

Summarised inspection findings

St Mary's Music School

Independent

25 February 2025

Key contextual information

St Mary's Music School is a co-educational independent day and boarding school situated in the West End of the City of Edinburgh. It was established in 1880 to provide education for the choirboys of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral. In the 1970's the school expanded to provide co-educational specialist music provision for choristers and instrumentalists from across Scotland and beyond.

Children and young people can receive financial support of up to 100% of the fees required to attend the school. The Scottish Government Aided Places Scheme provides around three quarters of the funding for places. Children and young people can also receive support through Cathedral bursaries and the school's own bursary fund.

In October 2024, there were 64 children and young people attending the school. Around one third of children and young people have an additional support need. Approximately one third of children and young people board at the school.

The headteacher has been in post for 11 years. He is supported by a director of music, bursar, a deputy headteacher, a head of primary, a head of guidance, an artistic director and a boarding house manager.

1.3 Leadership of change

very good

This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement change should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher, staff, children and young people lead a school community with a strong mission. Staff offer the highest standard of specialist music education for very able primary and secondary school musicians from the age of nine to 19. They have set out a clear shared vision and values to open this school for young instrumentalists, composers, singers and choristers who demonstrate outstanding potential. The whole school community work very well together to ensure the continuing vision for the outstanding music provision at St Mary's Music School is realised daily.
- The high-quality music staff support all children and young people very well to excel, musically and academically, in a safe, supportive and inspiring environment. Staff model the values they promote and demonstrate very high standards in their own musicianship. They lead a reflective music community, where learners work very hard to realise the benefits of strong concentration and very focused music practice. This culture of study, reflection, leadership and performance is ensuring the highest standards of continuous improvement in music across the whole school community. The levels of learning demonstrated at the school, ensure that young people are often able to secure a successful international career as a professional musician.
- Children and young people understand the school's values of 'creative, inclusive and committed' well. They demonstrate these values positively in the school community and

through their approaches to both their music development and wider academic learning. Senior leaders are aware of the need to revisit the school's vision, values and aims to ensure they are still relevant and meaningful to children and young people. As part of this work, and in line with recent legislation, staff should work with children and young people to develop a better understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its impact on their lives and the lives of others.

- The headteacher has a very strong vision for the school. He is highly committed to ensuring all children and young people who attend St Mary's Music School receive outstanding specialist music education alongside a wide academic programme. He demonstrates caring and compassionate leadership. He is supported ably by several highly-effective senior leaders. They work well together to lead the school very effectively. They are clear in their priority to raise the profile of the school nationally and beyond. Staff are proactive in looking outwards both for the specialist music provision and for their academic curriculum.
- Senior leaders in the music team create the conditions for all staff to lead and initiate well-considered change. Staff, leading music department instrumental and vocal work, are rightly proud of the ongoing music developments they all lead annually. They extend and produce new music coursework regularly, for example, in music composition. Staff provide extensive masterclass opportunities including with international professional musicians, to extend learning. They write new performance and listening courses regularly to support ongoing music achievement. They also offer practical and written tailored music support to those in the community.
- Senior music staff have led music improvement within the school through their visits to leading undergraduate conservatoires across the United Kingdom. They then analyse the present quality of their music curriculum offer in place and add valuable improvements. The improved improvisation courses have been valuable for learners and this work has now been added to the aural training courses already in place.
- Senior leaders develop the whole school improvement plan with staff. Identified priorities are clear and meaningful to the development of the school. A useful next step for senior leaders will be to ensure that all improvement priorities provide a measurable impact on children and young people's learning experiences. As part of this work, senior leaders should develop the role of parents, learners and partners in improvement planning. Staff have a clear understanding of self-evaluating their departmental work. Most improvement plans provide detailed, measurable improvement priorities along with clear criteria for success and planned outcomes for children and young people. Senior leaders should consider aligning the structure of improvement plans, including the overall school improvement plan, to provide consistency of approach. They should also consider how department plans align more fully with whole school priorities and how school-wide approaches to self-evaluation can be improved.
- A considerable amount of time and energy has been spent by both the Board of Governors and the senior leadership team, planning for the future location of the school. The Board of Governors and senior leadership team now need to work together to improve approaches to support and challenge the day to day running of the school. This should include improving approaches to how the Board of Governors ensures that child protection and safeguarding procedures are monitored.
- Senior leaders encourage staff to initiate important school music improvement. Staff are encouraged to take forward their own ideas to extend and widen the music curriculum offer. This includes their recent decision to commence improvement to their sound recording

facilities. It also includes improvement in the saxophone provision resulting in the introduction of new saxophone ensemble work. Staff have also put in place positive change through improvement actions that ensure all young people, whatever their background, are able to participate. This includes improving or adapting learning and teaching approaches, the provision of personalised support and extensive opportunities for additional achievement. Staff lead very strong music outreach work. This includes 'Saturday music classes' for local children and young people. This work also provides valuable professional learning for visiting staff who attend with their learners.

- Staff recognise the additional costs incurred from playing particular musical instruments could make them prohibitive for learners to access. They have recently introduced a musical instrument resource bank, available to learners in local schools. This ensures that any music learner can learn on a suitable musical instrument linked to their level of study. This instrument library is growing annually and can be available for as long as a learner requires support. This important and developing improvement is enhancing learner music development where required.
- Staff promote and lead innovation and change in music through the addition of new works used by the students. Young people enhance their creativity as a result and remain outwardly focussed on their performance choices.
- The music staff continue to be extended through the addition of new voice, horn, music composition and saxophone staff. The Director of Music, in partnership with the Head of Voice, recognised the need to bridge the gap in the present offer for singing in the school. They proposed changes to the singing curriculum that were suggested to the school board. The school now leads a new cohort of learners who can study singing. This new coursework offers much better progression and widens the curriculum offer further for all singers.
- Academic staff engage in a wide variety of professional learning appropriate to their role and responsibilities. Most academic staff are engaged as markers or other roles with the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA). This is supporting them to have a very sound grasp of national standards in National Qualifications. This is supporting their practice as they prepare young people for examinations in S4 to S6 and is leading to exemplary levels of attainment. Teachers are reflective in their practice. They engage well in the school's professional review and development process. This is aligned to the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) standards for registration.
- Children and young people have a strong voice across the school. They are empowered to make decisions and implement improvements aligned to their interests. A few children and young people undertake formal leadership responsibilities such as, primary prefects and house captains. Older young people act as buddies or music ambassadors to younger children. All children and young people have an opportunity to express their views about what is working well and what needs to improve through house meetings. Senior leaders should now work with children and young people to develop a more strategic approach to developing children and young people's role in leading change across the school. Children and young people would benefit from a greater understanding of their role in the improvement planning process.
- Young people have varied opportunities to lead music initiatives both in the school and for the local community. The standards of musicianship reached by these young people means they can be 'front desk' leaders in national and United Kingdom youth orchestras and choirs. They also lead aspects of the school music outreach work. Senior learners led the entire delivery of the 'Harmony in Bloom' concert. This leadership work ensured that senior learners have a full

understanding of every important area of work required to produce a successful concert event. Leadership in music is also promoted well through young people leading the 'buddy lunchtime concerts'. In addition, young people lead the very popular and competitive 'house music competition'.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Children and young people experience caring, nurturing relationships with adults and their peers. They learn and develop their musical talents in calm, supportive learning environments. Children and young people are polite, kind and demonstrate very well the school values of 'creative, inclusive and committed' in their work and engagement in the life of the school. Staff encourage actively, children and young people's ownership of their music learning through promoting a very strong culture of challenge and high expectations. Young people participate in a very personalised learning experience at St Mary's Music School with each child following a bespoke timetable.
- Instrumental and vocal learning is outstanding with learners enjoying exploring and participating in a very wide range of advanced music activities, selected from a wide range of genre. This includes for example, classical, jazz, and folk music and other contemporary repertoire. They learn how to perform as a music professional, to compose their own music and to analyse the quality of a music performance. Children and young people also learn how to deal with criticism and sometimes disappointment. This is important in taking their skills and knowledge to the next level. Children learn to broaden and refine the level of their music activities, developing musical accuracy and expression. Young people can use a wide range of advanced rhythms, melodies, and dynamics well.
- Young people enjoy learning to improvise, arrange and compose a variety of their own music. They use varied melodies and rhythms sometimes to a given stimulus. They learn to use music technology to enhance their music compositions exploring a wide variety of ways to combine music ideas using music notation. Children and young people enjoy learning about how music works. Staff encourage learners to develop their deep understanding of music harmony, form, structure, tempo, rhythm, texture, and dynamics.
- The Senior Vocal Programme provides young singers between the age of 15 and 19 the skills and knowledge they require to reach the standard for entry to music conservatoire. These learners study a wide variety of singing repertoire and benefit from very strong professional teaching in a one-to-one environment. Ensemble and choir work ensures they can develop their vocal skills and knowledge at a fast pace.
- Young people benefit from learning in important masterclass sessions with professional musicians and other music industry experts. They are supported well by staff in their learning beyond school. Young people attend external opportunities such as the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland and Great Britain, the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Scottish Opera, Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO) and Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO). Young people also participate in important music summer schools which provide a continuation to

their learning programmes and skills development over the summer period.

- Children and young people work very well in their academic classes. Children in the primary class enjoy sharing ideas and supporting each other in paired and group activities. They are highly motivated by their current enterprise project. At the secondary stages, young people benefit from relatively small class sizes. In these classes, most teachers adopt a tutorial style approach to teaching, particularly lessons at the senior phase. In most classes, young people engage very positively with their learning. Children and young people contribute confidently their ideas and are respectful of the views of others. Across the school, children and young people demonstrate strong self-motivation and independence. This is particularly evident in their daily music practice and impacts positively on their learning in the classroom as they display resilience and a strong determination to succeed.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching evident in one-to-one and ensemble lessons where learners experience clear and well-focused music pedagogy. Staff challenge children and young people well to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills as they learn. Children and young people understand what is expected of them and how to achieve success. High-quality teaching is a strong driver for learners' success at the school. Teachers encourage learners to seek advice whenever they need support and staff demonstrate highly-skilled questioning in music lessons. This leads to better learning and children and young people becoming well-rounded musicians.
- In most academic classes, teachers' explanations and instructions are very clear. They ask questions to check learners' prior knowledge and understanding of new concepts. In most lessons, teachers ask questions to extend children and young people's thinking and deepen their learning. Teachers should develop further approaches to questioning to develop critical thinking skills in academic classes. In almost all lessons, children and young people are clear on the purpose of their learning and know what they need to do to be successful. In a few classes in the secondary provision, teachers should provide young people more opportunities for challenge in their learning.
- In the primary class, teachers use technology very well. For example, in French, teachers use audio clips in listening activities. Children are developing their digital literacy skills very well. They use tablet computers to carry out research and use interactive screens to design posters using graphic tools. In literacy, children are creating digital comic strips and animations to demonstrate their understanding of their group novels. In the secondary classes, a few teachers make effective use of digital technology. All teachers use an online platform to share homework tasks. Teachers should continue to build on their use of digital technology to enhance further young people's academic experience.
- In all music lessons, staff provide ongoing feedback and discussion with children and young people as they learn. Children and young people learn to accept criticism well from each other in a respectful manner. In almost all senior-phase classes, teachers make use of relevant music national exam benchmark criteria confidently, to assess learning and provide quality feedback to young people. This feedback supports learners to evaluate their own progress regularly and then to identify their own next steps. Staff monitor pupil progress in every lesson they teach. This is very evident in one-to-one music lessons. Staff's assessment procedures are delivered in each class as young people learn and also from three more formalised assessment days. Staff use the information gained from these assessments to adapt their teaching and ensure young people continue to improve at pace. Senior staff monitor the results of assessments and ensure additional support for learning is offered to anyone who requires it.

- Children and young people join St Mary's Music School at different times in their education and from a range of different schools. Staff make effective use of information from other schools and initial assessments to build quickly on children and young people's prior learning. This has been strengthened further through the addition of standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy in the primary and early stages of secondary. Staff use the information from the range of assessments to plan and deliver appropriate and timely interventions for children and young people. This includes for those who require additional support with aspects of their learning. This includes one-to-one support for literacy and numeracy. Teachers in the primary class use assessment information very well to adapt their daily and weekly teaching plans, to respond flexibly to the needs of learners. As a result, all children are making progress in their learning. Staff in the primary should engage further with national Benchmarks. This will strengthen further their approaches to assessing children's levels of attainment.
- Most teachers in the wider secondary academic classes make effective use of formative assessment, particularly in S1 and S2. Young people are encouraged to reflect on their learning and set learning goals. The majority of teachers provide appropriate and detailed feedback based on assessment information which gives clear next steps that the young people understood. However, this is not consistent across the school. Teachers use summative assessments well in the senior phase to prepare the learners for National Qualifications. Most faculties engage in effective moderation to support staff to have a shared understanding of standards. Teachers have built on this work with schools across Edinburgh. This is supporting them to engage in effective moderation of courses and understanding the standard of National Qualifications.
- Music staff plan progression using a wide variety of curriculum modelling. They tailor the music curriculum pathways to the needs of individual learners. This means that a learner can follow features of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and a variety of other international music syllabuses such as Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). This ensures the level of breadth and depth required for each child is extensive and robust. The current curricular model has the expectation that learners will be at the standard of conservatoire entry by the time they leave their final year at St Mary's Music School.
- All children and young people follow a well-considered music pathway which leads to very high musical attainment. This deep learning in music across a very wide range of learning activities is leading to an outstanding music curriculum experience. Staff meet the needs of all learners, planning opportunities that extend music learning and performance well beyond the classroom. Learning activities also provide participation in a large variety of school music performance activities. This includes performing in school, in the local community and in international performing work.
- The Cathedral Choir School provides an additional learning pathway for selected learners. Young choristers study and perform as part of the Choir of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh. This choir enjoys an international reputation through their concerts, recordings, broadcasts and tours. These valuable choral activities included the young people singing in an international choir trip to Germany where they experienced the joy of performing to an international audience. All choristers rehearse at the Cathedral every morning in addition to their full academic programme.
- Teachers in the primary class plan over a variety of timescales. They use CfE experiences and outcomes to inform their planning. Teachers build in regular opportunities for differentiation including different levels of challenge and differentiation by adult support. Children have opportunities to inform planning, for example, through choosing group novels. Children who

receive additional support with aspects of their learning contribute meaningfully to their individual plans. Teachers also plan bespoke programmes to support the interests and needs of individual learning including Gaelic learner opportunities.

- Teachers in the secondary use CfE experiences and outcomes to inform planning across the broad general education. From S3, certificate qualification guides are used. Teachers ensure there are clear expectations as to hierarchy of skills and use both formative and summative assessment to inform the progress of learners, allowing for effective and individualised interventions. At S3 to S6, teachers' plans are often just SQA documents and textbooks. Teachers should consider how they plan over different timescales more effectively.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the Board of Governors.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator reflects on the setting's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Children and young people benefit from very positive and supportive relationships with staff and with each other. They behave very well and are respectful to others. They are highly focussed on achieving success in both their music and wider academic subjects. Children and young people have a very strong work ethic and display high levels of commitment to improving their music skills and knowledge through dedication and practice. Staff know the strengths and needs of children and young people well and use this information to support and encourage them. Learners identify key staff they can speak to if they are worried or anxious. Almost all children and young people feel safe and happy in school. They are highly successful in building positive attitudes and resilience that are important for their futures.
- Senior leaders and staff's approach to wellbeing is linked very well to their policy of considering the dignity and worth of every child and young person. They ensure a very strong climate of partnership, mutual respect and shared values amongst the music community in the school. Children and young people support each other very well in their music classes and ensemble work. Their social development is strong due to their music learning including the need for strong cooperation and the awareness of others' needs. They benefit from working in music ensembles by sharing their views confidently on how to improve and being able to listen well to the opinions of others.
- Staff are highly aware that workload and striving for musical success can impact on children and young people's wellbeing. They are proactive in supporting learners while preparing them for demanding schedules and high expectations. For example, children and young people benefit from a carefully planned approach to performance that takes very good account of their different stages of readiness. As a result, children and young people are highly resilient.
- Staff seek actively the views of children and young people about their own health and wellbeing. Key staff and all children and young people engage in twice-yearly individual guidance interviews. These provide children and young people appropriate opportunities to discuss important issues that impact on their health and wellbeing. Children and young people complete a termly survey to help them identify any challenges they face. Staff follow up on issues through one-to-one discussions with children and young people and implement supports and interventions if required. As a result, almost all learners have a strong understanding of their wellbeing needs and how they and staff can support them. Staff should continue to support children and young people by using national guidance and wellbeing indicators. This will help children and young people develop a deeper understanding of their own health and wellbeing. It will provide them with a common language that is used across Scotland to identify where they might require support.
- Almost all children and young people have a sound understanding about what they need to do to keep healthy and safe such as risks associated with social media and the importance of a

healthy diet. Learners are supported to develop an awareness of factors that may impact on their health through weekly lessons in personal and social development. Children and young people participate in a single one-hour session of physical education each week. They have opportunities to attend clubs such as volleyball and running to improve their physical health.

- Staff implement highly effective approaches to identify and support children and young people who require additional help with their learning. They have put interventions in place for children who require support such as English as an additional language or require access to digital programmes. Staff ensure a range of plans such as 'Passports to Learning' are in place to record specific barriers to learning and strategies to support learners. Children and young people work with staff to create these plans and agree strategies to support them. Staff monitor the impact of interventions on individual learners well. As a result, children and young people who require additional support are making significant progress.
- Across the school, staff are highly committed to supporting the wellbeing needs of children and young people. Staff have a thorough understanding about the strengths and needs of children and young people and issues that may impact on their wellbeing. Senior staff provide a range of information about individual learners at weekly wellbeing meetings. These provide key staff valuable opportunities to discuss the specific needs of learners. They agree actions and include inputs from the boarding provision staff who provide important interventions to support children and young people's wellbeing needs. Senior staff have recently implemented 'Passport to Care' plans for children and young people who require specific support for their wellbeing. While at the early stages, the plans are having a positive impact on children and young people's wellbeing.
- All staff across the school participate in child protection and safeguarding training, in line with national guidance. Child protection coordinators participate in training to reflect their roles and responsibilities. As a result, they understand their roles and responsibilities well in keeping learners safe. The Board of Governors need to implement systems to monitor robustly the school's safeguarding and child protection approaches. This should include the ongoing monitoring of safeguarding and child protection concerns and how these concerns have been dealt with by relevant staff in the school. As already identified, senior leaders and the Board of Governors should progress with regular pastoral meetings to allow board members to understand safeguarding and child protection approaches.
- Children and young people feel very well included in all aspects of school life. Children and young people join the school at any point in their schooling from P5. Staff support all pupils very effectively to ensure they settle in. Learners benefit from a one-to-one meeting with staff to identify and address challenges associated with being a new pupil. The house system allows children and young people to develop friendships outwith their own peer group. As a result, almost all children speak positively about their experiences transitioning to St Mary's Music School and being quickly included in the life of the school.
- Staff, children and young people understand their responsibility to ensure that music learning is an inclusive experience. Children and young people are supported to achieve the highest music standards regardless of any socioeconomic challenge. Learners who experience challenges in taking their instrumental or vocal work to the next level are offered additional music support. They appreciate the benefits this additional support can provide to help them to improve.
- The wide diversity of learners at St Mary's Music School is helping children and young people to understand and appreciate a variety of cultures. This is enhanced further through the wide

range of visiting music professionals who also come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Children and young people have opportunities to celebrate different religious festivals. They value that all children and young people are provided with equal opportunities to participate and achieve success. Staff should now continue to support young people to develop an understanding of equality and diversity in wider contexts.

3.2 Raising Attainment and Achievement

excellent

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in music

- The quality of children and young people's attainment and achievement in music across all levels is outstanding. Young people attain in performance and composition and can also analyse and comment on music, at a very high level.
- This very high level of music attainment is recognised through young people attaining a wide variety of nationally-recognised accreditation on instruments and voice. This includes Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in music often presented early at an advanced level, ABRSM, Associate of the Royal College of Organists (ARCO) and from their successes in a wide variety of music competitions. Young people also attain through certification in the internal St Mary's Music School Certificate. This S4 'Certificate in Academic Music' is focussed on the history of music and on music composition. Young people attain this qualification in between SQA Higher Music, which learners sit in S4, before they commence SQA Advanced Higher Music and Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) A-Level Music.
- The senior voice programme enables learners to demonstrate very strong progress in the use of their voice and their ability to showcase advanced repertoire for voice. They demonstrate confidence, team-working skills and resilience from their solo and group singing. Singers also demonstrate their ability to take criticism and use this to move their performances to the next level.
- All children and young people demonstrate strong skills and knowledge from their singing in the school choir. Young people also perform well in polyphonic ensembles, and in the chamber choir showing great confidence. Learners demonstrate strong skills in instrumental performance through their work within the Junior Orchestra, Senior Orchestra, Senior String Ensemble and Brass Ensemble. Their performances are at an advanced level of music attainment. Young people can apply their evaluative music skills, interpreting music scores well and showing a deep understanding of a variety of music terminology. Young people play their instruments to a very high standard, demonstrating the use of advanced rhythms, sensitive phrasing and where appropriate strong musical articulation. They express well their opinions and feelings about the music they listen to and play. Young people engage audiences very well through performing for large and often knowledgeable audiences. They demonstrate strong expression, confidence and great stage presence.
- Young people create very distinctive and original music using advanced composition techniques. They are able to refine, enhance and then perform compositions using a strong understanding of music structure, form and a wide range of expressive elements.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- The number of children and young people at each stage in the primary class and secondary stages varies and is relatively small. Overall statements have been made about attainment and progress to ensure individuals are not identified.

Primary stages

- Most children are on track with their learning. Most children achieve CfE second level in literacy and numeracy. A few children are extending their learning and are working beyond CfE second level. Teachers are skilled in identifying and addressing the learning needs of children in the primary class. Children make very good progress from their prior levels of attainment.
- Children in the primary class engage confidently in conversations with each other. They listen well to each other during group and class discussions, building respectfully on the views and ideas of others. Children's progress and attainment in reading is very good. They read a range of texts with fluency and expression. Children discuss confidently their preferred authors and genre. Children summarise very well the plot of their current group novels. They use a range of contextual clues to predict what might happen next. Children across the primary class write for a range of purposes. They are aware of and use a range of techniques to engage the reader and maintain their interest. For example, in their persuasive writing about animal testing they make effective use of rhetorical questions. Children successfully apply their literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Across the primary class, children use estimation and rounding to solve calculations. They use the four operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing with increasing confidence. Children now need to develop their skills in explaining their thinking and articulating the strategies they use to solve problems. Children have a sound understanding of the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They identify a range of shapes from their nets. Children are aware of the range of ways that data can be presented. They need to build on this to gather, display and interpret data.

Secondary stages

S1 and S2

- Young people in S1 and S2 make very strong progress in both English and mathematics. All young people are making progress from prior learning as aligned to the school's curriculum for English and mathematics. Teachers are highly skilled at identifying concerns with young people's progress and are proactive in addressing any challenges.

S3 to S6

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, all young people have either attained awards in National 5 English or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) by S4. Similarly, by S5, all young people achieve awards in Higher English or ESOL. All young people have either attained awards in National 5 Mathematics or Applications of Mathematics by S4. By S5, the majority of young people achieve Higher Mathematics.

Attainment over time

- The Head of Primary gathers a range of evidence to track individual children's progress and attainment. Across the primary school, consistently high levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy are maintained over time. The Head of Primary now needs to develop further approaches to tracking children's progress as they move through the school.

- Young people's academic success is excellent. Standards of attainment have been consistently high for number of years. In S4, all young people sit Higher Music and five or six National 5 courses. In S5, all young people sit Advanced Higher Music, Higher English and two or three other Highers. In S6, young people engage in a range of bespoke pathways and courses to meet their music and academic aspirations. This is often a combination of Highers, Advanced Highers and an A-level in Music. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, all young people achieved grade C or better at National 5, with most of these awards being grade A. At Higher, all young people achieved a grade C or better, with most of these awards being at grade A. At Advanced Higher, almost all young people achieve a grade C or better, with most of these awards being at grade A. At A-level, almost all young people achieve a grade C or better, with the majority of the awards being grade A. Senior leaders identify that they are working to improve the grade A pass rate at A-level.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- The quality of children and young people's musical achievement is excellent. Young people have a very wide range of music events to demonstrate their considerable successes. They lead activities and programmes actively to contribute greatly to the life of the school and the community. Very high numbers of young people are demonstrating the skills, attributes, knowledge and the capacity to succeed in life and work, including through developing their own music leadership.
- Commendably, children and young people are observed engaging purposefully in their performances demonstrating great confidence and outstanding musicianship. They demonstrate very strong concentration and perseverance skills. They also demonstrate a willingness to practise well and for an extended period of time. They play well by memory and can improvise when appropriate. They show great skills and knowledge within an extensive repertoire of music and within a wide variety of music genre.
- Children and young people transfer their music concentration and other study skills to their other academic subject results at all levels. They are achieving very highly across the entire school curriculum. Children and young people demonstrate strong skills, as confident, resilient music performers. They take part regularly in public events, such as choral performances in St Mary's Cathedral, and concerts at the Queen's Hall and in the Scottish Parliament. They also perform with the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland and Great Britain or in the National Youth Choir of Scotland.
- Young people compete and achieve highly in a variety of national and international music competitions. For example, as part of their participation in the UK BBC Young Musician of the Year, the piano competition of Sevilla and other international piano competitions. They demonstrate well-honed leadership skills as advanced-music instrumentalists performing alongside major orchestra players through the 'Side by Side' music initiative. They win many recital competitions across a variety of instruments and in voice. They reach the standard to be examined at music diploma level on their chosen instrument. Their staff, parents and school partners are justly proud of their outstanding achievements.
- Children and young people participate in a range of activities beyond music. They develop skills in communication and teamwork and contribute to the wider life of the school through these experiences and activities. For example, they represent the school at national maths challenges and debating competitions. In addition to this, children and young people develop skills in a range of sporting clubs including running and volleyball. Senior leaders have taken initial steps to track children and young people's participation beyond music. They have identified rightly the need to use this information with children and young people to help them

recognise the skills and attributes they are developing through their participation.

- Children and young people's achievements in and out of school are celebrated at weekly assemblies. Children and young people value hearing about the musical, sporting and academic successes of others in the school community. They are very proud of their individual and collective achievements. Senior leaders have introduced recently an achievement profile for older pupils. The portfolios include a biography, repertoire and collated evidence of young people's achievements. Senior leaders should extend this to support younger children to create a portfolio of their successes and achievements.

Equity

- Senior leaders are very clear in their approaches to ensuring equity for all children and young people. The unique way in which school places are funded means that all children and young people who meet the musical standards and require support to attend the school receive it. Children and young people are supported through the provision of materials, clothing grants and musical instruments. Senior leaders, staff and partners ensure that all children and young people receive equity of experience while attending St Mary's Music School.
- Senior leaders and staff are very effective in identifying and addressing gaps and barriers to learning. They are highly skilled in improving the music and academic attainment of children and young people. This is particularly evident for children and young people who join the school at different times of the year or at different times in their education journey.
- Commendably, staff, children and young people are outward looking and proactive in providing music experiences to children and young people beyond the school. They are also building capacity for other music services and schools. They provide a range of concerts, masterclasses, 'come and play or sing' sessions, summer schools and taster days. These events are at no cost or where costs are applicable, bursaries are available to support children and young people who require it. Staff are also supporting and developing partnerships with music groups in and beyond Edinburgh.
- Staff have very effective systems in place to monitor attendance. They monitor the needs of children and young people who require support, including with attendance, at weekly wellbeing meetings. Staff use appropriate interventions to support any children or young people who have challenges attending school. As a result, almost all learners maintain high levels of attendance.
- All young people move on to a positive destination on leaving St Mary's Music School. Senior leaders and staff are highly supportive of young people's learning pathways. They are equally supportive of young people who wish to continue their studies in music or study other disciplines of further education. For young people continuing with their music, positive destinations include Conservatoires and Universities across Scotland, the United Kingdom and beyond. Other young people are highly successful in gaining university places to study a wide range of subject areas including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, arts and social subjects. Staff provide a range of helpful and supportive career advice and have been highly successful in supporting young people to gain places at very competitive and prestigious tertiary education providers.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- The high-quality of music teaching where children and young people are offered an experience that uses a wide range of music genre with resulting very strong performances. Young people demonstrate very well their aural discrimination, music creative composition, theory of music and music appreciation and analysis at the heart of everything they do. Staff model well the values they promote and demonstrate very high standards in their own musicianship. They lead a reflective music community, where learners work very hard to realise the benefits of very focused music practice.
- The use of a well-considered Masterclass provision sometimes led by alumni from the school. These professional classes enable learners to watch and learn from the highest quality of music professionals. These sessions are open to learners from beyond St Mary's Music School.
- The quality of the music curriculum offer leads to very high attainment and achievement. A child or young person receives a dedicated music curriculum which follows features of CfE, allowing them to attain SQA Qualifications and AQA A-Level Music and to access a variety of other international music syllabuses.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.