



Choristerships

at Exeter Cathedral and
Exeter Cathedral School

information for
prospective parents

www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk



Exeter Cathedral Choristers and Exeter Cathedral School

There are up to 18 boy Choristers and up to 18 girl Choristers in Exeter Cathedral Choir, including a small number of Probationers (learner Choristers). They enjoy the most remarkable, fulfilling and rewarding musical training, alongside a broad and balanced all-round education at Exeter Cathedral School. For boys and girls who love singing, a Choristership is a very special opportunity to develop all-round musical talent in the context of service in the Cathedral.

All Choristers attend Exeter Cathedral School

The School has approximately 280 boys and girls, of whom 36 are Cathedral Choristers. All children study a broad curriculum, including a full sports programme, all of which is available for Choristers. Exeter Cathedral School is a Prep School for girls and boys aged 2½ to 13. It has a Nursery and a Pre-Prep department located in the Cathedral Close and pupils enter the Prep School from Year 3. The School's buildings are dotted around the Cathedral Green, with its main site (The Chantry) being in the lee of the Cathedral on Palace Gate. Class sizes are small (currently up to about 18), allowing each and every one of the pupils to be known as an individual, ensuring that both pastoral care and academic support are first-rate.



The optimum age for children to be selected to join the Cathedral Choir is in Year 4 (at the age of 8+) or at the beginning of Year 5. Although in exceptional cases there can be flexibility, the range of ages for children becoming Choristers is usually between 7 and 10 years on entry.

New entrants to the Choir are admitted as Probationers: they receive specialist musical and voice training, attend Cathedral services and occasionally sing with the Cathedral Choir. The length of the probationary period is not fixed; it varies according to the age of the Probationer and how quickly he or she learns the repertoire. When they are ready, Probationers are installed as full Choristers.

All Choristerships are offered on the understanding that children remain in the Choir and at the School until they reach the normal age of leaving - the end of Year 8 (13+). In addition to the Cathedral Scholarship, each Chorister/Probationer receives free instrumental tuition on one musical instrument and some voice coaching.

Some Choristers choose to board at the School. Of these, some are full boarders and some are weekly or flexi-boarders. Indeed, a number of children board for perhaps only one or two regular nights a week to help with travel arrangements. It is also great fun, and there is a warm family feel and a great sense of community. The House staff, led by the School's Head of Boarding, work very closely with parents/guardians to ensure they can see their children as frequently as they wish whenever they do not have School or Choir commitments. For those children living fairly locally, being a day Chorister works equally well.

At the age of thirteen, pupils move on to a range of leading senior schools. The School has a proven record of scholarship success to many senior schools and a number of senior staff are in place to advise families on the next steps. In 2016, 100% of Year 8 leavers secured a place at their first-choice senior school, and in 2017, 65% with a scholarship. Often, Exeter Cathedral Choristers receive offers of music scholarships/awards to a number of top senior schools.

The Chorister Week

Cathedral Choristers have a busy and rewarding schedule. Their school day is exactly the same as for all children at the School, but they start most days with a choir practice, sing Evensong after school on certain days and also at weekends. Tours and concerts (in the UK and overseas) take place regularly.

As a general rule the **Girl Choristers** sing as follows (although this pattern can change at different times of the year):

Mondays

08.20-09.05 Rehearsal
16.30-18.15 Rehearsal and Evensong

Tuesdays and Thursdays

08.20-09.05 Rehearsal

Fridays

08.20-09.05 Rehearsal
16.30-18.15 Rehearsal and Evensong*

Saturdays

15.00-17.00 Rehearsal and Evensong*

Sundays

09.00 Rehearsal and Eucharist*
15.00 Rehearsal and Evensong*

As a general rule the **Boy Choristers** sing as follows (although this pattern can change at different times of the year):

Mondays

08.20-09.05 Rehearsal

Tuesdays and Thursdays

08.20-09.05 Rehearsal
16.30-18.15 Rehearsal and Evensong

Fridays

08.20-09.05 Rehearsal
16.30-18.15 Rehearsal and Evensong*

Saturdays

15.00-17.00 Rehearsal and Evensong*

Sundays

09.00 Rehearsal and Eucharist*
15.00 Rehearsal and Evensong*

***NB: normally boys and girls alternate weekend duties (i.e. every other weekend is free). Choristers with a free weekend will usually sing Evensong on Friday.**

A full schedule is provided to all Chorister parents as far ahead as possible detailing the forthcoming term's services and commitments.

Choristers sing until Christmas Day (following a few days' break after the end of the Michaelmas Term) and during Holy Week (until Easter Monday) at the end of the Lent Term, holiday being found before and/or after Easter according to its position in the calendar.

During these periods excursions and activities are arranged for those children who are boarders to complement choral duties. There are approximately two weeks holiday for Choristers after Christmas, two weeks over the Easter period and at least six weeks in the summer. The Michaelmas half-term holiday is almost two weeks long, and in other terms approximately one week, including both weekends.

It is very important to note that, in fairness to all Choristers and their families and to maintain the professional standard of the Cathedral Choir, choir term and holiday dates are strictly followed.



“My daughter came to Voice Trials from a small family on Exmoor at age eight. A wonderful variety of music was opened up for her - disciplined Cathedral services, exciting concerts, overseas tours - even all the rehearsals were fun. Our family has discovered a loving community that has changed our lives”.

Exeter Cathedral Chorister Parent

The Chorister Parents' Association (The Matthew Locke Society) meets regularly and organise a variety of social and fund-raising events.

They provide an invaluable support network to all Chorister families and in particular to those families with children new to the School and Cathedral Choir. The society also produces a Chorister handbook to help Chorister families understand the routines and responsibilities of life in the Cathedral Choir.



What shall I do next?

Preliminary Auditions

One of the first, informal steps that some families like to take is to arrange a preliminary audition. This is not an essential requirement but some find it helpful to have a “trial run” in a very informal setting and to receive some feedback from Timothy Noon, the Cathedral’s Director of Music in advance of the official audition day.

Preliminary auditions can be arranged at any stage during the school year. Children undertaking a preliminary audition need to have a song prepared to sing and are also invited to play any instrument they may be learning, although this is not essential.

Lucy Lewis, the School Registrar is always very happy to arrange preliminary auditions and can be contacted on 01392 422763 or by email admissions@exetercs.org

Registration for the Voice Trial Day

Voice Trials usually take place at the end of January or in early February (for boys and girls aged 7-9 years), but the Cathedral Director of Music would always be pleased to hear potential Choristers for a preliminary audition at any stage of the year and this can be arranged via the School Registrar, Lucy Lewis.

Previous voice training is not essential – strong musical and vocal potential and enthusiasm for singing are the main requirements, along with sufficient academic ability to cope with the demands of Choristership.

If you would like your son or daughter to attend our next Voice Trial day please complete and return the registration form (either provided with this document or available online from exeter-cathedral.org.uk and exetercs.org).

On receipt of this form we will send you confirmation of your application together with directions and a parking permit.

Practical information for Voice Trials

Please note: The following details apply for the official Voice Trial day. Individual practical arrangements will be made for auditions held at other times during the year.

All candidates and parents/guardians are asked to arrive at the Chapter House (adjacent to the Cathedral) during the morning (the time will be confirmed nearer to the time, once final numbers are known; directions and a parking permit will be provided). Candidates may wear any casual, comfortable clothes and should bring their own writing equipment please, together with the music for their prepared song and any musical instrument(s) as appropriate. After a welcome and introduction children and parents will follow separate schedules.

The children will undertake their music and academic assessments and will have a school lunch with pupil hosts, together with a tour of the School. The children will be assessed academically by senior members of the Cathedral School teaching staff in small groups, and will receive an individual audition assessed by Timothy Noon (the Cathedral's Director of Music) and Timothy Parsons (Assistant Director of Music).

The children's assessments will include:

- Singing a prepared song or hymn (this does not need to be anything complicated; it should be a song that your child is familiar with and really enjoys singing). It is extremely helpful if children bring the musical accompaniment for their prepared piece with them so that Mr Noon can accompany them;
- Playing a musical instrument if applicable (this is not compulsory);
- Ear tests e.g. singing notes played on the piano; tests of musicality;
- All candidates will also undertake academic assessments in reading, English and mathematics. No specific preparation is needed for these assessments.

We will do our very best to put the children at ease and make the occasion an enjoyable one for them as we want them to do their best and to be relaxed, happy and confident.

The programme for parents will include:

- Introductory talks by the Headmaster, Cathedral Director of Music and a member of the Cathedral Clergy - an opportunity to hear and ask questions about the Choristers' life;
- A tour of the Cathedral, the Cathedral School and the Boarding House;
- A buffet lunch in the Chapter House with members of the School teaching staff, Cathedral clergy, and the Cathedral's Director of Music.

Parents and children will meet back together the end of the afternoon for tea, after which there will be a short break.

Children and parents are strongly encouraged to stay to attend Evensong at 17.30 as it is extremely helpful for the children to see and hear some of what the Choristers do each day. Evensong will finish at approximately 18.15.



Information for children already attending Exeter Cathedral School

Children already attending Exeter Cathedral School who wish to be considered for a Choristership will undertake exactly the same musical assessment programme as external candidates. They will not undertake assessments in reading, mathematics or English as we will already hold full information regarding their academic profiles.

Children at ECS are very welcome to have an audition on the Voice Trial day or at any other pre-arranged time during the year (as with external candidates) and separate practical arrangements will be made for this.

For the Voice Trial day:

Children already attending Exeter Cathedral School should wear their school uniform and attend school lessons as normal on the audition day. We will arrange for internal candidates to be brought to the correct place for the start of the audition day to meet their parent(s).

Although current parents may choose not to attend all parts of the Voice Trials day, there are many elements of the day which we hope will be particularly helpful and necessary when considering a Choristership, i.e. the introductory talks, the lunch with the Director of Music and the tour of the Cathedral and Boarding

House. Current ECS parents are very welcome to only attend those elements from the timetable which they feel will be helpful, but will, of course, be most welcome to attend for the whole day! An indication in advance to Lucy Lewis would be very helpful to assist with arrangements for tours and for lunch.

On receipt of a completed registration form ECS parents will be provided with an additional parking permit to allow for extended parking in the normal places provided in Palace Gate (space permitting).

Please note that if your child already attends Exeter Cathedral School a copy of academic and music reports will not be required (as requested on the application form) as your child will already be known to us. If your child has any music lessons outside ECS then a report would be extremely helpful. A detailed timetable for the day will be sent to you approximately one week before the audition day, once final numbers are known.

The Decision Process

Following the Voice Trial day, the Cathedral Director of Music, the Headmaster, the Assistant Head and a member of the Cathedral Clergy will meet to discuss the results from all the assessments. We will hope to inform parents of decisions within one week of the Voice Trial day.

It is important to understand that auditions for the Cathedral Choir are necessarily a very selective process and not everyone can succeed. The number of places is strictly limited in any given year and younger candidates may be encouraged to return for a further voice audition the following year if their voices have not yet developed sufficiently. It is also perhaps worthy of note that several of our current and past Choristers had unsuccessful auditions here or elsewhere before they were offered a Choristership.

Places are usually offered for the September following the auditions; however, under certain circumstances (e.g. older candidates), an immediate start may be possible and desirable. All children offered a Choristership will be invited to come and spend a "taster day" in the School with the other children in their year-group. This will be an opportunity to spend some time getting to know the children and to undertake a normal school day. This can also include the opportunity to attend a Chorister practice.



Financial Assistance

The Cathedral School is a fee-paying school.

All Choristers automatically receive a basic Cathedral Scholarship currently to the value of 25% of the School tuition fees.

In cases of financial difficulty there is a strong possibility of additional means-tested bursaries from the Dean and Chapter and/or from many trusts which support our Choristers. **In recent years no child has been prevented from taking up a Choristership owing to financial circumstances.** For further information/advice regarding bursaries and trust applications please contact the School's Finance Secretary, Helen Grantham on 01392 457070 / finance@exetercs.org who will be very pleased to provide help and advice.

In addition to their Cathedral Scholarship, each Chorister/probationer receives vocal coaching (both through their routine rehearsals and through some one-to-one sessions) and instrumental tuition on an instrument of their choice (voice may be chosen as this instrument if desired). Optional full Chorister boarding and occasional boarding is currently available, with discounts if booked in advance.

Any Questions?

We hope that this information has been helpful and that many questions have been answered. If you have any questions you would like answering in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact:

Lucy Lewis, Registrar

T: 01392 422763 E: admissions@exetercs.org

We look forward to meeting you and your child soon!