

Submission  
No 37

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

**Organisation:** The Association of Independent Schools of NSW

**Date Received:** 25 July 2024

---



# Submission from the Association of Independent Schools of NSW

**Inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales**

25 July 2024



## **Submission from the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW)**

This submission has been prepared by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) and reflects the views of the diverse range of independent schools. Photographs used throughout the submission are of students in NSW independent schools, provided by schools for use in AISNSW publications.

We would be pleased to elaborate on any aspects of this submission as required.

For further enquiries or additional information relating to this submission, please contact AISNSW Office of the Chief Executive,

# Introduction

**The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW)**, as the peak body representing the Independent schools' sector in New South Wales welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on the NSW Inquiry into arts and music education and training in NSW.

The NSW Independent school sector is vibrant and diverse. In 2024, there were 426 Independent schools across 563 campuses, educating 237,000 children (19% of all students), employing a workforce of 38,000 people and providing families with choice in schooling options.

Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or educate specific cohorts of students such as those with disabilities or students at risk of disengaging from education, or those seeking careers in the creative arts. Independent schools include:

- Schools of educational philosophies, such as Montessori and Rudolf Steiner schools.
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as Grammar schools.
- Boarding schools, and Schools that enrol significant numbers of international students.
- Schools with religious beliefs, including Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian schools, and schools of Christian denominations, such as Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist, and Uniting Church schools.
- Community schools, including those in Aboriginal communities.
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students at risk or students with disabilities.
- Schools that provide a specific focus on creative arts education.

Independent schools in NSW are registered with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). Most are established and governed independently on an individual school basis. Some Independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, like those within the Anglican Schools Corporation and Seventh-day Adventist systems.

Almost three quarters (70%) of NSW Independent schools serve low to medium socio-economic communities while 37 per cent of schools are located outside metropolitan Sydney. In addition to having low fees, almost half of all NSW Independent schools are small schools, educating fewer than 200 students. Thirty-seven percent of Independent schools are located outside of metropolitan Sydney.



## Benefits of arts and music education

Music, visual arts, dance and drama are fundamental forces of the human experience. These forms of artistic expression serve many purposes in the lives of all human beings. They act as a universal language, capable of expressing and evoking deep emotions that transcend linguistic barriers. Across all cultures, arts and music play a crucial role in defining and preserving cultural identities, reflecting the traditions, values and histories of diverse communities. Beyond entertainment, arts and music aid in healing and enhancing wellbeing. Engagement in creative arts stimulates cognitive development, fosters creativity, triggers imagination, inspires innovation and offers significant economic benefits globally. Art and music mark historical and societal milestones, capturing time and documenting social changes, events and movements.



Arts and music education plays a crucial role in fostering holistic development, nurturing creativity and preparing students to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Having opportunities to engage in arts and music education helps students develop essential skills, learn about their world, promote personal growth and express themselves. These are all key measures of success for effective arts education in NSW schools. drama and dance play a pivotal role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, supporting wellbeing and emotional intelligence among students. All NSW students should have access to good quality arts and music education in schools.

The mandatory inclusion of creative arts in the New South Wales (NSW) curriculum reflects the common shared understanding in contemporary society that the holistic development of school students extends beyond academic proficiency. While all schools in NSW are required to teach creative arts, the experience of students varies across schools and systems. Many NSW schools choose to prioritise arts and/or music education for students and provide opportunities to engage in creative arts beyond the classroom. Some NSW schools are also operated for the main purpose of supporting students explore creative arts passions and empower them with the skills and knowledge to pursue a career in the arts.

There are many different examples of excellent practice and innovative success stories in NSW Independent schools. Operating to meet the needs of communities, they have the autonomy to deliver

curriculum content in ways that best meet the needs of their students, including the delivery of creative arts and music. Beyond the curriculum, a reason many parents choose independent schools is because of the range of co-curricular opportunities available to students.

### *CASE STUDY 1: THE RICHARD GILL SCHOOL*

The Richard Gill School is a primary school established with a mission to integrate music and arts education into the mainstream curriculum. The school aims to foster creativity, critical thinking and holistic development among students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, using the transformative power of arts education. Students are supported to excel academically but also develop their creative expression and appreciation for the arts as part of a well-rounded learning environment. The school collaborates with local museums, theatres, music conservatoria and artists providing students with unique opportunities to engage directly with professional artists and organisations. The school regularly hosts concerts, exhibitions and workshops to showcase student talent, engaging families and the local community their innovative teaching methods.

## Communication and Social Skills

Engaging in the creative arts offers students an avenue for self-expression and exploration, particularly beneficial for those who find verbal and written communication challenging. Creative arts education improves verbal and non-verbal communication skills; whether expressing emotions through dance or discussing artistic choices in group critiques, students refine their ability to convey ideas clearly and provide constructive feedback to their peers.



Creative arts education not only aids emotional understanding and expression but also deepens interpersonal connections. Through these experiences, students cultivate self-awareness, discovering and define their identities, and foster empathy and understanding of others. Engagement in group creative



activities enhances artistic expression and equips students with essential social skills vital for personal and professional growth. Participation in drama productions, bands, choirs and collaborative art projects enhance students' social skills, fostering teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills. In the performing arts, students collaborate with each other as they take on roles of actors, dancers, musicians and technicians to produce performances and exhibitions. Students learn to coordinate effectively, respect each other's roles and contribute to the collective success of the production. Assuming leadership roles such as director, choreographer or lead artist cultivates leadership skills and accountability. Students learn to take initiative, make informed decisions and manage responsibilities within a collaborative framework, preparing them for future leadership roles both within and beyond the school.

## Cognitive Development

Engaging in creative arts education fosters cognitive development by stimulating critical thinking and problem-solving. In visual arts, students tackle challenges like achieving specific effects with different materials or composing balanced artworks, learning to be resilient and being able to adapt quickly as they experiment and adjust their approaches. Research indicates a strong connection between music and mathematics as rhythms, harmonies and scales rely on mathematical patterns and ratios. Additionally, students suggest that learning music and another language involve similar cognitive skills and processes.



Analysing artworks and performances requires evaluating artistic choices, enhancing their ability to critique and make informed judgements across different contexts. Creative arts education also nurtures innovation by prompting students to explore unconventional ideas and to take calculated risks, developing innovative thinking as they plan solutions to creative challenges.

## *CASE STUDY 2: KEMPSEY ADVENTIST SCHOOL*

Kempsey Adventist School is an independent Kindergarten to Year 12 school on the North Coast of NSW. The school's visual arts program is particularly noteworthy for its comprehensive curriculum and commitment to nurturing artistic talent among its students. The visual arts program at Kempsey Adventist School covers all grades in primary and secondary, focusing on creativity and technical skills in painting, drawing, sculpture and digital art. Blending theory with practical learning to encourage critical thinking and artistic expression. Students exhibit their work at school and local public events. Beyond the regular visual arts program, the school offers a Certificate III in Visual Arts, accredited under the Australian Skills Framework. The course provides senior students with vocational training in foundational and elective units such as digital media, art history, with hands-on studio sessions and industry partnerships. Together, these school-based initiatives create a dynamic arts environment, preparing students for careers in the arts and creative fields.

### **Wellbeing**

Creative arts education plays a pivotal role in fostering emotional development among students enabling them to deepen their understanding of themselves and others, building self-esteem and giving students a sense of accomplishment that helps them tackle new challenges confidently. Positive feedback on their performances or artwork reinforces their belief in their abilities, helping them face academic and personal challenges with resilience and optimism. Creative arts education encourages students to take calculated risks and explore new techniques, teaching them to articulate ideas, engage audiences and present their talents, equipping them with essential skills for success beyond school.

Creative arts education cultivates empathy by encouraging students to interpret and create art that represents diverse perspectives and experiences. This process also develops an appreciation for different cultural narratives, histories and social issues, promoting a broader global awareness and interconnectedness among students. Through the creative arts, students learn to understand human experiences better, developing their personal and social skills need to contribute as global citizens.

### **Cultural Understanding**

Creative arts education serves as a powerful conduit for enhancing cultural awareness among students. Through the study of various disciplines from around the globe, students gain a deep appreciation for the rich diversity of human expression. This exposure fosters respect for cultural differences while highlighting universal themes and values that unite people across different societies. Additionally, creative arts education plays a pivotal role in preserving cultural heritage by teaching students about traditional art forms, rituals and narratives passed down through generations. By engaging with these cultural artifacts, students contribute to the ongoing preservation and continuation of cultural identities and legacies. The representation of diverse cultures is a pivotal aspect of creative arts education. Through creative arts, schools celebrate and embrace the multiculturalism of their local context creating learning environments where every student's heritage is valued and respected.

Creative arts education opens a window into the rich and diverse cultures, histories and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Students are encouraged to deepen their connections with their peers and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through art, music and dance while exploring their own cultural identities. This exploration develops their understanding of cultural diversity within their classrooms, schools and community. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, creative

arts help cultivate pride in their cultural backgrounds and maintain robust connections to their unique culture and history. These connections are vital for nurturing their cultural resilience and strength in today's world.

### *CASE STUDY 3: GIANT STEPS SYDNEY*

Giant Steps Sydney is an independent Special school for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Sydney. Central to its holistic education approach is their specialised creative arts program designed to enhance communication skills, emotional expression and social interaction among students with ASD. Led by qualified teachers and therapists, the program integrates visual arts, music, drama and sensory-based activities tailored to individual needs. Giant Steps Sydney's creative arts program exemplifies best practices in using the arts to support the holistic development of students with autism spectrum disorder. By integrating creative expression with therapeutic interventions and academic goals, the school empowers students to thrive academically, socially and emotionally in a supportive and inclusive environment.



## Career Opportunities in arts and music

Providing meaningful opportunities for students and schools to engage with industry, universities and other post-school education options can provide more innovative and enriched learning. Creative arts education not only fosters artistic expression but also cultivates valuable skills that are highly applicable to diverse career opportunities in today's global economy. Creative industries that include design, media, entertainment and advertising, represent significant economic sectors worldwide. Arts and music education equips students with practical technical skills such as drawing, painting, digital design, music composition and theatrical production, which are in demand across various professional fields. Creative arts education nurtures entrepreneurial capabilities by fostering creativity, innovation and marketing skills. Students learn to develop and promote their artistic ideas, manage projects effectively and navigate professional networks, preparing them for careers as independent artists, designers and entrepreneurs. Creative arts education emphasises adaptability and interdisciplinary thinking, essential qualities in a rapidly evolving job market. Students integrate diverse skills and knowledge from different fields, preparing them for dynamic and multifaceted career paths not only within the creative industries but also in other sectors requiring innovative solutions and creative problem-solving.

### *CASE STUDY 4: THE AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING ARTS GRAMMAR SCHOOL*

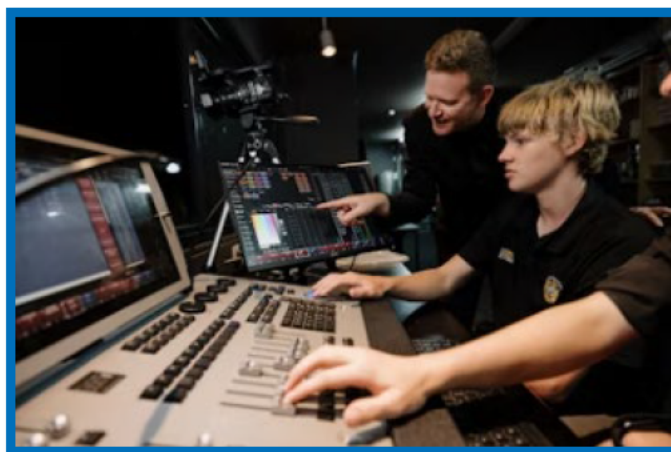


The Australian Performing Arts Grammar School caters for students passionate about pursuing careers in dance, drama, music and other performing arts disciplines. The school's creative arts education programs integrate performing arts education with academic subjects, so students are equipped with the practical skills and performance experience to seek career opportunities in the entertainment industry. Students have access to masterclasses with industry professionals and performance opportunities in the real world.



In NSW, stage management and entrepreneurial opportunities can be found at the secondary school level. In performing arts schools these are typically a key part of students' learning, but they are also evident in mainstream schools that offer regular concerts, musicals, theatre productions and art exhibitions by students. Just like the professional world, for many independent schools, technical and stage management skills are vital to the success of their productions and exhibits.

#### *CASE STUDY 5: ST PHILIP'S CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, NEWCASTLE*



St Philip's Christian College, Newcastle has a strong emphasis on creative arts education for students, offering comprehensive programs that develop artistic expression and technical proficiency among its students. Integrated into the College's creative arts programs is its Certificate III in Screen and Media, tailored for senior students aspiring to enter the film, television and digital media industries. Students gain hands-on experience in video production, editing, sound design and digital storytelling supported by local media professionals and industry professionals.

AISNSW is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), registered with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). Students in 133 NSW Independent schools study VET courses through the AISNSW RTO. Currently, the AISNSW RTO has CUA31120 Certificate III in Visual Arts and CUA31020 Certificate III in Screen and Media on our Scope of Registration. These courses provide a nationally recognised qualification, along with HSC unit credit, for the High School Certificate credential.

The Visual Arts qualification reflects the role of students who are developing a range of visual arts skills and who may take responsibility for their own outputs in work and learning. It applies to work in different visual arts, craft and design environments. Practice at this level is underpinned by the application of introductory art theory and history. Post school job roles that relate to this qualification include Ceramics Studio Assistant, Community Theatre Assistant and Arts, Crafts or Design practitioner. These VET courses also provide pathways to other visual arts, craft and design job roles.

The Screen and Media qualification reflects the role of individuals who use basic skills and knowledge for work in skilled assistant operator roles in the screen, media and entertainment industries. It applies to work in interactive digital media, film and television, radio, lighting and sound, content creation and technical broadcasting environments. Post-school job roles that relate to this qualification include editing assistant, assistant content creator, assistant sound technician, assistant audio visual technician, assistant radio producer, junior animator, camera assistant and technical production assistant. Students work under direction, using some discretion and judgement and may provide technical advice and support to a team.

## CASE STUDY 6: THE MCDONALD COLLEGE




McDonald College is a co-educational Kindergarten to Year 12 school for students with a keen interest in performing arts education, and those with aspirations of a career in the arts. Beyond the traditional performing arts disciplines, the school offers a specialised Technical Production Stream. Students passionate about the behind-the-scenes roles crucial for the success of live performances learn practical skills in technical production including lighting design, sound engineering, stage management, set design, and multimedia production. Students gain valuable insights into current industry practices through industry professional partnerships, internships and hands-on practical experiences with theatres and production companies. Through this stream students are supported to gain the industry experience and build professional networks that help them become job ready.

### Workforce Challenges

In NSW, the current teacher shortage has emerged as a multifaceted challenge impacting all school sectors. The shortage is also more acute in particular subject areas, including a noticeable shortfall in the availability of qualified music teachers. This shortage makes it difficult for some schools to provide comprehensive music education, particularly in some regional areas. Schools unable to recruit or retain qualified music teachers must instead use substitute teachers not trained in music education. In some cases, this specialist shortage also limits the availability of co-curricular activities, reducing opportunities for students to pursue music education.

Initial Teacher Education programs for primary school teachers require graduates to be generalists. While some teachers may choose to pursue additional studies to specialise in music or creative arts education,



this is not the expectation for Primary teachers in general. Lacking specialised knowledge in music or creative arts, primary teachers may feel less confident in teaching these subjects, particularly in stage 3. With the introduction of the new Kindergarten to Year 6 Creative Arts Syllabus in 2025, there is a clear need for tailored professional learning programs to support primary teachers enhance their knowledge, skills and confidence in effectively teaching each creative arts discipline from Kindergarten to Year 6. Proactively addressing this challenge will empower teachers to deliver high-quality creative arts education, providing opportunities for all students to develop creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills through hands-on artistic experiences appropriate to their age and stage.