

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

**Organisation:** Alberts (Music Education: Right from the Start)

**Date Received:** 25 July 2024

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25 July 2024  
Ms Julia Finn MP  
Chair

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE  
INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NSW**

**MUSIC EDUCATION: RIGHT FROM THE START  
SUBMISSION**

Dear Ms Finn and Committee Members,

[Music Education: Right from the Start](#) is a national collaborative initiative, led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation. We work closely with partners and supporters across education, music education providers, the music industry, education, teacher associations, research, and philanthropy. We enjoy cooperative relationships with education departments and teacher associations in several jurisdictions, including here in NSW.

We have been early supporters of this Parliamentary Inquiry and are delighted to now have this opportunity to provide a submission for the Committee's consideration. We have sought to be judicious in the material being provided though we have felt it important to attach key documents which we hope may assist the Committee in its deliberations; links to additional material are provided as appropriate.

This submission restricts itself to the policy landscape - and the research that informs it - focused on the immediate priority of delivering quality, sequential and ongoing music education for every NSW primary school student. We have refrained from anecdotes, stories and exemplar programs. As vital as we know these to be, we are aware that others will be providing a feast of such material. That said, we have any number of stories to share of the profound impact quality music education holds for children and young people.

Alberts has been deeply involved in the Australian music and entertainment industry for over 135 years. We continue to provide direct support to organisations sharing our belief in the power of music to change lives.

Music Education: Right from the Start is born of this history and experience.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee.

With our appreciation of your efforts,

Emily Albert  
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## MAKING QUALITY MUSIC EDUCATION A REALITY

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian education confronts a strange paradox: at the same time as the educational leaders, national declarations and curricula emphasise the importance of a holistic education that embraces the student's personal and social development, well-being and appreciation of Australian society, schools and teachers are under substantial pressure to devote their attention to a small number of the Key Learning Areas (KLAs): literacy, numeracy and the STEM disciplines.

This single-minded focus inevitably narrows the educational spectrum while at the same time dominating the school day. The 'residual' time becomes something of a battleground as the remaining learning areas compete for attention. The more thinly time is spread, the greater the risk of superficial learning with all that means for students.

Quality music education can confidently speak – backed by the research - to all the major challenges confronting contemporary schooling: academic attainment; retention; engagement and participation; well-being; personal and social development. It is integral to achieving a better, fairer education system.

Moreover, success in delivering a quality music education opens the space for the Arts. It is our conviction that music education is best placed to provide strong foundations for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the value of Arts education more generally.

Our submission focuses on the second section (1.b) of the Terms of Reference. In doing so, it briefly addresses the rationale for quality music education having a particular emphasis in this inquiry as reflected in the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Taking our lead from the TOR we do not re-present the overwhelming (and still growing) body of evidence from the social and neuro- sciences, and experience on the ground, as to the manifest benefits of quality, sequential and ongoing music education. We take this as accepted wisdom across all sectors and the Parliament itself.

Our focus is on the TOR's explicit emphasis on the quality and effectiveness of music education with a view to identifying the barriers and positing constructive ways forward.

We acknowledge the current Government's view, in its election commitments, as to *the long-term goal of quality, sequential and ongoing music education in NSW schools*. However, we stress that while it will take time to fully realise these ambitions, it is essential to start on that road with clarity and determination, and without delay.

In the submission that follows, we offer a framework for significant progress in delivering quality, sequential and ongoing music education for the Committee's consideration.

#### **1. An unequivocal priority commitment:**

That every primary school student in NSW will have access to quality, sequential and ongoing music education with a guaranteed minimum of 60 minutes of music per week mandated up to Stage 4 with a teacher (generalist or specialist) confident and capable of delivering quality music learning.

## **2. A timeline for realising that commitment:**

That at least 50% of NSW government primary schools will be offering a quality music education by the beginning of the 2027 school year, at least 75% by 2029 and 100% of primary schools by 2031.

## **3. The broader commitment:**

A commitment to quality, sequential and ongoing music education encompassing students from early childhood settings through to the end of their time in school (K-12).

## **4. Setting the Standard**

It is *essential* that there be an explicit standard as to what constitutes a *quality, sequential and ongoing music education*.

We recommend the 'explainer' developed by Music Education: Right from the Start as a suitable, practical standard. [Attachment 1]

## **5. Developing a Music Education Plan for NSW Primary Schools**

We are *not* suggesting a broad strategy but rather an 'operational' plan for the purpose of giving practical effect to the above commitment. As such it would include milestones, timeline and resourcing for an initial 3-5 year period.

## **6. The initial priorities:**

### **School leaders**

School leaders need to know that quality music education is a recognised priority, be encouraged to make the necessary commitment and supported in delivering it.

### **Teaching workforce**

We are conscious that NSW education faces significant workforce issues. We provide a suggested approach to meeting the demand for primary teachers who are confident and competent in delivering a quality music education, and in doing so also making a positive contribution to the wider issue.

There are several dimensions to this:

- A more coherent approach to equipping generalist classroom teachers, alongside use of specialist music educators.
- The challenges in improving Initial Teacher Education (ITE).
- Increased attention to, and investment in, professional development.
- Accreditation arrangements to improve pathways to permanent employment for specialist music educators in primary schools.

### **Facilities for Music education**

Given the significant investment in schools infrastructure, explicit provision should be included within the scope of works for flexible spaces that enhance music learning; a gym may be good space but some consideration will need to be given to acoustics, suitability for rehearsals and performance, storage for musical instruments, for example. We suggest future infrastructure investment be required to meet criteria to enable, and make it suitable for, multiple use, including for music and performance.

### **Curriculum Development**

Curriculum development and implementation is a lengthy, ongoing process overseen in this state by NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority). NSW is undertaking the 'first comprehensive reform of the NSW curriculum in three decades'. The Creative Arts K-6 syllabus has been subject to consultation with a view to its full implementation in 2027.

As important as curriculum is, we suggest that significant progress is not dependent on curriculum reform.

### **Accreditation**

There are several issues likely to be before the Committee around teacher supply warranting consideration. The one related issue we would draw to the Committee's attention is the limitations on pathways to permanent employment for secondary trained music specialists working in primary schools.

A solution to this issue, by allowing for appropriate recognition as an accredited primary school teacher, we are assured would be a significant advancement.

## **7. Committing to measures of success**

We propose establishing achievable targets for the equitable achievement of the following indicators of success over time:

- The number (%) of primary students who have access to music education.
- The number of primary schools delivering music education which meets the agreed quality benchmarks.

This requires establishing, maintaining and reporting baseline data to enable regular updates on progress towards the targets by region, IECSIA and other relevant demographic identifiers.

## **8. Resourcing**

While there is no ignoring the rising demands on government budgets, it is possible to get a sense of what may or not be regarded as a 'significant' additional demand. In the context of the current budget, for example, the Government has allocated \$28m for school vouchers in 2024 (reduced from \$190m in 2022-23). This is a very small portion of the overall schools funding.

An additional allocation of \$28m a year (initially for the next three years) for quality, sequential and ongoing music education in NSW primary schools is a good starting point: this would see the upskilling of teachers supported through ongoing professional development, specialist teachers in regional offices, mentoring and other program support, and incentives for improved ITE.

## OUR SUBMISSION

### INTRODUCTION

#### Why music education?

We are conscious that the Labor Government's election commitment to *initiate a parliamentary inquiry into music education in the Legislative Council in its first term*, became a commitment to an inquiry on 'arts and music education' in the *Creative Communities* 10-year arts and culture policy. This is reflected in the Committee's Terms of Reference which embraces Arts education and training but retains a specific emphasis on music education and training.

Given this, and the expectation that the Committee may find itself grappling with what, at first glance, may appear competing claims for the different art forms, we felt it important to articulate just why an initial priority should be given to quality, sequential and ongoing music education.

We recognise that music is one of five artforms under the Arts umbrella in the Australian Curriculum: the four in addition to music are Visual Arts, Dance, Drama and Media Arts – though media arts is not currently covered in the NSW core curriculum. We have been told often of the 'thinning' of music education where the Arts are simply timetabled so in rotation; for example, visual arts this term, dance next, music after that, then drama. Such an approach will never deliver quality, sequential and ongoing music education, and is likely also a disservice to the other arts subjects.

Having made submissions to both the Federal and NSW processes in developing their respective cultural policies, we have been disappointed that quality music education was acknowledged but largely sidelined. It was heartening to hear the NSW Arts Minister Graham indicate that music education was a case of 'unfinished business' in the *creative Communities* report: 'Looking back it was probably the missing pillar of the report' [Hansard 15 May 2024].

We appreciate that our decision to concentrate (as a priority, not solely) on music – and more specifically on the primary years – may give rise to legitimate questions about the relationship of this endeavour to the broader claims of the Arts in education.

Given a shared belief in the inherent value of the Arts and the importance of the distinct strengths of the different artforms in education, we thought it important to briefly articulate our reasoning.

#### Music Education in the Primary Years: a compelling case

While our purpose and objectives are admittedly concentrated on music education in the primary years, we are confident that recognition of quality music education and its embrace within the core educational offerings for primary school students would not simply open the door to a richer education but that all the Arts would benefit from a rising tide.

That said, the case for music education is particularly strong for several reasons:

a. The solidity of the research base:

*For over a century, formal research has been conducted into the nature and impact of music education for children and adults. As an art form, music is exclusive to humans and there is now a large body of research into how music education plays an important and unique role in human and societal development. Prior to the 1990s, much of the research was based in the social sciences (i.e. education, health, and behavioural psychology) with numerous large longitudinal*



*studies highlighting the impact of music education on child development. With the advent of new technologies (fMRI, EEG, PET) the impacts of music education were re-examined and many of the findings prior to the 1990s were both validated and expanded. As we approach 30 years since the commencement of neuroscientific research into the impact of music education, there is a substantial and compelling research base to view music education as a tool to support cognitive and learning development for every child. [Collins et al, 2020]<sup>i</sup>*

- b. Music education can confidently speak – backed by the research - to all the major challenges confronting contemporary schooling: academic attainment; retention; engagement and participation; well-being; personal and social development.
- c. There are opportunities to showcase the transformative power of existing music programs in NSW schools where it has been embraced as a core educational offering.
- d. Music has been one of the foundations of schooling in Australia.

In looking forward, we should recognise that educators are better placed than at any other educational period to understand and deliver what constitutes quality music education.

While not looking back with some starry-eyed view of past practices, it is worth acknowledging the historical precedents which contemporary music education draws upon and extends:

*From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; secondary education developed in all state education systems during the 1910s and 1920s and specialist music teachers were being appointed to high schools by the 1930s. <sup>ii</sup> As recently as the late 1970s the Victorian Department of Education had a music branch of 107 staff and a supervisor of music. “We had music staff going out into schools as itinerant teachers assisting classroom teachers (generalists) to develop music programs and also doing teaching themselves.”<sup>iii</sup> Queensland is well known for the universal coverage that was provided by specialist music educators.*

- e. Music connects with parents and the community.

There is strong indicative, and anecdotal, evidence for parental support and increased parental engagement with their children’s schooling and schools. That said, there is a lack of more definitive research. We are currently working with our Knowledge Base Working Group to scope a research project in an effort to better understand parental attitudes to music learning and levels of support.

## **THE CORE ELEMENTS FOR DELIVERING QUALITY MUSIC EDUCATION**

### **1. An unequivocal priority commitment:**

*That every primary school student in NSW will have access to quality, sequential and ongoing music education with a guaranteed minimum of 60 minutes of music mandated per week with a teacher (generalist or specialist), confident and capable of delivering quality music learning.*

We would encourage the Committee to support a focus on primary schooling as the key priority in building system-wide access to quality music education over the medium term.

The primary years are the key for several reasons:

- Music is (and should be) a core component of the curriculum for every primary student. This is the period of education in which there is the strongest commitment of music learning for all students while noting in NSW this is extended to Stage 4 learning.
- While music remains an option for students in their secondary schooling, the appeal of opting to continue music and the value of what is on offer, inevitably depend on a strong grounding in, and a rewarding experience of, music in the primary years.
- A quality music education in the primary years builds demand for the option of further music learning, and expectations as to the quality of that learning, in secondary schools.
- While the high value of music experience and learning is evident in early childhood education (and significant developmentally), demand will again be shaped, in large part, by expectations of what awaits in starting school.
- Finally, optimising the learning, personal and social benefits of a quality music education demands starting early.

A commitment to quality music education in the primary years goes to the heart of equity in NSW schooling. Knowing what we know of the significant benefits of music education, the denial of access to this learning for a significant (but unknown) number of primary aged students results in enduring disadvantage within our education system that compounds over the duration of the child's educational lifetime.

We are proposing that the commitment proposed here be made concrete by explicitly requiring a **minimum of 60 minutes per week for every primary student** by a suitably qualified/competent teacher.

We have been influenced by similar developments in Queensland where the Government has committed to a minimum of 30 minutes per week. This is driving progress in that state including measures to tackle the supply of suitably qualified music educators.

## 2. A timeline for realising that commitment:

*That at least 50% of NSW government primary schools will be offering a quality music education by the beginning of the 2027 school year, at least 75% by 2029 and 100% of primary schools by 2031.*

There are currently 1601 government infant and primary schools in NSW and 67 central/community schools. These schools serve 476,861 children. The attendance rate for primary students is a sobering 87.2%.

We are arguing that it is not unreasonable to expect, as a minimum, that 800 primary schools will be delivering a quality music education by 2027. The absence of baseline data makes it difficult to accurately assess how ambitious this target might be. However, the reality is that this is no more than saying that over two years is being allowed to ensure at least 50% of schools are delivering what parents and the community would rightly expect to be already available under the Australian and NSW curricula.

## 3. The broader commitment:

*A commitment to quality, sequential and ongoing music education encompassing students from early childhood settings through to the end of their time in school (K-12)*

This serves two purposes: firstly, recognition that the primary school priority exists within the broader commitment; secondly, the importance of the terminology. The consistent use of quality, sequential and



ongoing when talking of music education makes clear expectations of a scaffolded program that builds from one stage to the next and is delivered across the entirety of the school year.

#### 4. Setting the Standard

*It is essential that there be an explicit standard as to what constitutes a 'quality, sequential and ongoing music education'.*

*The 'explainer' developed under the Music Education: Right from the Start banner provides a suitable, practical standard.*

This is the means for establishing a common understanding of what quality music education looks like to guide departmental decision-making and school leaders. It would be available to parents as a guide to what they might reasonably expect for their primary-aged children.

Moreover, it is a necessary condition for determining the *measures of success in music education* [TOR b.ix].

Music Education: Right from the Start recognised very early on, the need for a common understanding/standard as to what constitutes a quality music education. The 'explainer' was developed through consultations and workshopping with practitioners, researchers, and providers. It evolved through a number of iterations before being endorsed by our Advisory Group. It has been well accepted to date. The standard reflects expectations of a student's achievement levels.

[See Appendix 1: [Our understanding of what constitutes a quality music education.](#)]

#### 5. Developing a Music Education Plan for NSW Primary Schools

We are *not suggesting* a broad strategy but rather an 'operational' plan for the purpose of giving practical effect to the above commitment. As such it would include milestones, timeline and resourcing for an initial 3–5-year period.

The operational plan would not only enable clear priorities to be established but would also ensure that programs, and support, reflect the varying needs across primary schools (e.g. the different challenges faced by city and regional schools with appropriately tailored solutions).

The DoE would retain responsibility for developing the plan in collaboration with a Ministerially appointed advisory group with provision for further external advice/consultation as may be needed. The Advisory Group would consist of up to nine members drawn from music teachers, principals, music education providers, Teachers Federation, ITE institutions, conservatoriums, and philanthropy.

#### 6. The initial priorities:

There will be no surprises in this list: it reflects earlier inquiries (the National Inquiry [2005], the Victorian Inquiry [2013]) and more recent reports, including [Music Education: A Sound Investment](#) [2020] by Dr Anita Collins and her colleagues and published by Alberts | The Tony Foundation.

Familiarity does not lessen the critical necessity of tackling these barriers to quality music education.

We have attempted to be brief, knowing that further information can be provided by us if requested, and that these matters will almost certainly be addressed in more detail in others' submissions.

## **6.1 School leaders**

School leaders are critical to progressing access to quality music education. They ultimately decide what priority will be given, the approach taken, and the resources allocated (including teacher-time, professional development, timetabling, physical space, and use of external providers).

We use the term 'school leaders' rather than 'principals' to reinforce the notion that even the best music program is likely to fall over with a committed principal's departure unless it has been consciously developed and supported by the broader school team.

School leaders need to know that quality music education is a recognised priority, be encouraged to make the necessary commitment and supported in delivering it. For example:

- An unequivocal message should come directly to school leaders from the government (minister/s) and Department of Education (DoE) Executive that quality, sequential and ongoing music education is a foundational commitment for all primary schools, and principals who move to implement/improve programs in their schools will be backed.
- This should be accompanied by access to information on what constitutes a quality music education program (the standard), guidance and practical aids such as access to exemplar programs and school case studies, teaching resources, and program information on relevant music education providers.
- Options for upskilling and supporting their teachers' professional development including, for example: an assessment of current music skill levels among the school's teaching workforce (and ability to deliver the curriculum), and a plan to upskill and continually support teachers' professional development in music through access to appropriate professional learning, preferably on a whole of school basis.
- Ensuring the rules and procedures governing school leaders (e.g. KPIs; school reporting) actively encourage primary school leaders to introduce quality music across their school. We have received some indication that the current expectations and guidelines may in fact inhibit principals in this regard.
- Peer-to-peer support has been shown to be particularly effective in supporting school leaders to introduce new and/or improved programs.
- A resource allocation subject to a planned school program [see section 8 below].

We would suggest that a valuable step in progressing work among school leaders would be to establish a 'working group' of school leaders who have experience in introducing and sustaining quality music programs with a mandate to identify practical steps (including identifying barriers) for supporting school leaders. It should be a time-limited exercise with modest resourcing (eg secretariat support) and a remit to draw on external advice as appropriate. This work would contribute to development of the 'operational plan' proposed above. Their observations and recommendations should be widely circulated and publicly available.

## **6.2 Teaching workforce**

We are conscious of the substantial challenges in the supply, training, remuneration and professional support of the teaching workforce that confronts the NSW education system.

All of these issues are at play when it comes to the provision of quality music education. This has been a priority consideration in our own work. Here in NSW, we have been working closely with the NSW Teachers Federation and have been greatly encouraged by the explicit support being given to quality music education by the Federation's executive and senior officers. We also recognise the Media

Entertainment and Arts Alliance's (MEAA) interest in related workforce issues given the reliance on music teaching in providing a basic income for a significant number of their musician members. These matters have been the subject of our own discussions with the MEAA.

We are confident that there is a genuine willingness to address these matters creatively and constructively, and that doing so would have the additional benefit of addressing some of the existing workforce challenges.

### **Generalist & Specialist Educators**

There is an underlying issue warranting attention when it comes to music education. For many decades, there has been significant tension around the questions of what type of teacher should deliver music education in Australian primary schools.

At one end, we have some government education systems that have a historical preference for trained specialist music teachers in every school. Historically, Queensland, for example, has relied heavily on specialists and is returning to that course. At the other end, sit government education systems that have a history of generalist teachers delivering the full music curriculum across all primary school years. This has tended to be the case in NSW.

We have sought to address these matters in offering a framework to build the capacity of the teaching workforce to deliver quality, sequential and ongoing music education. The framework has been developed over some time in consultation with our advisers, working groups and key partners. This collective thinking is published as ***Backing Teachers: a framework to support quality music education*** [Attachment 2]. We regard all our work as iterative; this may not be the final word, but it does appear to go some way in offering a way forward.

One clear step we would encourage the Committee to consider is the progressive appointment of music specialists (initially for primary schools) to the Department of Education's regional offices. This would offer increased support for primary school leaders and their teaching staff, give practical effect to quality music education being a priority, and provide a feedback loop (grounded in practice and on-the-ground experience) in the evolution of the proposed operational plan.

The framework highlights the levels of skill and competence required at the different stages of learning to deliver quality music education. This has direct implications both for the initial training of primary teachers, and the upskilling of those already teaching.

### **Initial Teacher Education**

We commissioned a national review of [Initial Teacher Education](#) (ITE) [2022] which provides for sober reading. While pockets of excellence exist, the research ultimately concludes that diminishing levels of music education training within generalist primary teaching degrees leave most graduate teachers underprepared to meet the realities of the classroom and expectations of the curriculum.

The short story is that there is a desperate need to better prepare primary teachers to be confident and competent in teaching music. While this is an unavoidably longer-term undertaking, there are positive developments to draw on including new programs being offered at [Edith Cowan University](#) within their ITE offerings, and the prospects for micro-credentials in upskilling teachers. We understand that this is under consideration in Queensland as they seek to meet the gap in specialist music educators there.

For our part, we workshopped the report's findings to consider constructive solutions to addressing the challenges identified. These are presented in the Summary Report [Attachment 3] that accompanies the full Fading Notes report.

### **Professional Development**

**Professional development** in teaching music needs to be an even higher priority for in-service teachers given the time-lag in what might be expected of ITE, and the need for generalist classroom teachers in NSW to have access to PD that will lift their skills and confidence to a level required to deliver a quality music education as outlined in the *Backing Teachers* framework.

We expect PD to be covered in some detail in other submissions to the Committee. Given this we would simply suggest here that this requires increased incentives and support (including teacher release provisions) for relevant professional development at each stage of the teaching lifecycle but with an immediate priority for teachers in the first five years of service.

We would note further that this is an area in which the Department of Education has established relationships and experience (including with Music in Me, Musica Viva, the ACO, the Song Room and others). There are also valuable resources developed in NSW and inter-state (Victorian education, for example, has invested substantially in developing tools and resources for principals and teachers).

These foundations should make it possible to significantly scale-up (proven) professional development with the provision of additional funding (see below).

### **Accreditation**

There are several issues likely to be before the Committee around teacher supply, registration and employment including in the importance of teaching for professional musicians in underpinning their income. These issues warrant consideration.

Many of these are daily involved as tutors and conductors providing choral and instrumental tuition both for individual students and school ensembles. These activities vitally support the goals of the formal music curriculum by engaging students in disciplined music making. An opportunity exists to gain additional benefits from these programmes, perhaps through an accreditation process through which professional musicians receive professional learning in the developmental and pedagogical aims of the curriculum, fostering an environment where they can work more closely alongside teachers and school music specialists for the benefit of students.

Within the teaching profession itself, one related issue we would draw to the Committee's attention is the limitations on pathways to permanent employment for secondary trained music specialists working in primary schools. This has been raised in our own work. Essentially, qualified secondary music educators who so choose, or otherwise find themselves working in primary schools are currently not able to be accredited as primary educators. Consequently, they are left hanging. We have been told that in some instances, principals develop a 'work around' to secure these sought-after music specialists. Clearly, this is not a solution.

A solution to this issue, by allowing for appropriate recognition as an accredited primary school teacher, we are assured would be a significant advancement.

### **6.3 Facilities for Music Education**

Earlier this year we partnered with the South Australian Department of Education to survey primary teachers on music education in that state's schools. The [survey and its findings](#) are instructive.

One area canvassed was the facilities and resources available for music learning. SA is three years into its 10-year music education strategy and the picture there is relatively encouraging. The survey pointed to the need for adequate provision and maintenance of instruments particularly in the latter primary years. It also highlighted the need to ensure, wherever possible, the availability of dedicated learning space.

This should be a matter for timely consideration in NSW. The 2024 Budget committed \$5b to a building program for new and upgraded primary and high schools with an additional \$900m for maintenance and general school facility improvements. Given this significant investment in schools infrastructure, explicit provision should be included within the scope of works for flexible spaces that enhance music learning; a gym may be good space, but consideration will need to be given to acoustics, suitability for rehearsals and performance, storage for musical instruments, for example.

### **6.4 Curriculum**

Curriculum development and implementation is a lengthy, ongoing process overseen in this state by NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority). NSW is undertaking the "first comprehensive reform of the NSW curriculum in three decades". The Creative Arts K-6 syllabus has been subject to consultation with a view to its full implementation in 2027.

Fortunately, the Committee will have access to considerable information and advice on these developments. Others are better placed than us to provide this.

We would simply say that curriculum is clearly important in establishing the expectations and parameters for what is to be delivered in our primary classrooms. It can be a rather technical domain which is largely confined to discussions among education policymakers and educators themselves.

We understand, insofar as music is concerned, that the emerging Creative Arts K-6 curriculum is expected to be an improvement but is likely to fall short in ensuring sufficiently solid foundations for quality, sequential and ongoing music education. The syllabus does, however, afford guidance on the expected levels of achievement in music at each stage of learning. Our proposed 'standard' reflects these expectations and provides a higher degree of certainty as to expectations of what should be delivered than the curriculum is likely to provide.

While it may be a moot point as to whether the reforms will drive progress, it is clear that this need not be an impediment to making significant strides forwards in prioritising and delivering quality music education. The directions and recommendations outlined in this submission, for example, are not curriculum dependent.

## **7. Committing to measures of success**

The TOR (b (ix)) rightly point to the need for clear measures for success for music education specifically.

We would urge the committee to adopt two critical indicators of success over time:

- The number (%) of primary students who have access to quality, sequential and ongoing music education.

- The number of primary schools delivering music education which meets the agreed quality benchmarks; that is, the proposed standard.

The indicators, taken together, would ensure that equity in access to quality, sequential and ongoing music education can be tracked over time. This presumes that there is a process for regularly reporting on progress towards the targets by region and other relevant demographic identifiers.

Standard data in existing school reporting would greatly assist; for example: does your school have a music education program? Does the program engage all students? Does it meet expectations outlined in the 'standard'? what resources have been allocated to support music in the school? Is it delivered across the school year / every week of the school year?

The survey of primary teachers (noted above) is one step in establishing, maintaining and reporting baseline data.

Alberts commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to design the survey. Its value has been proven in South Australia, where it was run in partnership with the SA Department of Education and the Day Family Foundation with the final reports released this year. The survey is planned to be conducted in NSW by ACER during third term this year with a funding contribution from Sound NSW. This is a cooperative endeavour between the Department of Education, the NSW Teachers Federation and us.

While cognisant of the demands on teachers' time, we are progressing this work as quickly as possible with a view to having the findings available to the Committee within its reporting timeframe.

The survey has been designed for it to be repeated periodically (every 2-3 years) so as trends can be identified.

Gathering the data is one thing, analysing and reporting it is another. In this regard, we would suggest that the Secretary of the Department of Education report biennially on progress in implementing the quality music education plan. The report to the Minister should be publicly available.

## **8. Resourcing**

The NSW Budget 2024-25 allocates \$27.9 billion to education. The budget highlights the investment in education infrastructure and in the teaching workforce.

While there is no ignoring the rising demands on government budgets, it is possible to get a sense of what may or not be regarded as a 'significant' additional demand. In the context of the current budget, for example, the Government has allocated \$28m for school vouchers in 2024 (reduced from \$190m in 2022-23). This is a very small portion of the overall schools funding.

The point is simple:

- would an allocation of \$28m p.a. over ten years (indexed) to quality music education in NSW primary schools break the NSW budget? No.
- Would there potentially be significant savings through improved health and wellbeing, improved cognitive abilities and educational attainment over a lifetime (you get the drift)? Yes.
- Would there be a significant lift in participation, engagement, satisfaction, educational attainment, emotional and social development? All the evidence would say: a definite YES.

Of course, more work would be needed to flesh this out, but an additional allocation of \$28m a year (initially for the next three years) for quality, sequential and ongoing music education in NSW primary schools is a good starting point: this would see the upskilling of teachers supported through ongoing professional development, specialist teachers in regional offices, mentoring and other program support, incentives for improved ITE.

It needs to be stressed that this is additional funding. It is intended to optimise, not replace, existing resources including critical support for regional conservatoriums, current PD programs, in-school programs and the like. The proposed 'operational plan' would provide the vehicle for ensuring the combined resourcing goes where it is both needed and likely to have greater impact.

## CONCLUSION

We appreciate the opportunity this inquiry offers to present a concrete, achievable framework to significantly progress access to quality, sequential and ongoing music education in NSW primary schools. The potential benefits for primary students are well-known, it is our firm conviction that delivering on the promise is doable.

We would be happy to elaborate on matters raised in our submission and/or to provide additional information should that be helpful.

## ATTACHMENTS:

1. Our Understanding of Music Education.
2. Backing Teachers: a framework to support quality music education.
3. Fading Notes: the state of music education for the next generation of primary school teachers.

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<sup>i</sup> Collins, A., Dwyer, R., Date, A., *Music Education: A Sound Investment*, Alberts, Sydney, 2020

<sup>ii</sup> <http://music-ed.net/History/index.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE: Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools Melbourne — 27 March 2013: School Music Action Group