Music development plan: George Abbot School

Overview

Detail	Information
Academic year that this summary covers	2026-27
Date this summary was published	September 2026
Date this summary will be reviewed	August 2027
Name of the school music lead	Michael Hartley
Name of school leadership team member with responsibility for music (if different)	Joe Omar
Name of local music hub	Surrey Arts
Name of other music education organisation(s) (if partnership in place)	Guildford Cathedral St Catherine's School, Bramley Guildford Opera Company

This is a summary of how our school delivers music education to all our pupils across three areas – curriculum music, co-curricular provision, and musical experiences. This information is to help pupils and parents or carers understand what our school offers and who we work with to support our pupils' music education.

We became a Lead School for Music within Surrey in March 2025, and this plan also outlines the opportunities this role affords, and the developments we are planning in future years.

Part A: Curriculum music

This is about what we teach in lesson time, how much time is spent teaching music and any music qualifications or awards that pupils can achieve.

Students at George Abbot receive one timetabled lesson of Music a week (75 minutes) during the entirety of Key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 & 9). Students who choose to learn an instrument with Surrey Arts have opportunities throughout the year to take graded music exams.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum shares the same principles as those set out in the model music curriculum, with distinct threads running through the three-year programme of study. By the end of Year 9, students will have:

- gained an aural knowledge of some of the great musical output of human civilisation
- engaged with creative processes through improvisation and composition
- built an understanding of how musical elements work and discussed how these interact with subjective and objective models of musical meaning
- developed knowledge of a wider range of notes and improved their fluency in music notation.

Singing is an intrinsic part of the curriculum, especially in Year 7. All students are taught the piano during Year 7 and given the chance to extend and develop their skills in Years 8 and 9. There are distinct threads running through the KS3 curriculum, with students revisiting core concepts throughout the three years. For example, to achieve fluency in notation, students will:

In Year 7:
Learn the fundamentals regarding pitch and rhythm, and work regularly with both, composing and performing their own rhythms in the first term of Year 7, before developing an understanding of pitch in the second term.

In Year 8:
Re-visit notation as part of the unit in the Spring term on film music. Having studied the work of notable film composers, students work with music technology (*Musescore)* to compose their own ostinato figures and original chord sequences.

In Year 9:
Study the work of notable late 19th and 20th century composers, including Tchaikovsky, Penderecki, Adams and Glass. Students will then use Musescore to compose and notate minimalist compositions, building on the ideas of composers such as Glass and Adams.

At KS4 (Years 10 - 11) and KS5 (Years 12-13) students study for GCSE and A Level, following the Eduqas (WJEC) specification. There are currently 43 students studying Music at KS4 and 9 studying Music A Level at KS5. Additionally, we have five students commencing study of an A Level in Music Technology this year.

Our outcomes at both GCSE and A Level are exceptionally strong. Our 2026 GCSE APS places us in the top 10% of schools nationally for Music, whilst at A Level, at least one student has achieved an A or A* every year for the past four years. We have an excellent record of accomplishment of sending students to study Music at some of the top universities and conservatoires in the country. In the past five years, George Abbot students have gone on to study Music at the University of Oxford, York University, Trinity Guildhall, The Royal Academy of Music, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham University and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Part B: Extra-Curricular music

Outside of timetabled lesson time, students can learn a musical instrument with Surrey Arts. These are charged at a sliding scale, depending on length of lesson, and whether they are individual or group lessons. Surrey Arts handles all the administration for these lessons, which are offered on both an individual and group basis. George Abbot students are currently learning the following instruments:
Piano, Violin, Cello, Guitar, Clarinet, Oboe, Flute, Bassoon, Saxophone, Trumpet, French Horn, Trombone, Bass Trombone, Tuba, Voice, Drum Kit.

The Music department works exceptionally hard to ensure that students in receipt of Pupil Premium (scholars) have the same opportunity to learn an instrument as all other students. When students begin in Year 7, all Scholars are invited to attend a workshop where they are introduced to the instruments on offer. Information is sent home, and any student who wishes to start learning an instrument is invited to apply for a place on the Surrey Arts programme. George Abbot covers the cost of instrumental lessons for all scholars who choose to take up this opportunity. During 2025-26, this opportunity has been extended to all scholars in years 7 and 8. One of our students who gained a 6 in GCSE Music this year played the clarinet for her performances, having started studying the instrument in Year 7 as part of this programme.

Outside of timetabled lesson time, there are numerous ensembles for students to join, and clear progression pathways within both vocal and instrumental ensembles.

Choirs

Over 150 students a week regularly attend one of our six choirs. At Key Stage 3, students either attend **Young Voices** (Girls) or **KS3 Boys' choir.** Both ensembles rehearse weekly, with approximately 50 students attending over both choirs.
Senior Choir (mixed voices, Years 10 - 13) is compulsory for all those studying Music at GCSE and A Level but also attracts many students who have not chosen to study Music but wish to keep singing. This choir rehearses during form time once a week, with approximately 60 students attending every week. This choir focusses on SATB repertoire drawn primarily from musicals and popular music of the past forty years.

Senior students who wish to develop and progress are then invited to join one of our three senior vocal ensembles:

GAFC (George Abbot female chorus)
This is a student run choir, focusing on close harmony, acapella repertoire, with currently 25 members.
GAMC (George Abbot male chorus)
This choir specialises in songs from musicals, as well as traditional folk music, and currently has 20 members.
Chamber Choir (SATB)
This choir sings music from a variety of genres, with a particular focus on jazz standards and sacred choral repertoire. This choir also currently has 20 members.

In the past two years, our choirs have worked with numerous musicians and ensembles outside of school, including Alexander L'Estrange, *Voces 8* (through our partnership with St Catherine's, Bramley) and Guildford Cathedral. In November 2025, our Senior choir and male voice choir took part in a vocal workshop day at St Catherine's with members of Tenebrae, culminating in an evening concert. Through a series of workshops, rehearsals and shared services and concerts, our students who sing have benefitted enormously from the guidance and expertise provided by these professional partnerships. Over the past 12 months, our Chamber choir has sung Evensong at Guildford cathedral with the cathedral choir on two occasions and sung Matins at the local Guildford church of St Martha-on-the-Hill.

We are delighted that this year will see our first tour in several years, with 30 students from Senior Choir opting to go on tour to Belgium, with concert opportunities in Bruges cathedral and the Menin gate.

Instrumental Ensembles

In a similar way to our choirs, our instrumental ensembles are designed and structured in such a way as to ensure they are accessible to all students, regardless of ability. There are also clear progression pathways within these ensembles.

Entry-level ensembles

Concert Orchestra

This orchestra is open to all players and targeted specifically to those players at the start of their instrumental journey. This orchestra has over 40 regular members and rehearses after school.

Boomwhackers!

This is the most accessible of our instrumental groups, requiring no prior experience or after-school commitment, as the group rehearses during break times. In addition to catering for those who wish to play boomwhackers, this ensemble also features tuned and untuned percussion and provides an excellent opportunity for students to explore playing in an ensemble.

Senior ensembles

Senior Wind consort

This is a new group, for wind players Grade 5 and above, rehearsing on a Wednesday afternoon.

Senior Strings

Our Senior Strings is targeted at students who are Grade 5 and above, rehearsing on a Thursday after school.

Big Band

Our big band was awarded a silver award in the National Concert and Big Band Festival in November 2025 and is looking forward to at least equalling this achievement this year. The band rehearses on a Friday after school, and membership is by audition.

Both our Senior Orchestra and Concert Band have benefitted in the past three years from our partnership with St Catherine's, Bramley, with the Concert Band taking part in a shared series of workshops and concerts with the band of the Welsh Guards in November 2023. In November 2024, our Senior Orchestra joined the orchestra of St Catherine's in a day of tutorials and workshops led by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, culminating in an evening concert.

In addition to our regular instrumental ensembles, there are smaller student-led groups rehearsing on an occasional basis, including handbell choir and flute choir. There are also several student bands within the school, with the Year 11 band last year performing at both the Spring concert and Year 11 prom.

The orchestras for both our whole school musical and Year 7 mini-musicals are formed of George Abbot students, with participation being a combination of invitation and audition.

Access and Inclusion

It is a source of pride for George Abbot that our extensive extra-curricular offer is entirely free, and that none of our groups require an audition, apart from our big band. The use of form times and break times for rehearsals enables all students to attend if they wish, without after-school transport providing a barrier to access.

Part C: Musical experiences

This is about all the other musical events and opportunities that we organise, such as singing in assembly, concerts and shows, and trips to professional concerts.

Concerts and Shows

The performance calendar of George Abbot is busy, to say the least! Every choir and instrumental group will perform publicly at least once a year, at both school concerts as well as concerts in other venues. Tickets for concerts are priced at between £4 and £6 a ticket, with the whole school musical being the exception. The income from concerts is used in a variety of ways, including subsidising trips to concerts and shows outside of school, buying and maintaining audio visual equipment and purchasing instruments and equipment for curriculum music that otherwise would not be possible.

Concerts are open to the whole school community, and are standing room only, with an average audience of 250 people at each Raynham Hall concert. Wherever possible and according to capacity within the concert venue, students attend rehearsals for all concerts and show, either in place of their regular performing arts lessons, or on a targeted basis. The end of term concerts (Christmas and Spring) feature at least 150 students in a performing capacity. The school year concludes with our whole school musical, one of the highlights of the school calendar for the whole community.

In addition to putting on *West Side Story* in July 2026, the academic year 2025-26 saw some notable high points in terms of public performances. Our chamber choir sang Evensong with Guildford cathedral choir in October, and all our senior choirs took part in our Christmas celebration in the same venue in December, working closely with composer Will Todd and a professional jazz trio. A particular highlight was our Spring concert in Raynham Hall, which featured over 150 student performers, with exceptional levels of performance and close collaboration between the Music and Dance departments. The year concluded with our whole school musical, where the standards of music, acting and choreography were (in the words of several of our parents) West end standard.

Our role as Lead School for Music saw George Abbot host our first army music day in November 2025, where we were able to welcome the band of the Scots Guards for two concerts. The morning concert was aimed at GCSE students and featured a variety of works that feature on syllabi of the main exam boards, with students seeing and hearing the works analysed in a workshop style presentation. The script and presentation for this concert was prepared by the George Abbot KS4 team, and we are delighted that this event was felt to be such a success that the Army music team are seeking to expand this model nationally. The afternoon concert was a joint concert with students from George Abbot joining the Scots Guards to perform a variety of popular classics to local primary children. Over 1000 students took part in the day,

either as audience members or performers, and we are delighted that this year's event (November 2026) was full within a week of being publicised.

2026/27 Performance Calendar

AUTUMN TERM

2nd October | Senior Choir | Guildford Cathedral - TBC

For the third successive year, our students will be singing Evensong with the Cathedral Choir. The choir will have received additional rehearsals by staff from the cathedral music department, before joining the cathedral choir for the service. This year the Senior choir will be invited to take part, as preparation for their forthcoming tour.

6th and 7th October | Year 7 Mini-musicals | Raynham Hall

All 300 Year 7 students are invited to participate, and in 2025 over 95% of the year group took part in this event. Performing in their house groups (60 at a time), students perform a musical in 15 minutes, performing a dance, singing a song, and acting a short scene from their given musical. The songs and dances are accompanied live by our student band and musical theatre choir (formed primarily of the senior students) and put together for this event.

13th October | Senior Choir & GAMC (tour choir) | PA1

Prior to going on tour, the George Abbot Senior Choir and Male Voice Choir will perform a selection of the tour repertoire in a free concert for family and friends.

15th - 19th October | Senior Choir tour | Belgium

30 senior students (years 10 – 13) will travel to Belgium and perform in three concerts. An undoubted highlight will be our performance at the Menin gate as part of the daily Last Post ceremony.

16th November | Christmas concert workshops | Elmslie Hall

As part of our preparation for our Christmas celebrations on the 3rd of December, we will be hosting and running a shared rehearsal for all students participating in this event, which will include over 100 George Abbot students, as well as choirs from four local primary schools

17th November | Scots Guards concert & GCSE workshop | Elmslie Hall

In the second such event hosted and organised by George Abbot as part of our Lead School role, the band of the Scots Guards will perform a workshop and concert in the morning to 200 local secondary students, focussed on GCSE set works. The concert will introduce the band and analyse and break down key

composition techniques used in the pieces performed. In the afternoon, members of George Abbot concert band will join the Scots Guards to perform a joint concert to 200 local primary students.

3rd December | Christmas Celebration | Guildford Cathedral

This will be a celebration of the season, featuring all the George Abbot vocal groups, but also choirs from four local primary schools. The concert will be accompanied by a professional jazz trio, and students will take part in workshops with both the trio and Will Todd as part of preparations for this event. We are delighted that this event is being sponsored by Seymour's estate agents, and we are grateful to them for their support in enabling this event to take place. We are delighted to have been able to commission Will Todd to compose a finale for this event, which we look forward to rehearsing during the Autumn term.

17th December | Christmas Concert | Raynham Hall

We are delighted that our Autumn term will culminate in a Christmas concert in Raynham Hall. This concert will feature performances from across the Performing Arts.

SPRING TERM

20th & 21st January | A Level Dance & Music Recitals | PA1

These two evenings will provide our Year 13 Music and Dance students to perform their recitals in full, to an audience of family and friends. These evenings provide valuable experience and training for the real recitals (March), as well as an opportunity for family and friends to share and celebrate the achievements of our older students.

10th & 11th February | Winter Concerts | Raynham Hall

Providing a burst of sunshine during winter, these concerts will feature all the departmental ensembles, as well as showcasing the fabulous work of the Dance and Drama departments. The evenings will also feature a variety of soloists, focussing particularly on those students who will be leaving George Abbot at the end of the academic year.

SUMMER TERM

w/c 7th June – Guildford Opera & George Abbot production of Carmen

In the first collaboration between our two organisations, 20 students in Years 7 – 9 will participate in 3 performances of Carmen. Working with professional directors and musicians, our students will play an integral role within the opera, and learn firsthand how it feels to make a living as a professional musician, and also gain an insight into the discipline of opera.

12th June | Big Band | Shamley Green

For the sixth successive year, George Abbot Big Band have been invited to form the centrepiece of the musical entertainment at the Shamley Green Summer Fete. The band provide one of the highlights of the fete, and this also provides the band with an excellent opportunity to perform in public, outside of the school concert series.

12th June | Choirblast! | Godalming

In what will be a busy summer Saturday for the music department, our two KS3 choirs will join choirs from all over the local area to perform at one of the three Godalming venues that together make up *Choirblast – a celebration of contemporary choirs*. Similarly to Big Band performing at Shamley Green, this will provide our students with the opportunity of performing in public outside of the school hall, as well as showing our support for local music initiatives.

6th – 9th July | Whole School Musical | Raynham Hall

Whilst the musical to be performed has yet to be announced, previous musicals have included *West Side Story* (2026), *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* (2025) & Phantom *of the Opera* (2024). The standards achieved in our whole school productions are a source of pride to the entire performing arts faculty and provide a superb showcase for the talents and abilities of our students. Students are involved with every aspect of our school productions, including the technical, backstage, hair, make up, costumes & props teams.

Trips to external concerts and shows

The Music department organises a wide variety of trips throughout the year. GCSE and A Level students are typically invited to at least two classical concerts a year, with a recent highlight being a trip The Philharmonia perform Mahler's second symphony at the Royal Festival Hall (May 2026). There are also frequent trips to see musicals, with recent highlights including *Starlight Express* (London) & *Miss Saigon* (Southampton).

In addition to evening concerts, there are afternoon trips to see matinee performances, with two Year 8 trips to see *Hamilton* being the most recent examples. These matinee trips are targeted primarily at disadvantaged students, with financial assistance made available for any student who would otherwise be unable to go on the trip.

In the future

During the Autumn term 2024, George Abbot applied to become one of the first lead schools for Music in Surrey. This was a competitive process, organised and overseen by Surrey Arts. We were delighted to be awarded Lead School status in March 2025 and look forward to working with our fellow lead schools, and Surrey Arts, to ensure that all students in Surrey have access to the highest possible standards of musical education and opportunities. It was a pleasure to organise and host the first army day last year, and we look forward to hosting this again for the second time, as well as continuing to work with Surrey Arts to plan future projects.

During 2026 – 27, the George Abbot music team will be working with Surrey Arts, as well as with our local schools, to formulate a plan to ensure that learning an orchestral instrument does not become a privilege afforded to only a small percentage of society. This is one of the central goals of Surrey Arts, a goal shared by George Abbot music staff, informed by our research and observations which show that the percentage of students arriving from primary school who have had the opportunity to play an orchestral instrument is diminishing every year.

As this development plan shows clearly, music plays a significant role in the fabric of the George Abbot community. The music department now comprises five permanent members of staff and the team are exceptionally proud of both the curriculum outcomes, and the standards achieved by all our ensembles in public performances. The huge increase in pupils singing regularly over the past three years has played a key part in ensuring that massive shows such as *West Side Story* were even possible. This year, we are looking forward to working more closely with our local primaries, particularly with regards to increasing the number of boys singing regularly.

Additionally, we will continue to ensure as many of our students as attend one of our numerous choirs, and for George Abbot to continue to be a singing community. To this end, we will also be looking at the ways in which Year 8 and Year 9 students can continue to sing more regularly and build on the success of, and enthusiasm generated by, the mini-musicals project, beginning with assembly performances by GAMC to the younger year groups.

Thanks to the unwavering support provided by the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team, as well as the expertise and commitment of the teaching staff, music at George Abbot is flourishing. We look forward to working closely with Surrey Arts and together continuing to explore how it may continue to do so many years into the future, and to providing musical opportunities to our students (both locally and country-wide) that will shape their lives for years to come.