

Saint John

St John's College School was founded to educate the choristers of one of the world's greatest choirs, and music remains at the heart and soul of the school. This guide endeavours to introduce you to th intOur approaches focus heavily on pupils learning to internalise their musical experiences through movement and singing. More detailed information is provided in the Curriculum Summaries published in the Teaching & Learning section of the website.

When to Start?

The school offers instrumental lessons to children in T2 upwards, and a number of children begin to learn an instrument in T2 or Form 1. On very rare occasions, pupils may start instrumental lessons before T2, although this will be entirely at the discretion of the school – outstanding ability having been noticed, discussed and monitored by Music Department and Byron House staff – and not automatically as a result of parental requests. There is no upper age restriction, though it is worth adding that for many children it is best to start a stringed instrument sooner rather than later. However, children who start an instrument slightly later in their school careers will typically progress accordingly at a faster rate, due to increased general maturity. In all cases, though, it is, of course, crucial that a child is coping well with the academic, social and emotional demands of life at school and also returning home at the end of the school day with some spare mental and/or physical energy left over so that regular practice can be undertaken. Parents, class teachers and other members of staff may all have an input with regard to the most felicitous time to start. For some instruments, there are, of course, physical considerations (general size and strength, dental development, coordination, etc.).

Useful questions to ask regarding the timing of starting:

Is the motivation for taking up an instrument coming from your child, just from you, or from both? It is crucial, of course, that your child is really keen to take up an instrument, as a regular commitment is required, and very helpful if parents have the time and inclination to support and encourage.

Has your child showed signs of interest – which can be expressed in many different ways – in music (e.g. singing around the house, dancing/moving to music, tapping rhythms at the table, playing an instrument which is available at home, talking about music, etc.)?

Is your child coping with the academic, social and emotional demands of life at school?

Is your child returning home at the end of the school day with plenty of spare mental and/or physical energy? (Which of these two distinctive types of energy your child has left over should help us to work out which instruments may be more suitable for your child, as explained later.)

As a family, are you ready to take on this extra commitment? Regular practice (ideally as part of a routine – explained later) is required, as otherwise progress and enjoyment are unlikely to result.

Does your child persevere with hobbies?

If in doubt, do please seek advice directly from the Music Department staff and, in some cases, a period of waiting and reviewing may be the best solution. Please be aware that the Music Department may contact parents of some Byron House pupils, having consulted colleagues at Byron House, if we think that delaying the start of instrumental lessons or a different instrument would suit your child. This, of course, is meant to be an entirely positive process, as we seek to find a solution which will give your child the greatest access to the p

done. Of course, some wind instruments require less physical energy (the flute or recorder, for example) and some require more (the oboe and the brass instruments).

It is worth mentioning that it is not necessary for a parent to possess any expertise on the chosen instrument! The best support a parent can give their child is through taking an interest, offering encouragement and making sure that practice is part of the daily routine.

Pupils in T2 are generally limited by physical size to the 'cello, piano, recorder and violin, although developments in smaller-scale instruments now make the bassoon, clarinet, double bass, flute, harp, horn, oboe, trombone and trumpet possibilities for many children, too. If we know that your child is keen to play a particular instrument, or if we consider your child to have a talent that should be fostered, you will be contacted. Likewise, please contact any member of the Music Department if you have a query about instrumental music provision.

Obtaining an Instrument

You are advised not to acquire an instrument before receiving confirmation that your request for lessons has been successful. Do please ask your child's instrumental teacher for advice with regard to acquiring an instrument; an unsuitable instrument could severely hinder progress and enjoyment. The school keeps a modest stock of certain instruments which are available for hire at a reasonable termly charge. It is strongly recommended that piano pupils have access to a proper piano, and not just a keyboard o

practising must not come to be seen by the child as a chore. If, after a while, there is too much parental contribution, a situation can arise in which the child struggles to gain the independence necessary to take them further with their studies. With judicious encouragement, children gradually become aware of the correlations between thoughtful practice, successful lessons and rewarding progress overall. Ultimately, enjoyment has to be the foremost motivation.

Some tips for successful practice follow (further advice is sent to parents from time to time):

Boarders' Practice

Choristers and probationers have supervised practice sessions for half an hour after breakfast each weekday, and the choristers have additional time on Saturday mornings. Other boarders are allocated daily supervised sessions before school.

The Practice Notebook

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that it is not desirable or advisable to move straight from one grade syllabus to the next, as pupils will miss the opportunity to explore a varied repertoire and to develop the range of

