

How to support your child during the Junior Extension Course

Just like the first course, parents are vital for the success of JXC: even though you are not present at every lesson, and whether you have a musical background or not!

Our approach during the first course stressed independence: letting the children discover the music themselves, allowing them to feel comfortable to make mistakes whilst learning a piece so that they have the willingness to keep on trying.

We now build on this foundation, and students will gradually take control of their own learning. Of course, this is a process over the two-year course: it doesn't start from JXC lesson 1!

Here's what you can do at home to help:

Be their biggest fan club! Keep in touch with what they're doing, ask them about their ideas, say 'wow' in the right places! Create a happy and pleasant atmosphere around music at home.

Put the CD on. Regular listening to the pieces they are playing is one of the best ways to help the children get to know the course music. Enjoy the music together and **sing along to the lyric songs** - ask your child which one they're singing, as this is not usually written down each week.

Check everything on the list has been attempted. Rather than a daily thing, this could be something you do once or twice a week, leaving them to their own practising devices in between. Naturally, they will play their favourites more often than other things.

Help with the writing homework. Parents are often needed to get this started: for example, choosing a calm time to suggest doing it and sitting down with them to help. It is likely you won't know what is required, but they should do: try to find a time as soon after the lesson as possible so they can remember.

The actual help you give is creating a supportive atmosphere and perhaps asking questions 'what did the teacher say about this page?' 'What do you have to do here?'

Please accept their music writing efforts if you know they've tried their best: these are likely to be their first real attempts at writing music and they will learn by doing, rather than having all their mistakes pointed out.

For parents with musical backgrounds it is often tempting to give too much help. If you're unsure about the level of help to offer, please ask the teacher. As a general rule, it is much better for your child's progress if you say 'I don't know, I wasn't in the lesson!'

Provide them with the right equipment. Does the instrument they play on have a good sound? Is the piano in a tempting position (not tucked away or hard to get at).

Make sure they have access to the CDs or iPod recordings themselves and that the furniture/equipment is in the right place for them to play along to the CD tracks!

Communicate with the teacher your successes and difficulties - sometimes children are absolutely fine in class and the teacher has no idea that there is anything negative going on at home. Our teachers are very happy to receive emails if there isn't time to catch them before or after the lesson.

Trouble shooting

'My child doesn't practise regularly'

If the week goes by and not a lot of practice has happened, or it's generally a bit hard to get started, why not try sitting down together and working out a good regular practice time? Like

brushing teeth, this then becomes more routine: 'what do we do before [breakfast/dinner]?'

Although the ideal is that children go to the keyboard unprompted, please be aware that it is much harder for children to do this if they don't have much free time. If there is lots of schoolwork or extra-curricular activities, it will be difficult to find the mental energy to freely explore on the piano. They will need you to help prompt regular practice – when is the best time each day? - and perhaps to help balance their timetable.

'My child forgets how the tunes go'

There's a few tricks you can use without actually giving too much information away:

- Number One: Put the CD on!
- 'Let's sing/hum it' - or even better: 'I can't remember, how does it go again?'
- Ask: 'What do you think the first note is?'
- If they still can't remember, work out the first note from the music (better from Book 2 onwards). Then write it in the book - there's no need to work it out every time - some children just need the starting note or chord written in their books to get them going. Please don't write any more than that into their books.

If children are forgetful about what happened in class, make sure they do a practice session with you very soon after the lesson. Please email the teacher with anything on the list that neither of you can make sense of. We're always happy to help and this kind of feedback can also help us to find out what we need to be clearer about.

'We're having difficulties with Let's Play More Repertoire' (book 2 onwards)

The teacher will ask the children to listen to the CD lots of times before trying it out.

The children are likely to be able to play the right hand much more easily than the left, as they may be able to do it mostly by ear by listening to the CD - that's fine and normal.

You may need to help with the left hand just a little: but please don't just show them how it goes! It is much better to ask questions to get them going then withdraw.

- 'Let's try to work out the first note' - they can count the notes up or down from a note they know
- 'Let's listen and see how the left hand goes'
- 'Can you see any other notes/bars the same?'

Please communicate any worries to your teacher or to the office and we will do our best to help.