JGPS TEACHING AND LEARNING POLICY

Traditional piano teaching can be quite Victorian, often weighted towards reading staff notation and learning whatever piece comes next in the book!

Learning at the JGPS is rather different.

1. It’s concept-based. Various areas (technique, rhythm, melody, harmony, expression, pianistic skills) are explored in depth through learning aspirations progressing over years. The goal of increased independence means that we explore concepts in different contexts; any pieces studied are a chance to put developing learning concepts into practice. Ultimately, students should be able to learn music at an appropriate level, almost without teacher input.
2. Musicianship is vital. We aim to develop rounded musicians who sing, enjoy, audiate (“think in music”), and express/communicate music confidently. Just as readers are created through language exposure, musicians are created through music exposure. Learning often takes place away from the piano and focuses on developing listening/audiation skills. Similarly, improvisation and composition are developed to experience music as a living art that exists in the here and now, but also to provide wonderful opportunities to explore sound, structure, and technique.
3. With music and sound as the foundation of everything, we often use rote learning. This is where a pupil utilises their listening skills and teacher demonstration to learn given repertoire. It enables them to succeed with music that is often beyond their existing music reading capabilities; for example, they can explore colour and aspects of technique more freely. It also develops musical memory.
4. Reading staff notation is important. This is how most musicians access the majority of music and collaborate with others. A highly complex and cognitive skill, it is taught over many years in a carefully-constructed learning sequence. Aspects of pitch, rhythm and harmony are deconstructed, explored and applied: first, through use of the mini-staff, and then exploring staff notation through landmark notes, steps/skips, wider intervals and patterns. Reading is NEVER just decoding and ALWAYS connected to sound! The development of sight reading skills is important in developing reading fluency.
5. We are happy to use examinations as a celebration of good learning that has already taken place. Once students are at or beyond the requisite standard for a grade, have a sufficient grasp of the necessary skills, and experience of a broad repertoire of an appropriate level, then it may be a positive experience to have an external summative assessment as an affirmation. Formative assessment takes place every single lesson by teachers and always forms the basis of subsequent lesson plans.
6. Students should have a regular and committed practice routine in place, strongly supported by parents/carers. It may include theory, listening, technique, improvisation, composition, learning music, expression, performance skills, or revisiting repertoire with improved skills. Teachers use MyMusicStaff to communicate the learning focuses for home practice; progress is most rapid when these learning points are explored daily. Teachers have an understanding of strategic planning for progression both from week to week and year to year, but pupil engagement with home learning is the single most important prerequisite for success. Such commitment and resilience are definitely skills for life!