

Submission
No 56

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

Name: Louise Barkl

Date Received: 25 July 2024

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To the Hon. Jacqui Munro MLC and members of the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW

As a music educator with more than 40 years experience in schools, leadership roles in arts organisations and the NSW Department of Education, and now as a Consultant in Arts and Education, I would like to make the following observations and recommendations to the Joint Select Committee on arts and music education and training in NSW as they relate to **primary school classroom music education**:

Observations from throughout my career:

1. There has been a steady decline in the quality and amount of time devoted to music education in initial teacher education (ITE) for primary school teachers.
2. The status of music has decline throughout my career, with literacy and numeracy being the main focus for decades without recognising the benefits of a rich music education to the development of the whole child, including in literacy and numeracy.
3. The confidence and competence of general classroom teachers to teach music has steadily declined. This is directly related to the decline in music in ITE as well as the status of music in primary education.
4. The NSW Department of Education has never recognised role of the music specialist in primary schools despite many schools engaging such teachers on a temporary basis. At the same time, many independent and Catholic schools regularly engaged music teachers in ongoing roles.
5. Education authorities, arts organisation, regional conservatoriums and teacher associations provide rich teaching and learning opportunities for students and professional learning for teachers. However, their impact is patchy at best.
6. Syllabuses rely on teachers developing deep subject matter and related pedagogy in order to implement effectively. The lack of music in ITE and no mandatory professional learning for teachers has resulted in a wide disparity with how the music syllabus is implemented, leading to inequity, especially in regional and remote areas and in schools with a low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) and therefore more complex learning needs.
7. Few primary schools are able to provide a high quality, ongoing and sequential music education K to year 6.
8. Often schools and their communities see co-curricular initiatives such as instrumental music programs, band programs, choirs and the school musical as being more important than high quality classroom music learning. Such programs should complement but never replace high quality classroom music programs that meet syllabus requirements.
9. There are outstanding teachers of music in some NSW primary schools, both specialist music teachers and general classroom teachers with suitable pre and in-service music training that could mentor teachers in their own schools, others schools in their community and beyond.

Recommendations:

1. Schools need clear guidelines as to what constitutes a high quality, ongoing and sequential music education. A quality framework could provide this.
2. Teacher confidence and competence to teach music can be lifted through teacher mentoring. Results will be achieved in the very short term, for example, over two school terms.
3. Harness the skills, knowledge and experience of teachers who are teaching music well in order to mentor others. Many of these teachers are working casually, are nearing retirement or have recently retired. Obstacles need to be overcome to allow these teachers to mentor the current primary teacher workforce.
4. The tertiary sector needs to address the decline in music in ITE for primary teachers to ensure their graduates are equipped to teach music when they enter the profession.
5. Arts organisations need to be encouraged and supported to develop and deliver relevant music education programs that meet the needs of schools to support delivery of a high quality school music program.
6. NSW needs to recognise the position of specialist music teacher in primary schools, allowing such teachers to gain ongoing roles to build the quality of music teaching and learning in schools.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss any ideas presented here.

Regards

Louise Barkl

Consultant, Arts and Education