

**Submission
No 89**

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

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Submission: Art and Music Training and Education in NSW

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Introduction

Art and music education are fundamental components of a well-rounded educational experience, playing a vital role in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of students. These programs are instrumental in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Despite these benefits, public schools in the Leppington electorate of South-West Sydney face substantial challenges in delivering comprehensive arts and music education. This submission aims to shed light on the current deficiencies in our electorate's arts and music programs and emphasises the urgent need for targeted investments, including the establishment of a specialised high school arts school or unit, the introduction of compulsory music education, and the provision of necessary musical instruments and resources.

Current Implementation and Statistics

There is a notable disparity in music education and opportunities among public primary and high schools in different regions of Sydney—specifically, between eastern, northern, and south-western areas.

- Eastern and Inner Sydney: Schools in this region generally have better access to music education resources and programs. They often benefit from partnerships with local arts organisations and have more funding for extracurricular music activities. Schools in the eastern suburbs also tend to have more specialised music teachers and facilities.
- North Sydney: Like the eastern region, northern Sydney schools usually have substantial music education programs. These schools often participate in regional music festivals and competitions, providing students with more performance opportunities. They also have access to private funding and community support, which enhance their music education offerings.
- South-West Sydney: Schools in South-Western Sydney face more challenges in providing comprehensive music education. They often have limited funding and fewer specialised music teachers. This results in fewer opportunities for students to engage in music activities, both within and outside the school curriculum. The disparity is also evident in the availability of instruments and facilities, with many schools in this region relying on outdated or insufficient resources.

In the Leppington electorate, the implementation of music and arts programs in public schools is inconsistent and often inadequate. Primary schools generally offer only basic creative arts programs, lacking the structured and comprehensive music education that is essential for student development. This inconsistency is starkly illustrated by the fact that only a few schools have established music programs. Currently, only Denham Court Public School in the Leppington electorate and Edmondson Park and Cecil Hills Public Schools in adjoining electorates boast established school bands, highlighting a significant disparity in access to music education across the region. This disparity limits students' opportunities to engage with and benefit from music education, a crucial component of a well-rounded education.

Moreover, the limited availability of music education deprives many students of the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that such programs provide. Research consistently shows that music education enhances students' abilities in areas such as language development, mathematical skills, and overall academic performance. Without adequate music programs, students in the Leppington electorate are at a distinct disadvantage compared to their peers in regions where music education is more robustly implemented.

Furthermore, the inconsistency in program availability points to a broader issue of resource allocation and prioritisation within the educational system. Schools with established bands and music programs often rely on external funding and community support, which are not uniformly available across all schools in the State. This disparity underscores the need for a more equitable distribution of resources and a stronger commitment to incorporating comprehensive music education into the curriculum for all schools in the region and broadly, within NSW.

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The Victorian Model

Victoria's music education program is a standout example of comprehensive and equitable access to music education for students. The program integrates music into both primary and secondary curriculum, offers a robust Instrumental Music Program, and includes classroom music lessons. During Daniel Andrews' tenure as Premier, funding was significantly increased, leading to the launch of the "Music Education Strategy" in 2015, which provided professional development for teachers, grants for instruments, and initiatives targeting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These efforts resulted in more students participating in music programs, improved quality of music education, and greater equity across the state. Victoria's approach has cemented its reputation as a leader in music education, delivering high-quality musical experiences to all students.

'Fading Notes: The State of Music Education for the Next Generation of Primary Teachers' Report Findings

The report "Fading Notes: The State of Music Education for the Next Generation of Primary Teachers," authored by Dr. Rachel Hocking and Dr. Anita Collins identifies several significant deficiencies in the provision of music education within primary teaching degrees in Australia. Key issues include the minimal credit point value assigned to music education, often integrated into broader arts units, resulting in insufficient depth and scope of musical instruction. On average, only eight hours of compulsory music education are provided, a dramatic 53% decrease since 2009. Additionally, 70% of universities teach and assess music as an integrated discipline with other arts, which undermines the development of specific musical skills. The lack of prior significant music education experience among primary teaching students further exacerbates the problem, leaving them underprepared and lacking confidence and competence to teach music effectively. The decline in the provision of dedicated music education units and the reduction in practical teaching opportunities during training contribute to the inadequate preparation of new teachers for delivering quality music education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Need for a Dedicated Arts School or Unit

The absence of a dedicated arts school or unit in the Leppington electorate represents a significant gap in the educational landscape. A specialised arts school or unit would serve as an educational and cultural hub, providing students with the opportunity to explore and develop their creative talents. This is particularly important in a multicultural community like Leppington, where diverse cultural expressions through creative arts can enhance community cohesion and individual self-expression.

A dedicated arts school or unit would offer a structured curriculum tailored to nurturing artistic skills across various disciplines, including visual arts, music, dance, and drama. This facility would serve as a centre for artistic excellence, providing students with access to specialised educators, necessary music and art equipment, and ample performance spaces. Additionally, it would have the capacity to offer after-school programs. By investing in such a facility, the government would be making a long-term commitment to the educational and cultural enrichment of our community.

2. Enhancing Compulsory Music Education

Research consistently shows that music education offers numerous benefits, such as improved cognitive abilities, better academic performance, and enhanced emotional and social development. Despite these advantages, many schools in the Leppington electorate lack comprehensive music programs. Elevating music education from its basic form to a more structured and compulsory program in all public schools would ensure every student can develop these essential skills. This initiative would help bridge the gap between different socioeconomic groups, offering equal opportunities for all students to benefit from music education.

Compulsory and enhanced music education would provide every student, regardless of background or economic status, with the advantages of music instruction. This approach would encourage discipline, teamwork, and creativity among students, preparing them for a diverse range of future opportunities. Integrating a more structured music education into the core curriculum would also help identify and nurture young talents who might otherwise go unnoticed. The long-term benefits include a more culturally vibrant community and a generation of students who are well-rounded and culturally aware.

3. Provision of Instruments and Resources

A major barrier to effective music education in our region is the lack of musical instruments and other necessary resources. Many students in the Leppington electorate express a strong desire to learn to play an instrument but are hindered by the unavailability of instruments in their schools. Investing in musical instruments and providing adequate training for educators are essential steps to ensure that all students can participate in and benefit from music education. This investment is crucial for nurturing the next generation of musicians and culturally aware citizens.

Providing schools with a sufficient number of musical instruments and the resources to maintain them is essential for a successful music education program. In addition, it is important to offer professional development opportunities for music teachers to ensure they are equipped with the latest pedagogical techniques and knowledge. By addressing these needs, we can create an inclusive environment where all students have the chance to explore their musical interests and talents. Ensuring access to quality music education resources will also promote equity, giving all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, the opportunity to experience the joys and benefits of music education.

4. Consider the Victorian Model in NSW

To enhance music education in NSW, key elements from the Victorian model should be considered. Firstly, introducing a Music Education Strategy similar to Victoria's would support professional development for music teachers, ensuring they have the skills and resources needed to deliver high-quality education. Secondly, increasing funding dedicated to music education would enable more schools to develop and expand their programs. Additionally, providing grants for schools to purchase musical instruments would enhance classroom and instrumental music programs. Finally, targeted initiatives to ensure equity and access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds would help bridge the gap and ensure all students benefit from comprehensive music education. By implementing these strategies, NSW can offer a richer, more equitable music education experience for all students.

5. Implementing Recommendations of the Fading Notes Report

The recommendations outlined below need to be considered for implementation to address the deficiencies found in the report:

- a. Extend Music Education in Primary Teaching Degrees - Increase the length, scope, quality, and credit point value of music education within primary teaching degrees.
- b. Enhance Practicum Experience - Ensure primary teaching students observe and participate in music lessons during their practicum to boost practical skills and confidence.
- c. K-12 Teaching Degrees with Music Specialisations - Advocate for K-12 teaching degrees that include music specialisations to create clear pathways and qualifications for aspiring primary music specialists.
- d. In-Service Music Education Courses - Develop free in-service music education courses for both primary teaching students and early career teachers to provide ongoing professional development.
- e. Support for Primary Music Lecturers - Provide more support for primary music lecturers through the formation of an association or a national award to enhance the quality of music education delivery.
- f. Raise Awareness - Highlight the distinction between music specialists and arts specialists, and the current lack of fair access to quality music teaching to drive systemic change and improve music education outcomes for Australian primary school students.

By looking to implement these recommendations, we can work towards a robust and effective music education system that benefits all primary school students in Australia.

6. Social Infrastructure around Western Sydney Airport

Western Sydney Airport's social infrastructure must include dedicated performance spaces to provide students with ample opportunities to perform, learn, and grow. As this area evolves into a bustling new metropolis, it is crucial to incorporate cultural spaces that enrich community life and support the arts. Music education in particular benefits significantly from having accessible venues for practice and performance, allowing young talent to thrive. These performance spaces would not serve just for music but all performing arts, ensuring enrichment, artistic growth and development broadly. By integrating such facilities, we will ensure that the cultural fabric of Western Sydney is vibrant and dynamic, creating a supportive environment for the next generation of artists and performers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is imperative that the government addresses the significant gaps in arts and music education in the Leppington electorate and indeed across the whole of NSW. By establishing a dedicated arts school or unit in South-West Sydney, making music education compulsory, and providing the necessary resources and spaces, we can ensure that all students have access to a well-rounded education that includes the invaluable benefits of arts and music. Such initiatives will not only enhance the academic and personal development of students but also contribute to the cultural richness of our community.

Investing in arts and music education is an investment in the future of our children and our community. These programs have the power to transform lives, foster creativity, and build a more cohesive and vibrant society.

I urge the government to consider these recommendations and take decisive action to support arts and music education in the Leppington electorate.

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Government Whip