



From Director of Music: Michael Stinton

1 May 2020

Dear Parents

**Abingdon School - online music teaching in the Summer Term 2020
Information for Parents**

This document is intended to give information to those parents that have children at Abingdon School who receive music lessons from our Visiting Music Teachers (VMTs).

Our VMTs are self-employed. This means that they are not paid by the school to deliver music lessons to our pupils. The contract between the VMT and the parent is therefore a private contract. Whilst the school advises the VMTs on fees, scheduling of lessons and notice periods, these decisions as well as those governing the VMT/Parent relationship are ultimately mutually agreed between the VMT and parent.

This means that this document is advisory, and that VMTs and parents may mutually agree any other arrangements. In a case where contractual arrangements are not adhered to by the VMT, the school will support parents to help to ensure that these obligations are met. Similarly, if contractual arrangements are not adhered to by the parent, then the school will support the VMT to help to ensure that the parents' obligations are met. Ultimately, this ensures that the musical progress of our pupils continues to be as rewarding and as fruitful as possible.

This arrangement is and has always been the arrangement that has existed between the school, the VMT and the parent for as long as our VMTs have been self-employed, and this is the arrangement that will continue throughout this period of remote learning.

It is also important to understand what this relationship means for the VMT. Their income is reliant upon their clients paying for music lessons. Our VMTs are highly skilled professionals in their respective fields and they are considered a huge asset to the school and our pupils for many reasons, including the excellent music lessons they provide.

To this end, it is expected that pupils will continue with their music lessons unless otherwise mutually agreed with the VMT. In cases where VMTs have attempted to make contact with clients to explain and set-up their remote learning strategy, but where parents have not responded to VMTs, the assumption will be that the parents want lessons to continue (in any case, they would need to give a full term's notice of withdrawal) and lessons will continue to be scheduled and charged.

Below you will find a list of questions and answers that you may have regarding VMT lessons. Whilst it is expected that for most pupils' lessons will continue as normal, any queries about how lessons will specifically be conducted with VMTs, scheduling queries or instrumental progress queries should be directed to the relevant VMT in the first instance.

If you have any further queries or questions beyond this, please feel free to contact me on the email address below at any time. I am always keen to help and I will try to get back to you as soon as possible. If any safeguarding concerns arise during the course of VMT lessons, you should immediately contact the School's DSL, Mark Hindley, at mark.hindley@abingdon.org.uk

Yours sincerely

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Q.1 How will VMTs at Abingdon continue to teach their pupils?

Pupils will continue to follow their normal school timetable and receive work which will be communicated to parents and pupils using various online platforms such as Firefly, email, zoom, Google Classroom etc. For music lessons, the zoom app will feature in the new online learning environment. Pupils' parents should encourage and support their sons' work by ensuring, as far as possible, that the discipline of the timetable is maintained at home. For VMTs, this means that building a normal rotation into timetabled lessons will continue so that the pupils will not miss the same academic lessons every week.

Q.2 How will VMTs continue to teach their pupils?

Whilst it is still technically permissible for VMTs to visit pupils to teach lessons in their houses or a studio, it is now strongly discouraged by government bodies, unions, and schools alike.

The overwhelming advice from most institutions and advisory bodies is that VMTs teach pupils remotely using some sort of video software.

All VMTs have access to a school Zoom account. It has been recommended to VMTs that they use these accounts as most parents and pupils will now be using and interacting with Zoom for their normal school lessons on a daily basis and will have become quickly familiar with the interface. That said, it is not obligatory for VMTs at Abingdon School to use Zoom for music lessons. We are confident that superb instrumental and singing lessons can take place using this remote learning platform.

Q.3 When will music lessons be scheduled?

Pupils will be following their normal school timetables at home, so it has been recommended to VMTs that they schedule pupils on the days and times that they would normally have their lessons if they were physically in school. Mr Fletcher-Campbell (CFC) will continue to upload the majority of VMT timetables to the school's learning platform, Firefly – in other cases, VMTs will communicate specific lesson times in a timely manner on a regular basis. Teaching them on the same day as usual will give the pupils a familiar structure and routine. Rotating times will ensure that pupils don't miss the same academic lesson every week.

Your relationship with the VMT is a private relationship, however, and VMTs may schedule pupils at any convenient time that is mutually agreed.

Q.4 What about children of key workers that are in school?

Children of key workers that are now attending Abingdon Prep School (APS) will not be able to have video lessons during the school day, so scheduling of these pupils at a different time than usual may be necessary. Music lessons do not have to be scheduled in school hours. You should liaise directly with the VMT about whether or not your child/children will be in school.

If this proves problematic, please contact the Director of Music on michael.stinton@abingdon.org.uk

Q.5 Can online music lessons really be as effective as face-to-face lessons?

Yes.

Whilst there may be some limitations as both parties are not in the same room, music lessons have a relatively long history of being taught online. Technology has advanced very quickly in this area. All music conservatoires have now moved to online teaching. A good many of our teachers have given and received music lessons online and we can assure parents that they can be highly effective.

It is recommended that parents "have a presence" during online music lessons. This means that you can gain an insight into what the VMT is teaching and how they are teaching it. As a parent it can give you a better understanding of what is expected and how you can best promote musical progress at home.

Most VMTs started teaching remotely in the final week of last term, and feedback from them and from parents has been extremely positive. We expect zoom lessons to become more and more effective as this new way of teaching online becomes familiar.

Q.6 How can I ensure that my son gets the most out of his online music lessons?

You can support your son by ensuring that he is ready with his instrument set-up at his allocated lesson time. Lesson times will be communicated to you by the VMT.

The pupils should by now all have the device enabled with the zoom app and have online access. Please ensure that your son has all this set up and ready to go before the lesson start time.

It would be helpful if the camera you plan to use is set up in advance of the lesson and that it is focused on the correct area. During initial lessons, VMTs will let you/your son know where the camera should be positioned to ensure that they can see clearly.

Using inbuilt device microphones is suitable for online lessons, but it is recommended that if you have an external microphone that this is used as it can produce a slightly better sound quality. Check the computer audio settings etc in advance of the lesson to limit any time wasted. For zoom, the use of *Original Sound* option is advised to optimise music sound quality.

Inevitably, from time to time, especially during initial lessons, technical issues may arise on your end or the VMT's end. A little patience may be required when this happens but, in general, it is hoped that most lessons will happen with very few technical hiccups.

Ensuring that your son has a regular practice routine is also key to excellent musical progress. If you find that your son has a few minutes spare at the end of school lessons, or you need to fill time at the weekend or in the evenings, this is a great opportunity for pupils to practise their instruments and make excellent progress.

Q.7 Does a parent/guardian have to be present during VMT lessons?

Ideally, especially for younger children, it is recommended for parents to "have a presence".

The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) advises that parents are present during 1:1 video lessons. A good practice might be to try to be available to pop in and out from time to time to check on the lesson.

Safeguarding our pupils, but also our VMTs, is paramount in any 1:1 situation, even if it is a remote one. Some VMTs may request that a parent must be present. If this happens, they are simply following the advice of the OSCB and as well as the school's updated safeguarding policy.

There will of course be many differing and unforeseen circumstances that mean it will not be possible or practical for a parent/guardian to be present during VMT lessons. If this is the case, you will have to mutually agree with the VMT whether or not you are happy for the lesson to continue or if you would prefer it to be rescheduled.

Q.8 Will my son's lesson be able to be recorded by either ourselves or the VMT?

It is not obligatory for VMTs to record lessons. However, the OSCB advises that any lessons that are conducted via video on a 1:1 basis (even if the parent is present in the room) should be recorded for safeguarding reasons. The school's safeguarding policy has also been updated on the OSCB's recommendations, advising that 1:1 video lessons should be recorded. VMTs have been advised that any video recordings that they choose to make must only be made with the express consent of the parent for each session.

This advice means that some VMTs will stipulate that they need to record lessons for safeguarding reasons. They will ask for consent from you to do this. As self-employed members of the team, how they do this will be their choice. They may (the list is not exhaustive):

- 1) Email asking for consent.
- 2) Ask on video at the beginning of each lesson and you verbally give consent on video.
- 3) Update their terms and conditions to include a clause about consenting to record lessons that you will have to sign or verbally agree to.
- 4) They may not require video lessons to be recorded at all, which means you will not have to consent.

VMTs have been advised that all video recordings made should be stored securely, shared with the Director of Music, and not be shared with third parties. These videos will not be accessed by anyone, including any school staff, unless a safeguarding concern is raised by a parent or VMT.

If a VMT asks for consent to record a video lesson and you would prefer lessons not to be video recorded, please let the VMT know. Some VMTs might be happy to proceed without the lesson being recorded. Some might request that perhaps they can record the audio only. Any arrangement is fine as long as it is mutually agreed by the parent and VMT.

If you would like to record lessons that a VMT is giving to keep the recordings for personal reasons, this should only be done **with the express permission of the VMT**. VMT lessons are private, and lesson content and delivery are the personal and intellectual property of the VMT. Some VMTs might be happy for you to record lessons so that pupils can watch them back, and to help with practice purposes etc. Some VMTs may not be happy to have lessons to be recorded. VMTs have the right to protect their personal and intellectual property. In either case, the decision of the VMT should be respected.

Q.9 Do notice periods still apply?

Yes.

The relationship between the parent and the VMT is a private relationship. VMTs will have terms and conditions and their clients (parents) are contractually and legally obligated to adhere to these terms and conditions. If VMTs are offering remote lessons and doing the best they can in the current situation to deliver high-quality lessons and you choose not to continue, then you should give **a full term's notice to both the Director of Music and the VMT** and adhere to the notice periods stated on the School's website and which have been contractually agreed.

In a case where a VMT chooses not to offer lessons then this is a breach of contract on the VMT's side and it would be inappropriate to continue to charge parents for lessons, but it is expected that all VMTs will offer remote lessons in some form.

Q10. The school has reduced their fees. Will VMTs be doing the same?

Contextually, the school has given fee reductions to all pupils, but there is **no expectation** that the VMTs should do the same. Parents should expect that lessons will be charged at exactly the same rate as if lessons were happening in school as normal.

Please bear in mind that the income of our VMTs is reliant upon their clients paying for music lessons. Many of our VMTs have lost substantial amounts of income already with cancelled musical engagements and cancelled performances. Given these circumstances, it will simply not be possible for some VMTs to consider reducing fees or waiving notice periods as they may already be struggling to make ends meet. It is understood that this is a challenging time for many, and it is really worth bearing this in mind when considering our VMTs.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding of our pupils and staff is, and will remain, our top priority, including throughout all potential periods of school closure.

In these unusual circumstances some adjustments to how VMTs teach have to be made, but this will always be done with safeguarding of all parties in mind. Throughout a period of school closure, remote learning is a reality. To this end, it will be permissible for VMTs and pupils to use personal devices to teach and receive lessons via video software platforms.

Whilst it might be appropriate for a child to be taught a 1:1 music lesson via video link when the pupil is streaming from a communal area of their house and their parents/other family are present in the house, it would not be appropriate from a safeguarding perspective for children to stream from a non-communal area (such as their bedroom, for example), or where a parent/other family member/s are not present in the house.

It is best to establish a serious and professional manner when learning online. Video calling apps in this context are for lessons only and not for other contact, e.g. sharing photos or general messaging.

Parents should consider the background that the VMT will see and carry out a video check from your camera to see what is visible. A neutral background is best – try to minimise mess and avoid put anything too personal on display. You may wish to adjust your chosen app's background settings if necessary.

It may be necessary to widen the frame depending on your son's instrument, so take care that the frame is well chosen and appropriate.

Pupils should wear appropriate clothing for lessons. If a pupil arrives to a lesson wearing excessively informal attire (such as a dressing gown or pyjamas) or present against an excessively messy background, it would be appropriate for the VMT to terminate the lesson and communicate the reason to the parent afterwards. Lessons cancellations for such reasons may not be refunded.

The same applies if a pupil behaves inappropriately or is clearly streaming from a non-communal area that a VMT doesn't feel comfortable with. It may be necessary for a VMT to take further action if this happens, just as they would with a face-to-face lesson, and this may include contacting the school for support to implement sanctions in line with the school behaviour policy.

It is advisable that a parent/guardian (if at all possible) is present with the pupil during remote lessons.

The OSCB recommends that VMTs record 1:1 lessons, even if parents are present. Video recordings of children will not be made without the consent of the parent/guardian.

If any safeguarding concerns arise during the course of VMT lessons, you should immediately contact the School's DSL, Mark Hindley, at mark.hindley@abingdon.org.uk