2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject: Music

Level: 1

Achievement standard(s): 91950, 91951

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91950: Demonstrate understanding of music in relation to contexts

Assessment

This standard was assessed via a submitted report. Candidates were required to gather supporting evidence towards the standard during the year and then select their best evidence to submit. To achieve the standard candidates had to present evidence for both a Māori context and one other context.

The report could be in the form of a written report (pdf) OR a slideshow (pptx). Up to 6 hours of class time was recommended for candidates to prepare their report. Teachers could not provide any advice or guidance to candidates about the report content once candidates started to curate their response.

Commentary

Across responses, the most consistent pattern was the absence of specific musical evidence to support statements. Many candidates focused on describing mood, personal interpretation, or general impressions rather than analysing musical elements in relation to context.

A significant number of responses displayed characteristics consistent with AI-generated text, including generic phrasing, limited use of music-specific vocabulary, and a lack of precise references to lyrics, sections, or instrumental detail.

Another common issue was the selection of works that offered limited scope for analysis. Generic pop songs were frequently chosen with broad contextual ideas such as unity or love, which candidates found difficult to link meaningfully to musical elements beyond lyrical content. This contributed to superficial or incomplete discussions.

Many candidates submitted lengthy, research-style responses that included extensive background information but minimal analytical relevance. Very few responses incorporated scores, diagrams, or detailed musical references. Subjective "vibes-based" language (e.g. "relaxed feel", "smooth vibe") was prevalent across lower-achieving submissions.

It was also common for candidates to produce uneven responses, where one work approached Merit level while the second remained clearly at Not Achieved, resulting in an overall lower grade.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- selected works that allowed a limited level of discussion beyond lyrics
- clearly identified a relevant context for each piece
- provided basic but valid links between context and musical elements or features
- describe musical elements at a level consistent with Curriculum Level 6, though often without depth
- provided some discussion, but with limited use of precise musical references such as timestamps, lyric quotations, or terminology.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- selected works where musical elements beyond lyrics were clearly related to the stated context
- stated a clear and specific context at the outset of the response
- provided clear explanations linking musical elements to context
- used supporting evidence such as lyric references, timestamps, sections, or instrumentation in at least one work
- explained how musical elements were used, but sometimes did not fully address why those choices were made
- produced one strong work alongside a weaker second work.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- selected works with sufficient musical complexity to support detailed discussion
- stated and consistently maintained a specific context
- provided insightful, well-supported discussions of multiple relevant musical elements in each work
- explained both how and why musical elements were used and explicitly linked these to context
- used precise musical evidence consistently to support claims
- avoided unnecessary descriptive or background information.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- provided descriptive commentary without clearly linking musical elements to context
- included background information or general musical description without analytical connection
- relied on subjective or vague language (e.g. "calm vibe", "sad feel")
- did not identify or discuss relevant musical elements such as lyrics, instrumentation, form, or texture
- selected works with insufficient depth to support analysis
- provided unsupported or tenuous links between music and context
- focused disproportionately on one work while providing minimal analysis of the second
- submitted responses displaying characteristics consistent with AI-generated text, lacking musical specificity.

Achievement standard 91951: Shape music ideas to create an original composition

Assessment

This standard was assessed by a submitted portfolio.

The portfolio consisted of three artefacts:

- a recording of a completed piece of original music
- a stylistically appropriate visual representation of the music
- a short descriptive statement on how the music was created.

Commentary

A significant number of group composition submissions did not clearly identify the individual candidate's role within the collaborative process. In many cases, contribution statements were absent, overly brief, or descriptive without linking to specific musical decisions.

Recording from live settings, including school performances and competitions, often lacked clarity and made it difficult to distinguish individual parts. This issue was particularly problematic when assessing a single candidate within an ensemble. Clearer recordings, supported by visual or written documentation, provided more reliable evidence.

A recurring pattern was the use of narrative or conversational descriptions rather than focused musical analysis. Many statements did not explain how musical ideas were developed or realised, reducing their effectiveness as supporting evidence. A small number of candidates submitted multiple works without indicating which piece was intended for assessment.

There was an observable increase in submissions that appeared to incorporate AI-generated compositions or written statements. Some works were created entirely through AI tools without meaningful student involvement. This reinforces the need for robust authenticity processes within schools.

A small number of submissions noted teacher assistance in the compositional process but did not specify the nature or extent of that involvement. This lack of clarity makes it difficult to determine whether the evidence represents student-generated work.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- wrote short pieces of music that demonstrated some structuring of ideas which were simple but showed some development (i.e. not just repetition)
- demonstrated a musical style or genre which was not wholly coherent
- wrote melodic ideas that generally followed the harmony, often repeated and based around the tonic of chords
- did not write a piece of suitable duration (around 2 minutes)
- produced a very basic harmony often using only 2 or 3 primary chords or different sections used the same chords (i.e. chorus and verses using same chords)
- produced a written component which was brief but included some details of composition process
- submitted a visual representation lacking in some detail, but clearly reflected the audio submitted
- submitted as a member of a group, individual contribution stated, though not in detail.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- wrote pieces that were clearly connected to an identifiable style and conventions
- wrote music that was clearly structured and developed in more complex ways and using more identifiable musical elements
- provided music that was between 2 and 3 minutes in duration
- demonstrated harmony development – a range of chords used and often sections including contrasting harmonic elements
- developed melodic ideas further
- provided clear visual representation detailed and appropriate to the style of the music. If notated, score conventions were mostly adhered to and included dynamics, articulations, etc. If DAW based, screenshots were annotated with musical detail
- wrote a detailed written component with reference to specific musical details. If submitted as a member of a group, provided clear and detailed statements of contribution with reference to the specifics of the music.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- wrote highly stylistic music that was well developed, structured, and demonstrated creative use of musical conventions
- combined or contrasted musical elements within the style
- provided visual representation demonstrating high level of detail that is consistent with the style and would allow for a very accurate recreation
- demonstrated a high degree of musical / music technology literacy (i.e. understanding of the capabilities of instruments; use of DAW techniques, etc.)
- produced a written component that was detailed, with reference to specific musical details. If submitted as a member of a group, provided clear and detailed statements of contribution with reference to the specifics of the music
- demonstrated a clear individual sense of compositional voice or contribution to overall group sound.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- wrote pieces that were too short
- provided preexisting loops within DAWs. (i.e. no original material included)
- did not include visual representation or a written component
- produced music was too simplistic to meet the curriculum level – for example, highly repetitive or missing elements expected in the style; often little or no structure to the music
- did not clearly explain their individual contribution to the piece as part of a group
- did not declare use of AI in for music composition or in written component
- did not produce an original piece.