HELPING HAND

If running a music department is seeming harder than it ought to be, you may benefit from some technological support. Joanna Wyld profiles MusicSchool Manager and offers some alternatives from a jam-packed software market – all in aid of helping HoDs manage

MusicSchool Manager (*MSM*) aims to change the way school music departments are organised, saving time and increasing efficiency. It is produced by CJM Software – a team of music specialists with a sincere passion for music, and a love of their product.

Exhibiting at the Music Education Expo 2015, the CJM Software team introduced *MusicSchool* Manager to Expo visitors – and there I caught up with CJM founders Chris Boulton and Jonathan Maiden to ask them about MSM, and how it can help its users.

SCHEDULING TOOLS

Teacher timetabling: a clear picture

As the CJM team demonstrates, *MusicSchool* Manager enables teachers to see the academic timetable overlaid on their own music timetable, aiming to make the scheduling of music lessons much easier. What's more, the system allows teachers to build up a clear picture of student involvement with music, whether in individual lessons, ensemble participation, or exams. As teacher Chris McInnes of the BRIT School says: 'We've been using *MSM*

for a year now, in order to centralise the admin of the peripatetic music tuition within the school. We have 17 visiting teachers, with over 400 individual lessons per week to timetable and administer. It allows us to keep far greater oversight of attendance, as registers are all completed electronically now, as well as making it easier to edit and send timetables.

'We're starting to use its other features now, such as exam scheduling, and will no doubt find other features to work with soon. The best thing has been the access to and quality of the support from CJM, which has helped both with learning how to use the software but also with customising it to our needs. We're using the early version of 'MyMSM', which allows staff to access the system via the iOS app, and CJM have responded quickly to feedback and requests by updating the software as we go.'

Whereas reams of paper and numerous diaries can lead to lost information and create confusion, MSM stores data for each student, so that their musical journey through school life can be charted. MSM is also compatible with handheld devices such as smartphones and tablets, allowing teachers to login outside school should they need to update or check information.

New software can be daunting, but from the demonstrations offered at the CJM stand *MSM* was clearly laid out and easy to pick up. The home screen offers a number of categories: Students, Teachers, Ensembles, Events, Exams, Suppliers, Orders, Stock, Recharges, and Inventory.

STUDENTS

A student list provides a snapshot of pupils

MSM's 'Students' category allows teachers to build up a comprehensive database of their students, including details of their tuition, ensemble work, performances, exams, timetables, reports, and contact information.

There is an automated import system, which allows existing information to be quickly transferred into MSM. Teachers may then select the profile of an individual pupil, and the software calls up all relevant information for that student, including their current standard, and who their peripatetic teacher is. Further information can be added in the form of notes or comments, to give a more rounded picture of a student's development. One plus here is that new or covering teachers will find the database provides them with a detailed picture of each student, which can save time in getting to know a new class.

A real time-saving device is the ability to rotate timetables on a weekly or termly basis: instead of the laborious task of writing out a new timetable each week or term, with the inevitable crossings-out that occur when students need to swap lessons, the software arranges things neatly and clearly.

TEACHERS

Details of peripatetic teachers may also be uploaded from other systems into