

Alexander Technique online sessions at Abingdon School

What is the Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique is a re-educational method which gives pupils the opportunity to learn how to deal with the stresses and strains of everyday life and the tools to look after their own mental and physical well-being. They learn how to recognise and change habitual patterns that interfere with their thinking and movement creating tension, anxiety, pain and postural issues. By developing a greater awareness of themselves and how they react to the world around them, pupils can regain the effortless freedom, poise and coordination that we are all born with.

How is it taught?

Normally, the Technique is taught face to face and the teacher uses her hands along with verbal instructions to work with a pupil in everyday movements (such as sitting, standing, walking, bending) to bring about a better co-ordination of the head/neck/back relationship and to help the pupil find a greater sense of lightness and ease. With the current restrictions, lessons are taught via Zoom and have shown to be just as beneficial. Cathie has worked with musicians from the European Union Youth Orchestra over the Summer period and the results have been very positive.

How do Zoom lessons work?

In an online session, I work with a pupils' individual needs and we experiment with thinking and inhibition 'games'. We then go on to look at a specific movement or activity and through observation, we identify how the pupil is getting in the way of what they are doing. For example, a singer may be tightening and shortening themselves as they get ready to sing, taking a big breath in... a violinist may tighten through the shoulders and neck, fix the eyes and forget to breathe fully as they play... a flautist may be pulling down to the right, with weight more on one foot, locking the knees and throwing their head off balance as they play...

As we identify unhelpful patterns, the pupil learns how to pay attention to themselves and not 'get ready' by unconsciously stiffening. They learn to allow the natural ease and expansion of their body through constructive thinking and then to keep this awareness as they revisit the activity. The point of lessons is to give pupils the tools to be able to help themselves and approach whatever they do with a sense of curiosity and awareness.

How can it benefit pupils?

Lessons in the Alexander Technique can help pupils to cope with the everyday pressures of school life and can be a supportive process to their instrumental lessons. By learning to look after themselves, they are less likely to develop tension and pain through wear and tear and poor 'use' and will be able to identify where they are going wrong and how to rid themselves of the habits that no longer serve them.

The A.T. can:

Improve performance and prevent pain/injury

Reduce muscular tension

Promote feelings of being calmer and more grounded / nerves and stage fright

Increase consciousness

Improve breathing and quality of voice

Promote a sense of being taller, lighter and freer

Improve co-ordination, poise and balance