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Real Stories of Success in Music Education

Life in my Music Department at The Windsor Boys' School

James Manwaring, Director of Music, Windsor Learning Partnership

Welcome to our MusicFirst Lighthouse series.
Inspiring stories capturing how institutions have implemented online learning into their curriculum using innovative technology and creative thinking.

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My Story

Life in a music department is never dull. Every day is different, and there are always highlights, challenges and surprises. The life of a music teacher is therefore also never dull, and I love working every day in a lively and thriving department.

I think that it is one of the best roles in a school because you can work with students from all year groups and they are often students who really do care. It is also wonderful to watch students new to music who are discovering it for the first time, as well as more accomplished musicians who really want to develop their skills.

Music is a subject which is alive, with new music being released almost every day. Whether it be a new album, film score or musical cast recording, there is always something new to listen to. This means that you always have something new to explore with students. Music is always changing, as is the software available to music teachers. Over my career I have seen so many developments in music teaching, software, and access to music. It is amazing to think how far we have come, and I don't know how I would have survived the pandemic without all the cloud-based technology that is available.

One issue with software has always been that it is all at school on the computers. Unless students stay after school, they can't access it at home. I have always found myself frustrated by a lack of options for creating music at home. Being able to set homework for them to complete at home is fantastic.

aural training and theory

online learning

creativity

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From the Classroom to the Cloud

So, I turned to MusicFirst for their range of software and am really pleased that I did. I can now set listening work using *Focus on Sound Pro*, composition work on *Soundtrap* and theory/aural work using *Musition* & *Auralia*. This has been a real game-changer for me, and I am still exploring the best ways to fully utilise the software.

Focus on Sound Pro

Focus on Sound Pro has become a particular favourite. The more I use it, the more useful it becomes – far more than a dictionary of sounds. ***Focus on Sound Pro*** brings together everything you need to teach music theory, key terms, and set works. It is full of great examples, key terms and questions. I use it almost every day, both in and out of the classroom. Students love using it for revision homework and there are fantastic questions for the GCSE set works. If there isn't something already available, then I can quickly create my own questions and resources. One of my favourite features is the link to **Microsoft Teams** which allows me to quickly share work. The marks from tests are then linked straight back to Teams so I can easily track progress.

Focus on Sound Pro features:
- Encyclopedia of instruments and terminology.
- Packed with videos, audio, and learning advice.
- Structured lessons with KS3, GCSE and A Level content.
- Unlimited randomized tests and self-marking quizzes.
- Comprehensive results system.
- Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams integration.
- Lesson, Test and Content creation tools.

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Soundtrap for Education

Soundtrap for Education is a wonderful piece of software and has really helped to bridge the gap between home and school. Students can now create work in class and then continue it at home. This allows them the time to develop their ideas and build on the classwork. Lessons are always a little rushed, particularly at Key Stage 3. There is often not the time to fully explore ideas and being as I start with them in Year 9, I need all the help I can get.

Soundtrap is also easy to use with other MIDI and notation software and this proves useful when exploring notation and how to develop ideas. Soundtrap is something I want to use more and more, and I am always looking for fresh ideas. I know that the students enjoy the quality of the sounds, the cloud-based access, and the easy-to-use interface.

Soundtrap features:
- 4040+ loops, 540+ instruments and sounds.
- Podcasting tools including voice transcription.
- Student and teacher collaboration.
- Direct export to Noteflight Learn and Flat for Education.

Musition & Auralia

Musition & *Auralia* are both fantastic tools. They focus on music theory and aural skills and students can quickly access what they need to know. The lessons are helpful, and I use them to build on work completed in class. Students can then take tests and get instant feedback on how they are doing with their musical knowledge. I don't like to approach music theory in a dry and boring way. I like to ensure students learn through listening, composing, and performing. But I must say, it is sometimes good for them to just test their skills. I find that aural dictation is often something students worry about, and these two platforms are helping my students to build confidence in these areas.

Musition and Auralia features:
- Wide range of topics from interval recognition to dictation (Auralia) and musical terms, symbols, chord structures, scales and rhythmic notation (Musition).
- Excellent content and curriculum.
- Quizzes, worksheets, and exams.
- Student tracking and grading.
- Self-paced learning.
- Run your own mock-exams.

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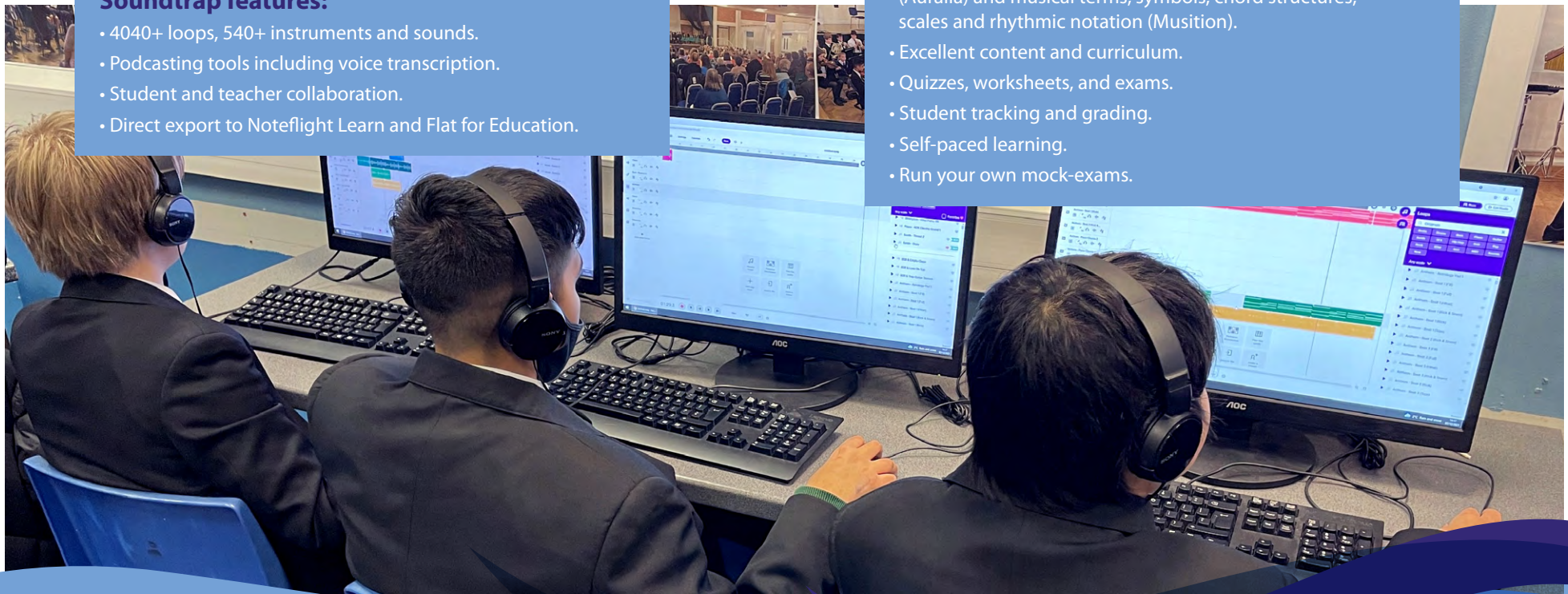
Discover

Music is about discovery – exploring and unpacking music from different cultures and historical periods. As we unearth one feature or genre, another is instantly revealed.

Relate

As we listen to one piece of music we can quickly relate it back to others and how to utilise the power of musical relationships in our own learning.

Collaborate

By collaborating, we learn more about discovery, listening, relationships and the creative process – sharing ideas and discussing musical concepts.

Listen

As we discover, we listen. Listening leads to learning about how to use our ears and open our minds to the world of music available to us – how music is formed and shaped.

Create

By discovering, listening and relating, we form our own musical responses and create music ourselves in our own unique way.

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I have decided to sign up The Windsor Boys' School as a MusicFirst Lighthouse Institution because I believe in the software provided by MusicFirst. It ticks all the boxes, appeals to the students, and makes my life easier.

I can set work quickly, gather marks efficiently and ensure students are challenged. The gap is firmly bridged between home and school and there is always something new to explore. I want to grow the way I use Soundtrap and continue to develop my own resources in Focus on Sound Pro. The more I use the software from MusicFirst, the more I see the benefits for my students.

I also know that using the software is making me a better teacher. I am starting to consider how I can best support students as they learn and explore music at home. My aim is to make sure that all Key Stages have access to the tools and resources that will help them make progress, as well as ensure that they have access to cutting-edge technology. I am on a journey with MusicFirst and as a Lighthouse Institution I know that the journey is ongoing – and very exciting.

James Manwaring, Director of Music –
Windsor Learning Partnership

Contact Us

For further information about
MusicFirst or on how your school can become
a Lighthouse Institution contact us today.

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