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Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Arts,
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(HASSE)
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Australia

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Dear Ms Finn,

We note your concern as to the evidence gained that primary school teachers do not feel confident to teach music. At UNE our music teaching courses focus on developing students' confidence, creativity and musical skills through a variety of methods, such as singing, playing instruments, composing and music theory. However, we are aware that many primary school teachers in Australia lack confidence teaching music due to a combination of factors. First, a significant number of primary teachers receive the required music training in their degree qualification but in Australia, primary education programs often prioritise subjects such as literacy, numeracy, and science, leaving music and the arts as lesser priorities. This is not only due to curriculum but also tacit sociocultural beliefs about the value or lack thereof regards learning fundamental skills in music. As a result, many teachers enter the profession with a basic grounding in music theory, performance, and pedagogy but do not have the opportunity to build their skills to a greater level of competence and confidence.

Music lessons, with an important and well-established evidence-base that creativity, empathy and other dimensions of emotional development are enhanced, may not always be prioritized in the school context, leading teachers to feel less comfortable in making time for it and/or feeling prepared to teach it. Time and resources may also play a role. Music programs often require additional materials, instruments and time, that many schools may not be able to allocate, leading teachers to feel unsupported. Without professional development opportunities in music, teachers may struggle to integrate it into their classrooms, contributing to a lack of confidence in delivering effective music education.

To help primary school teachers in Australia become more confident and skilled in teaching music, the committee may suggest several key actions:

Option A

Fund annual places in existing music training programs to top up existing skills, and build greater confidence for primary school teachers.

Option B

Create new bespoke training which is offered during team time with teaching load reduction. Ensure the highest quality teaching and curriculum by having regular reviews by national music specialists.

Option C

Add to A or B further curriculum support and resources: The Department of Education could commission and provide easily accessible teaching resources, such as lesson plans, online tutorials, and practical guides tailored to primary school music education. These could also include digital tools or apps to make learning music more engaging for students.

As specialist music teachers in primary education have focalised music skills they could be assigned primary staff to mentor in developing curriculum and materials for teaching. Current specialist music staff in conservatoria or university performance degrees could receive incentives for mentoring primary teaching staff to engage and build confidence and skills.

Further to this, additional cultural initiatives which schools can rely on to regularly collaborate with local musicians, music programs, and/or cultural institutions, could provide teachers with mentorship and inspiration, while enriching students' exposure to diversity and depth of musical experiences.

By providing these supports, teachers will be empowered, build their confidence, and ensure more robust music education in primary schools across Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jane Edwards, BMus, MMus, PhD