with key theoretical understanding, allowing students to develop skills and techniques relevant to the performing arts industry.

The curriculum is structured to build technical skill, independence and professional working habits over time. By the end of Key Stage 4, students are ready to progress to KS5 vocational study, having experience of sustained rehearsal, performing under pressure, independent project work and an understanding of how the performing arts industry operates, as well as being prepared for further study, training or employment.

Music

Students follow the Level 1/2 WJEC Eduqas Performing Arts Course (Music approach). This course allows students to cultivate an interest and skills in music performance. It is structured as follows:

Year 10

- **Unit 1: Performing** (Internal assessment, 30%)
- **Unit 2: Creating** (Internal assessment, 30%)

Year 11

- **Unit 1: Performing** (Internal assessment, 30%)
- **Unit 3: Performing Arts in Practice** (External assessment, 40%)

Throughout the **Eduqas Performing Arts Level 1/2 Award**, students are taught and provided with time to develop their **technical, theoretical and expressive skills** both as musicians and as event producer and organisers, which form key elements of the course. The course is sequenced in this order so that students can carry the core skills developed in Year 9 into their first assessed unit (**Component 2 Creation**).

Component 2 (June series) is delivered in **Year 10 (September to April)** to allow students sufficient time to develop a secure theoretical understanding and theoretical understanding of composing music. This component allows students to build on their composition skills from KS3 including the Year 9 songwriting topic. It also provides time for students to develop skills and receive marks based on **critically analysing their own progress**, rather than being assessed solely on a final product. Within the unit, students develop knowledge of a range of key components including: their intended purpose, effect, audience, performance venue/occasion, theme and idea, scale, interest and experience, resources, styles, and the work of practitioners. These form the core **theoretical knowledge** needed across all three units, allowing students to make informed decisions about performance, event planning, and composition.

Component 1 (Performance) is taught from **April in Year 10 to November in Year 11**. Lessons focus on building and refining students' performance skills and exploring different repertoire in preparation for responding to an assignment brief. Students explore a range of repertoire as an ensemble, duo or soloist, with opportunities to revisit KS3 repertoire or learn new material. This allows students to develop technical control and accuracy on their instrument, improve rehearsal discipline, build confidence in performing, and strengthen stage presence. The practical elements of these lessons are often workshop-led, with teachers and peers providing expert instrumental and performance skills feedback to support students in **critically evaluating** their progress at key milestones.

Component 3 is externally assessed and follows a fixed structure in which students must respond to an assignment brief by **designing and producing their own performing arts event**. It draws upon the theoretical knowledge developed in Components 1 and 2, combines their composition and performance skills, and provides opportunities for live performance during a **viva voce-style pitch**. Students also develop understanding of new professional skills including marketing, promotion, job roles, and budget planning.

This sequence of the course ensures that students are well prepared for progression into **Key Stage 5 Music**, where students study the **RSL Level 3 Vocational Extended Certificate in the Creative Music Industry**. The KS4 curriculum builds the skills and theoretical understanding required for KS5 units, where students must plan key elements of a live performance, undertake a live performance, and critically evaluate their development by identifying strengths and areas for improvement. With the **Component 1** directly supporting students for **CMI 304 Improving Instrumental Performance, CMI 302 Rehearsing Music and CMI 303 Performing Music**

Component 3 at KS4 directly supports the demands of **CMI 301: Collaborative Project**, where learners plan all aspects of a live performance from start to finish. As a result of the vocational structure at KS4, students are well-prepared to move into Level 3 study confidently, equipped with the theoretical knowledge, rehearsal technique and stamina, expressive skills, and professional skills required for success.

Dance/Musical Theatre

Students follow the Level 2 BTEC Tech Award in Performing Arts. It is broken down as follows:

Year 10

- **Component 1: Exploring the Performing Arts** (Internal assessment, 30%)

Year 11

- **Component 2: Developing Skills and Techniques in Performing Arts** (Internal assessment, 30%)
- **Component 3: Responding to a Brief** (External assessment, 40%)

Through the BTEC Tech Award in Performing Arts, students on the Dance and Musical Theatre pathways are given the time and structure needed to develop strong technical, theoretical and expressive skills before being assessed in performance. The course is deliberately planned to build confidence, performance quality and professional working habits over time, rather than rushing students into assessment.

Component 1 is delivered in Year 10 and entered in the **June assessment series**, rather than December, to allow students sufficient time to develop secure understanding of styles, practitioners and professional work. The first year is used as a practical, workshop-led foundation, giving students

extended opportunities to explore a range of approaches, make informed choices about what they study in depth, and build core technical and performance skills without the pressure of early high-stakes assessment. Component 2 is taught in Year 11, allowing the remainder of Year 10 to be used purposefully for skill-building and preparation for component 2. This ensures students enter Component 2 with the technical control, confidence and rehearsal discipline required to refine and apply skills with increasing independence. Component 3 is externally assessed and follows a fixed structure and timeframe; it brings together learning from Components 1 and 2, drawing on students' understanding of rehearsal processes, professional practice and performance skills.

This sequencing ensures students are well prepared for progression into Key Stage 5, where they study the Pearson Level 3 National Foundation in Performing Arts Practice (Musical Theatre). The Key Stage 4 curriculum builds the skills and understanding needed for both performance development and industry study, directly supporting the demands of Module D and Module F. As a result, students move into Level 3 study confident in sustained rehearsal, independent practice and working to professional standards.

Key Stage 5 (Year 12 and 13)

At Key Stage 5, students can continue their vocational learning in the performing arts. While previous Level 2 study is helpful, it is not essential, and all students are supported to access the course successfully.

Students further develop and refine their skills through a range of practical and performance-based units, preparing them for progression to university, drama school, conservatoire training or employment in the performing arts and music industries. Courses are shaped around the strengths and needs of each cohort, supporting students to become confident, adaptable and employable performers.

Music

At Key Stage 5, students study the RSL Level 3 Vocational Extended Certificate in the Creative Music Industry. The course is carefully sequenced to provide students with the time, support, and industry

experience needed to develop their technical, theoretical, and expressive skills, alongside a strong understanding of the professional music and wider performing arts sector.

Year 12:

- **CMI 304 Improving Instrumental Performance**
- **CMI 302 Rehearsing Music**

From **September to December**, students spend time workshoping ideas across a range of different repertoire, applying each of the musical elements to selected repertoire in order to deepen their understanding of stylistic features, genre characteristics, and musical detail in preparation for their first ensemble unit: **CMI 302 Rehearsing Music**.

During this period, students also develop their individual instrumental skills for **CMI 304 Improving Instrumental Performance**, with a focus on solo performance technique, critical self-reflection, and identifying areas for improvement. They create personalised practice plans that can be applied both in future units and within real-world industry settings, supporting their development as independent, versatile, and reflective musicians.

Students work on both units simultaneously. In **CMI 304**, they develop their theoretical understanding of technical skills and equipment selection alongside instrumental lessons, supported by regular milestone recordings that allow for structured critical reflection. In **CMI 302 Rehearsing Music**, students refine their ability to take on leadership roles within an ensemble and work towards learning a range of repertoire for a performance brief.

Both units culminate in a live performance in June, ensuring students have sufficient time to refine their skills and demonstrate secure technical and stylistic understanding.

Year 13:

- **CMI 303 Performing Music**
- **CMI 301 Collaborative Project**

At the start of **Year 13**, students develop their ensemble performance skills for **CMI 303 Performing Music**, adapting songs into different musical styles to create engaging performances for a vocational brief. They use their **theoretical and technical knowledge** to arrange well-known songs and explore the

planning of live events, including communication with technical staff, venue staff, and band members. Students use audience surveys to select suitable repertoire and produce risk assessments and stage plans to mirror real-world practice. This work culminates in a live performance assessed in **January**.

From **January**, students begin working on the **CMI 301 Collaborative Project**, developing the planning, organisational, and creative skills needed to deliver a live event in response to a vocational brief. They gain insight into the management and business aspects of the industry and plan their own event at an external venue. Students develop skills in marketing, promotion, ticketing, budgeting, and project management, applying industry-standard practices to a real-world scenario. Throughout the project, they build confidence, independence, and professional standards to support progression into higher education, further training, or employment in the performing arts.

The KS5 RSL Music course has been carefully designed with units selected from a wide range of musical areas to reflect students' strengths, interests, and aspirations. A survey is completed prior to starting the course so the department can identify individual strengths and areas of interest. These units provide students with a solid foundation in both performance and the business aspects of the music industry, ensuring they are well-prepared for further study and a variety of career pathways within the performing arts.

Performing Arts (Musical Theatre)

At Key Stage 5, students study the **BTEC Level 3 National Foundation Diploma in Performing Arts Practice (Musical Theatre)**. The course is carefully sequenced to give students the time and experience needed to develop high-level performance skills, alongside a strong understanding of the performing arts industry.

Year 12

- **Module F: The Performing Arts Industry**
- **Module D: Musical Theatre Skills Development- Unit D10: Exploring Performance Styles**

Module F is taught **throughout Year 12** and runs alongside practical performance work. As a largely theoretical and research-based module, it allows students to develop an understanding of employment pathways, career planning and the business side of the performing arts, while applying this knowledge to their own ambitions and future progression.

The majority of **Year 12** is dedicated to developing students' technical and interpretative skills across a wide range of musical theatre styles. This extended learning phase allows students to build control, versatility and confidence through regular practice and performance. D10 is assessed in **June**, ensuring students have sufficient time to refine their skills and demonstrate secure technical and stylistic understanding.

Year 13

- **Unit D12: Performing Musical Theatre for an Audience**
- **Unit D11: Creating Performance Material**

At the start of **Year 13**, students move directly into D12 through participation in the whole school or college musical. This unit is assessed in **December** and provides a professional, real-world performance experience, requiring students to meet a commissioned brief and perform to a live audience as part of a large-scale production.

From **January to February of Year 13**, students focus on D11 through a structured teaching and learning phase. During this time, students explore pantomime as a performance style, including a visit to see a professional pantomime. They then apply this learning by devising, writing and performing their own pantomime productions, which are toured to local primary schools, developing both creative and collaborative skills.

This curriculum is deliberately sequenced to get the best out of students, allowing time for skills to develop before assessment and ensuring learning is meaningful, practical and progressive. By structuring the course in this way, students are supported to build confidence, independence and professional standards, enabling them to succeed in both their assessments and future progression into higher education, training or employment in the performing arts.

Curriculum Beyond the Classroom

The Performing Arts Department at Cowley International College offers extensive opportunities for students to perform both within the school and in the wider community. Central to our curriculum are the extracurricular provisions that reflect our commitment to equality and inclusivity.

Our extensive extracurricular program includes:

- Drama Club

- Musical Theatre Club
- Dance Club
- Choirs
- Rock School
- Dance Company

Peripatetic teachers provide one-on-one music tuition during the school day, free of charge to students.

Cowley International College actively participates in local community events such as the St Helens Rotary Club, Young Carers Services, Remembrance Day events, faith groups, and the St Helens Council Christmas light service. We collaborate regularly with the local music service for external events.

Students also have the opportunity to audition for our annual large-scale musical theatre production. Recent productions include *Les Misérables*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Evita* and *The Addams Family*. Other performance opportunities include *Cowley's Got Talent*, the Year 6 Transition 'Welcome Performance', and the annual Summer and Christmas concerts.

Subject Expertise

Our Performing Arts staff are highly experienced and dedicated, ensuring the highest standards of teaching and learning. Staff are encouraged to develop their subject knowledge and continue professional development through various avenues, including:

- Examination board training sessions on new and existing specifications
- Serving as Lead School for music for Sound! Music Hub
- Serving as Examiners, EQAs and standards verifiers for KS4/5 examining boards

Staff also remain active in the performing arts outside of school, including choreographing and directing productions, vocal coaching, performing as lead vocalists and pianists, working on professional musical theatre tours, cruise ship productions, and supporting auditions as rehearsal or audition pianists. This ongoing professional practice helps staff stay current with industry developments, and they regularly share their expertise by supporting other schools within the local authority and contributing to best practice across music, dance and musical theatre.

Destinations

The curriculum at KS4 equips students with the necessary skills, techniques, and knowledge to pursue Performing Arts courses at Cowley 6th Form and other further education institutions. Our students have progressed to prestigious drama schools and music conservatoires, including:

- Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
- Birmingham Institute of Music
- The Royal Northern College of Music
- London College of Music
- Leeds College of Music
- Guildhall
- LAMDA
- LABAN
- Urdang
- Mountview
- Arts Ed

In addition to successful performance careers, our Performing Arts courses develop transferable skills that open doors to various career opportunities, such as teaching, off-stage roles (set/lighting/sound/costume design, directing, producing), and roles in marketing and promotion. Alumni feedback demonstrates that the soft skills honed through our Performing Arts program—such as presentation, teamwork, confidence, problem-solving, and communication—prepare students for success in any chosen field.