

***Inspiring a Love of Music.
The Power of Musical Engagement in the Classroom and Beyond.***



Activity

We champion cultural capital at Saffron Walden County High, putting the arts at the centre of our school. As observed by Ofsted (2024); *Pupils are extremely proud of their achievements, including beyond the academic. They have the chance to develop their musical interests and skills to a very high level. They love performing in Saffron Hall.*

We run twenty choirs and instrumental ensembles, and attendance is free. Ensembles include junior and senior Jazz Band, junior and senior Concert Band, Orchestra, Show Choir, Chamber Choir, the Rhythm Corporation as well as a range of smaller ensembles such as saxophone group, string ensemble, and guitar clubs. We encourage individual music tuition, and eighteen private music teachers visit SWCHS weekly, delivering lessons to two hundred and sixty students weekly. We provide support with the cost of lessons and instruments - with additional bursaries being provided by our Music Academy and our Concerts fund. We also apply PPG funding and firmly believe that every pupil deserves the chance to play an instrument and experience the joy of performance.

The Impact on Participants and Staff

“Taking part in choir has really helped my musicianship. Learning the score improved my sight-reading and listening skills... It isn’t just about singing notes - it’s about understanding the music and feeling it together.”

The broad range of experience available in the ensembles and choirs provides something for everyone and for musicians of all musical experience. For example, our Ukulele group is for beginners and players alike. Two hundred and fifty students are currently immersed in our extra-curricular Music provision.

Staff are always on hand to help, leading with enthusiasm and positivity. We look to emerging needs and seek to address them. We invest time and support into extra-curricular music. Students practice at breaktimes and access equipment for student-led bands.

Groups are directed by both classroom Music teachers and our private teachers. All teachers are skilled specialists, and we maintain high standards, concerts being a strong example of our commitment and progress. Funding for private music teachers is generated through ticket sales; we hold four major concerts each year in Saffron Hall. Additional events are scheduled throughout the year. Music in the community is a priority, and we perform regularly at St Mary’s Church, Audley End House, in local care homes, and at other events. Recitals, including some in Saffron Hall, are free of charge, with an option to donate. Donations are used to support workshops and lessons in ‘rare breed’ instruments.

“The department is a hive of music making, rooms are always occupied, and corridors are alive with sound.”

The extra-curricular provision fosters a warm and supportive environment in Music, for both students and staff. The programme strengthens relationships that carry over into the classroom. Concerts are exciting and celebratory occasions, providing clear goals and moments of shared pride, with achievement points awarded afterwards.

What else do we offer?

Music forms the backbone of cross curricular activities such as our Charities Week which raises around £10,000 each year to share between a range of local, national and international charities. We offer Musical Theatre Productions, Talent Shows and fundraisers.

We also love our annual Music Tour to Europe.

We utilise Saffron Hall for senior ensemble rehearsals after school; we find this adds prestige to those ensembles and promotes commitment - while providing aspiration for the intermediate groups. Our Sixth Form Music Academy offers our students the chance to experience workshops and masterclasses - as well as the opportunity to lead music education, directing intermediate ensembles and visiting local feeder schools. Some opportunities also made available to selected students in Lower School.

We work closely with Saffron Hall to ensure all our students experience professional performances and have access to workshops and high-quality enrichment opportunities. This includes our celebrated annual residency for selected students in Year 9. We are a partner school in the Saffron Centre for Young Musicians which offers high quality music provisions (with bursaries to support with costs). This is in association with Essex Music and Saffron Hall.

We support Initial Teacher Training and are committed to supporting on-going development of teachers, both in our own team and beyond.

Learning

Extra-curricular music enhances and works in symbiosis with the classroom in several ways. It motivates interest, which is evident in the confidence shown during GCSE Performance - both in the solo and ensemble unit requirements, as well as in students' readiness to perform in the classroom, to improvise, and to create. Along with broadening interest and fostering creativity, we also observe that these students are more likely to evaluate and reflect. They are accustomed to making mistakes in a safe space and building on experience.

Involvement in extra-curricular music improves students' communication skills, often encouraging them to socialise with peers from other year groups and participate in projects and events beyond their year group or school form.

One student started GCSE music having never had singing lessons but clearly had a lovely voice. We were able to offer a bursary and encouraged him to join Show Choir. He went on to enjoy success in GCSE performance with an excellent mark, auditioned for the Chamber Choir and was successful, leading the tenor section and being offered an additional bursary to go on Music Tour. He joined the school

Supported using public funding by

production and became integral in leading aspects of Charities week such as coordinating music for the Senior Citizen's Party and running a Worship singing club. With this confidence, he auditioned for local choirs including the SW Choral Society and a prestigious semi-professional choir; he is now in receipt of a choral scholarship. Another student started the bassoon with the support of a 'rare breed' instrument on a Year 7 scholarship. She is now reading Music at university and enjoying playing lead bassoon in the orchestra.

“There's loads of opportunity to play music at SWCHS. Rehearsals are great for building friendships and getting into a good routine, but performances are the best part, they're so much fun. We genuinely love playing, and getting to perform in the hall feels like such a privilege but also a safe space.”

Form tutors and Year Coordinators often discover another side to a student through Music performance, an important piece of the puzzle that can significantly support wellbeing. For example, a Year 11 boy struggling with attendance and attainment was able to turn things around when the school harnessed his enjoyment of drumming. The vital role of extra-curricular music is also reflected in student progression and the structured pathways at SWCHS. We offer both intermediate and senior ensembles and choirs, enabling students to play with peers and progress appropriately. They learn ensemble etiquette, while we foster joy and commitment. Positions, promotions, and performance opportunities are carefully managed, supported by strong communication between classroom teachers, the extracurricular coach, and, where relevant, private teachers.

In KS3, we gather information through questionnaires and teacher relationships to guide students toward ensembles or choirs. A Year 7 baseline assessment helps identify students not yet learning an instrument but showing aptitude, enthusiasm, or ability. Similarly, the Year 7 Singing Project often highlights promising singers, who are then encouraged to join choirs. Pianists are also well supported, some take up instruments like double bass or bassoon, and many benefit from duet and accompaniment coaching.

We also note a significant impact on repertoire awareness and chronology through music making. We have taken steps to include examination set works and relevant curricular music as performance repertoire in our bands and Orchestra, for example - Haydn, Film Music, and Samba. SWCHS GCSE Music students must join at least one school music ensemble, and we find they commonly exceed this.

We offer Music at GCSE and A Level, and Music Technology at A Level. In addition, we provide graded music exams in a wide range of instruments and in voice for all year groups. We are experienced in supporting progression to the next stage in students' music education; we have successfully supported students in achieving

places at leading conservatoires and university music courses. The number of students who go on to conservatoire and university is significant.

At Saffron Walden County High, Music and the arts are at the heart of school life, nurturing creativity and spirit, both in the classroom and on the concert stage.

