



## Welcome to the Junior Extension Course!

The Junior Extension Course is about learning how to learn. Children are gradually guided towards independence with the help of teacher and classmates, the group setting playing a major role. We find this approach highly motivational, enabling children to learn not only how to play the piano by ear and from music, but to play within a group, to develop the general musicianship skills learned previously, and importantly, to express their creativity in an individual way.

JXC consists of four books: Books 5, 6, 7 and 8. For each of these stages there is a repertoire book, workbook and accompanying CD. We expect the Junior Extension Course to last around four years, after which children will be given the option to continue on to the Junior Advanced Course. It is at the start of the advanced course that individual piano lessons enter the curriculum, as piano repertoire is already part of the extension course. Those families wishing children to have individual lessons alongside JXC are asked to choose a second instrument (i.e. not piano).

**Role of parents** The purpose of JXC is to guide the children towards independence, however, this does not usually happen overnight! We would persuade parents to help as little as possible, though, and it is very useful for the teacher if you write what help was given on the homework sheet. This means that the teacher can pitch the work to the correct levels. Parents' role is one of gentle encouragement!

Parents come in at the end of lessons to write down homework (or print off an email attachment) and are invited to presentations or open classes around three times a year.

Please find inside an overview of the curriculum, and on the back page, information and advice on homework and equipment.

## CURRICULUM SUBJECTS

**Songs** Songs with words are increasingly more sophisticated; and occasionally go into parts.

**Solfège** The aims of solfège singing in JXC are:

1. To develop the expressive ability necessary for advanced level performance, by experiencing the musical elements through the voice.
2. To continue to help students develop the ability to sing with accurate pitch, interval and rhythm.
3. To accomplish a high level of expression.

By Book 7, the children graduate to singing these pieces from scores, supporting reading skills. This subject is entitled 'Singing Musically'.

**Sequence-singing** Students are given a phrase in solfège and sing this pattern at different pitches to create mini-pieces. This is a development of the solfège singing, and supports improvisation and composition.

**Cadence exercise** Instead of playing chords with the left hand only, students learn to play cadence-style chords: that is, with chords in the right hand and with single bass notes in the left. London Bridge is the first piece of this kind: the cadence is written out on the same page as the melody. The goal of these pieces is for each student to sing the tune while accompanying with the cadence on the keyboard. In lessons, we go further and discover cadence patterns, transpose to other keys and create on-the-spot ensembles.

**Keyboard Harmony** Keyboard Harmony is one of the most characteristic subjects of the Yamaha Music Education System and starts in Book 6. Students acquire the fundamental ability of improvisation by learning how to add chords to a given melody as well as playing variations. Students try to imagine/discover the harmony from the melody and will play the piece with both hands. CD recordings give ideas for variations, registrations, expression, accompaniments. Development possibilities include melodic variation, accompaniment variation, introduction, link sections and ending, A and B sections, sometimes composing new material, development into an ensemble and transposition.

**Ensembles** There are several types of ensemble included in this new JXC subject: rhythm, improvisation, by-ear and repertoire ensembles. Each has a different purpose, but all require the skill of playing together, listening to each other, and watching a conductor.

**Repertoire** The aim of these solo pieces is a musical performance, but the process of learning is often different for each piece. Masterclasses, where the children make suggestions to improve their own and each others' performances, are possible because of the group lesson and are used regularly to develop a critical ear, with children sharing ideas for practice and improvement with each other. These sessions are very valuable and are one of the ways in which independent practice is encouraged and supported.

**My Favourite** is a collection of repertoire pieces introduced halfway through the course, which are contained in the workbooks of Books 7 and 8. Children choose from these carefully graded selections a piece they would like to study, and learn their choice independently. Solos are then performed to the class. This subject starts with fairly easy pieces in order to boost confidence in independent learning – we have found this to be the stage that students' notation skills develop, almost subconsciously. All repertoire has a CD recording to help learn the piece and to serve as a model.

**Finger exercises** These are located in the back of the workbook, with the purpose of developing finger muscles (control, speed, articulation) and introducing new fingering. They all have accompanying backing tracks at slower and faster paces to play the exercises along to.

**Scales, cadences, arpeggios, broken chords, sight-singing, sightplaying and theory** These subjects are all studied in JXC, with exercises included in the workbook, along with illustrations of the various families of instruments.

**Homework** Children will often come home with some 'working out' homework: perhaps to work out a tune for themselves with the correct fingering, or to put something hands together, or to make up a variation. This is gradually introduced from Book 5, leading to the 'My Favourites' section of Books 7 and 8, where children will choose and learn a piece by themselves and bring it to the lesson for a performance or masterclass. Homework is generally emailed.

Homework sheets have a place for marking what has been practised, and also has space for communication between parents and teacher if needed. Each week, the teacher checks the homework folder – the whole homework list does not have to be worked through every practice time, and some things on the list will not need as much attention as others. However, please encourage your child to practise everything on the list each week.

It is usual for Junior Extension to foster **different levels** of achievement in various subjects. This is another way that the group lesson is of real value, as the children learn from each other's strengths. Be aware that your child's homework target may sometimes be different to another's – all children are encouraged to a higher level of performance.

**Equipment** At home, it is very useful to have a CD player next to or near to the instrument your child practises on, as the homework often involves playing along to the tracks on the CD. Listening regularly to the pieces they are playing is important.

If you have a small keyboard at home, it may be time to upgrade to a piano, clavichord or keyboard with touch/weighted keys. It is also worth thinking about the position of your keyboard or piano, as this can make a huge difference to how much practising gets done. Make the keyboard as accessible as possible – e.g. if it is somewhere your child walks past several times a day (with the homework list displayed) they may be tempted to play as they go past!

We hope you enjoy listening to your child's progress during the course. Please communicate successes or worries to your teacher – your feedback is valued.