

**Submission
No 4**

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Introduction

I am an educational consultant in the field of music education, with expertise in music learning and brain development. I am based in Australia and support work across every Australia state and within each school system, as well as work with Scottish Government, partner organisations in Ireland and England, various organisations in the US and advise television and film productions around music education. I have written a book called *The Music Advantage*, founded Bigger Better Brains which works with music teachers, LearnGauge which an award-winning online platform for data driven decisions in teacher professional development and Muse Consulting that specialises in facilitating the building of music programs and measuring their impact. I am a senior advisor to the Music Education: Right from the Start initiative and lead the work into the most recent [state of play report](#)¹ into music education in Australia.

In this submission I have chosen to focus on the current state of primary school teacher capacity to deliver quality music education within NSW government schools. I would be pleased to present to the parliamentary committee in person.

Terms of Reference to be addressed

- (i) progress towards a long-term goal of quality music education, including actions to address identified barriers
- (ii) the present level and status of formal music education across all levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary levels
- (ix) measures of success in music education

Recommendations

- Provide a tool for primary teachers² that can measure the objective competency and subjective confidence of primary school generalist in delivering music education as required in the Australian and NSW music curriculum
- Provide a tool for school principals³ to audit and assess the music education provided in their schools and designate a specific budget allocation year on year for the next five years to support the capital and professional development investment to ensure every school is delivering quality music education to every student in primary school.
- Plan, resource and measure⁴ the impact of professional learning that will capacity build all primary teachers in NSW to deliver quality music education

Music education changes more than we think

If I had not been the recipient of quality music education, my life would have followed a very different path.

This is not because a quality music education in my childhood lead to a career as a performing musician or a music educator. Being the recipient of a quality music education helped my brain to rewire itself so that I could read more effectively.

¹ Collins, A., Dwyer, R. & Date, A. (2020) *Music Education: A Sound Investment*. Music Education: Right from the Start.

² This tool is currently in use by the Department of Education Victoria. It is called SoundSparks and is based on the Australian Curriculum and tailored to the Victorian music curriculum. Now that the new NSW music curriculum has been released, and NSW specific version of SoundSparks is in development. This tool is part of the LearnGauge platform that has won the ACT iAwards in Business & Industry in June 2024, and will be judged at the National iAwards in August 2024.

³ This tool has already been piloted and tested in the Australian context. It is called SoundAssess and the development was supported by a Churchill Impact Grant and is part of the LearnGauge platform that won the ACT iAwards in Business & Industry in Jun 2024, and will be judged at the National iAwards in August 2024.

⁴ The Backing Teachers report (soon to be published by [Music Education: Right from the Start](#)) provides a framework to assist Australian education systems to accurately plan for the needs of their workforce in terms of professional development in music education. Available on request.

Until the age of 9, I was a reading fraud. I struggled to read fluently, to incorporate new words into my vocabulary, to get my eyes to stop jumping between lines and to remember word sounds and combinations. I was ashamed, embarrassed and I learned how to pick up signals from those around me about what the next word would be. My brain was a version of ChatGPT well before we had language-based AI systems.

At 9, I got the opportunity to learn how to play the clarinet, and more importantly to learn how to read music. About 6 months later my reading fluence and confidence changed dramatically, and school became an exciting place to learn, not a daily ordeal of hiding my deficiency.

Fast forward 30 years and an entire PhD devoted to understanding the links between neuroscience and music education, and I had my brain scanned while interviewing a neuroscientific language specialist. He confirmed what I had always believed – learning music had helped my potentially dyslexic brain to rewire itself and conquer the Herculean cognitive task of reading language.

My professional work is now focused on ensuring that every Australian child is not just given the opportunity but is guaranteed the right to a quality music education during their school years.

TOR (ii) What is getting in the way of quality music education in NSW?

For a quality music class to happen regularly, many factors need to be in place. The two most important factors are well-informed school principals and well-trained primary teachers.

I have the great privilege through my work as an educational consultant, to see first-hand the provision of music education in each Australian state, and across Government, Catholic and Independent systems. This work comes about through my expertise in music learning and brain development and my professional experience in reforming music education systems and measure the impact of those changes. I have worked extensively for a decade in NSW, across long and short term projects in schools and school systems.

Well informed school principals

Very few school principals have had significant personal music education themselves, and only a lucky few have had the experience of an impactful quality music education for their own children. Understandably, they struggle to understand how to effectively support music education in schools. They need training and logistical support to provision quality music education to their students.

School principals may ask why they should take this extra time to develop these skills? The reason they should invest in, and be invested in, when it comes to music education, is that we now know through research that learning music is a mechanism for effective and positive cognitive development for every child.

Music education has been found to improve auditory processing which supports typical language development as well as act as an effective intervention for language delay or language disorders. The impacts of this improvement are being seen in the Wired for Sound⁵ program delivered by the Catholic Education Parramatta CAPTIVATE team.

Music education has been found to improve executive function skills that support students' ability to learn. This has been demonstrated dramatically in the [ACO Foundations](#) program which is based in St Marys North School⁶ in Western Sydney. In a joint research project with myself, ACT and University of Sydney researchers, the students receiving music education significantly improved their executive functions and the improvements in the school in terms of increased learning capability, positive behaviour management and reading improvement have been documented.

⁵ Catholic Education Parramatta – Contact Co-ordinator Françoise D'Unienville

⁶ St Marys Norths School – Contact Principal Lisa Parello

Music education has been found to improve social skills, anxiety management and self-regulation effectively and permanently⁷ and when measured in a population level study in British Columbia, found that students who undertook music in primary and secondary school performed at least one year ahead of their peers in Maths, English and Science.⁸

Music education in a school is more than just a subject on the timetable, it is a tool to support general learning capabilities, student self-management, promote social cohesion as well as improve academic performance. School principals on the whole are unaware of this research and need to receive training in this evidence-based approach and supported to audit and assess their own music education programs to ensure quality, equity and continuity for every NSW government school student.

Well trained primary teaching staff

In NSW, the policy for over 10 years has been to expect generalist teachers to deliver the music and arts curriculum to students. Generally, they do this with on [average 9.39 hours of training](#) in NSW⁹ in the pre-service teaching degrees and limited or no training in their in-service professional development.

This is the main barrier to the provision of quality music education to every NSW government school student. Not only does professional development need to be provided at scale to all NSW generalist teachers, the limited number of music specialists within the NSW government workforce need to be utilised to mentor generalist teachers to develop their music teaching skills. The important factor to remember in such a large undertaking is that once the workforce is upskilled, experienced teachers can mentor and teach new teachers as part of their induction into an NSW government school, and the investment will be self-fulfilling.

Overall, the provision of quality music education in NSW could be improved significantly by

- Acknowledging the lack of training for school principals and primary teachers has contributed to a decline in the equity and quality of music education received by NSW government school students over the last 10 years.
- Requiring school principals to undertake training to update and upskill their knowledge of the impacts of a quality music education in their schools
- Strongly encourage school principals to audit and assess their music education programs and be supported to make year on year improvements over a five-year period
- Systematically measure the competence and confidence of primary teachers to deliver of music education, support the implementation of professional development for all teachers and measure the impact of that development in terms of student outcomes (both musical and non-musical) over a five-year capacity building period.

TOR (ii) Where does NSW sit in the national picture?

The issue of well-informed school principals and well-trained primary teachers in one that is being grappled with across several Australian states. I will now compare the NSW experience and approach with QLD, VIC and SA. I will focus specifically on the provision of in-service teacher development for primary school teachers.

⁷ Hallam, S., & Himonides, E. (2022). *The power of music: An exploration of the evidence*. Open Book Publishers.

⁸ Guhn, M., Emerson, S. D., & Gouzouasis, P. (2020). A population-level analysis of associations between school music participation and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112(2), 308.

⁹ Collins, A. & Hocking, R. (2023) *Fading notes: The state of music education for the next generation of primary teachers – summary report*. Alberts | The Tony Foundation.

Compared to Queensland – QLD has a long history of heavily supporting the training of music teachers in the Kodaly methodology, as well as maintaining the expectation within schools that music education will be delivered by a specialist music teacher. In comparison over 10 years ago NSW moved to placing the onus on generalist teachers to deliver all aspects of the Arts curriculum, including music education. This workforce change meant that generalist teachers had to rely on their pre-service training, of which the time allocated has [decreased by 53%¹⁰](#) over the same period, and was not supported by workforce wide professional upskilling. This means the teachers required to deliver quality music education and typically not able to do so due to lack of training.

Compared to Victoria – VIC took the same approach as NSW in terms of generalist teacher requirement to deliver music education in schools. However, they allowed greater autonomy to school principals to use their budget to employ a specialist music teacher in their school. Over the last 5 years, Department of Education Victoria has recognised that their workforce requires significant capacity building in music education and has created the [Music in Schools](#) program and commissioned the SoundSparks tool and SoundSparks Resources Links project to support the capacity building of their workforce in music education. This program requires expansion to service all Victorian teachers. A somewhat similar program has begun to be delivered by [Music in Me](#) (formally the National Music Teacher Mentoring program) in NSW but the provision is very small and would need to be expanded significantly to result in meaningful workforce capacity building and the resulting quality music education for every NSW government school student.

Compared to South Australia – SA took the step in 2019 to highlight music education as one of the three pillars of a world class education. They committed \$14.5 million to date to support the roll out of the 10-year [Music Education Strategy](#) which looks to provision quality music education to every SA government school student. This step has led to the significant shift in the confidence and competency of teachers in music education, specifically in the primary years, as shown through the [Setting the Tempo¹¹](#) report released in 2024. NSW does not have an overarching strategy that could co-ordinate and collaborate with the many providers of music education across the state. Lack of a focus on lifting the quality provision of music education to NSW students has led to a lack of teacher and school development, and this has resulted in a significant lack of equity for students across the system.

TOR (ix) How do we measure success in quality music education in NSW?

There are many good news stories about music education across NSW. Wonderful work being done at wonderful schools and organisations. Yet in NSW there is not wonderful work being done at every school. This means that not every NSW government school student is receiving the music education that is their right in the NSW and Australian curriculum. This also means that many NSW government school students may not be experiencing the benefits that music education can provide for their general learning and personal development.

The following measures of success would move NSW towards an equitable and quality provision of music education.

Next 3 years – 2026 to 2029

- 80% of NSW government school primary school teachers will be able to deliver quality music education to either Curriculum Stage 1 or 2 level

¹⁰ Collins, A. & Hocking, R. (2023) Fading notes: The state of music education for the next generation of primary teachers – summary report. Alberts | The Tony Foundation.

¹¹ Collins, A. (2024) Setting the tempo: The inside view of music education from South Australia's primary teachers. Music Education: Right from the Start.

- 50% of NSW government school primary school teachers will be able to deliver quality music education to Curriculum Stage 3 level
- 80% of NSW school principals will have audited music education at their schools
- 70% of implementation requests from NSW school principals are funded by a combination of NSW DoE, philanthropic support and school-based fund raising

Next 5 years – 2026 to 2031

- 95% of NSW government school primary school teacher will be able to deliver quality music education to either Curriculum Stage 1 or 2 level
- 75% of NSW government school primary school teacher will be able to deliver quality music education to either Curriculum Stage 3 level
- 90% of NSW school principals will have re-audited music education at their schools to determine improvements and the new priorities for development
- 85% of implementation requests from NSW school principals are funded by a combination of NSW DoE, philanthropic support and school-based fund raising

There are tools, expertise and supportive organisations and individuals available within the Australian context to accomplish these tasks and meet these measures of success. These measures will require expertise from both within and beyond the NSW DoE. This broader approach is working effectively for the SA Music Education Strategy who utilise advise and collaboration with many organisations and individuals to work towards their goal of a world class education with music education as one of the central pillars.

I encourage the parliamentary committee to look beyond music education as the vehicle to create the next music industry generation and see the broader and more transformative impact that improving the quality and provision of music education could bring to NSW – a state leading the way in education in schools where students are engaged, empathic, curious and cognitively equipped for learning.

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