dave {dot} hall_family {at} virgin {dot} net

3 July 2010

Dear Parents,

First of all I'd like to introduce myself – my name is Dave Hall, and I'm the father of Pete who plays clarinet. I've recently taken over from David Jellinek as Chair of Trustees. On behalf of everyone connected with Music School I'd like to thank David for his efforts over the last few years.

This last year has been a very exciting one for Sheffield Music School. We're very lucky to have Zoë as our new Director – her enthusiasm and commitment to the job have led to many positive changes in the music school curriculum and also the background running. We now have a new website which is actively updated, sponsors for music school, recordings of the concerts, and Zoë has organised an open day and several outside performances for the students which raise the profile of Sheffield Music School in the wider community as well as providing vital experience for the students. Student numbers are also increasing, and this is vital for our future well-being.

Gemma has also taken over as Head of Junior Music School, and under her leadership the younger students are thriving and improving immensely in a happy and stimulating environment.

As well as the many positive things this year, we have also faced a major challenge in the form of our financial state. Our move to Sharrow School last Easter resulted in a large increase in our weekly rent. This, combined with a reduction in student numbers in the summer, meant that we were running at a significant loss. Initially we thought this would only be a temporary situation and we would be able to cover the loss from our reserves, as we had been led to believe that we would be able to claim Gift Aid. Unfortunately, we have now been told (after a long delay) that we are not eligible for Gift Aid as parents are paying for a service rather than donating to a charity.

By Christmas we had reached a state where we only had reserves to sustain the losses for one more term before going bankrupt, so drastic action was needed to ensure the survival of Music School. Initially Zoë looked at reducing staff hours to balance the books, however the staff showed their immense dedication to Music School by requesting that we kept their same hours but at a significantly reduced rate. I'm sure I speak on behalf of all parents and students in thanking all of the staff for showing this selfless determination to maintain the high quality of musical education they offer to our children.

Since Christmas our situation has improved and we are now just about managing to break even, but we are facing a further rent increase from September. The trustees have discussed the situation at great length, and in order to ensure the future of Music School is secure, we feel we have no option other than to increase the fees. In doing this we have tried very hard to minimise the increase, and we have also reviewed the relative costs of the different types of membership to make sure that they are all fair. The fees from September will be as follows:

- Senior (full time) £22 per week
- Senior (part time) £15 per week
- Intermediate £22 per week
- Junior £10 per week
- Family Discount 10%
- Payment will be due every half term, and there will be no reductions for days missed by a student.

Whilst the increase in the Intermediate fee seems very large, we believe it represents a fair cost for the tuition provided. Initially when Ian Naylor started the Intermediate section pupils stayed for half an hour extra for ensemble work as a small group, and the fee reflected this. After a while, Ian felt that this wasn't working well from a musical point of view, and so intermediates were integrated into senior ensembles, staying for an extra hour, but the fees weren't changed. Intermediate tuition now seems to be working well, and as part of our review we felt it appropriate that the intermediate fee was the same as seniors since they receive the same amount of tuition.

Family Discount is another area that has led to several questions from parents and much discussion amongst the trustees. Up to now, family discount has applied only where there were two or more full-time senior students in a family. Surprisingly, this applied in very few cases, and many parents questioned why there was no family discount for junior or intermediate students. The trustees felt that it would be much fairer if the discount applied to all family members, regardless of which part of Music School they attend. The discount level will be 10%. Whilst this is not

as much as the previous discount for senior students, because it applies to a lot more families it means that overall we will be giving around twice as much total discount. In our current situation we simply cannot afford any more.

In an attempt to make the payment process on a Saturday morning easier for everyone, we will be issuing individual invoices to each family showing how much is owed for the term. We would like to do this electronically, so I would appreciate it if everyone could let me have their email address (by sending a message to my address above) where they would like the invoice to be sent. Hopefully this will avoid the confusion we often get over how many weeks are in the term and what the fees are for each different type of student.

Finally I must stress that the aim of the trustees throughout this review has been purely to balance the books and make sure that Sheffield Music School remains financially viable, thus allowing it to continue to provide musical education of the highest quality – we are not a profit-making organisation. We firmly believe that Sheffield Music School represents extremely good value for money. Senior students get 3½ hours of tuition in small groups from a group of extremely talented music teachers with varied interests and specialities, all for less than the cost of an average 1 hour instrument lesson.

If anyone wishes to speak to me personally about these changes (or anything else about the running of Music School) then please don't hesitate to talk to me at tonight's concert or give me a call on the number above. I'm also around at the beginning of Music School most Saturdays if anyone wants a chat.

I hope you all have a very enjoyable summer break, and look forward to another successful year for Sheffield Music School.

Best wishes,

Dave Hall