

**Submission
No 94**

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

Organisation: Australian Education Union - NSW Teachers Federation Branch

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**AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION BRANCH**

SUBMISSION TO

NSW JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

ON

Arts and Music Education

Authorised by

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General Secretary
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31 July 2024

Introduction

The Australian Education Union NSW Teachers Federation Branch (the Federation) represents teachers, executive teachers and principals in NSW public preschools, infants, primary, secondary and central schools, schools for specific purposes and teachers working in consultant/advisory positions within the NSW Department of Education (the Department). Teachers employed by TAFE NSW and Corrective Services NSW are also represented by the Federation. The current financial membership totals more than 60,000 practising teachers and student members.

The Federation thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission on this important matter.

The Federation's comments will focus largely on addressing 1.b) of the Terms of Reference in relation to music education for reasons which will be explained below.

At the outset, the Federation wishes to note the work of *Music Education: Right from the Start*,¹ and in particular, state our support for their vision that "all NSW primary school students need, and have a right to a **quality, sequential and ongoing** music education."

With respect particularly to 1.b (i) and 1.b (iii) of the Terms of Reference, the Federation sees the barriers to achieving such a vision grouped as follows:

1. Competing curriculum priorities

In NSW, syllabuses are developed within the following Key Learning Areas (KLAs) in primary K-6.²

- English
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Human Society and its Environment (HSIE)
- Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)
- Creative Arts
- Languages

Music falls into the Creative Arts KLA, alongside Visual Arts, Drama and Dance.³

Schools are required to have educational programs for each of the six KLAs.

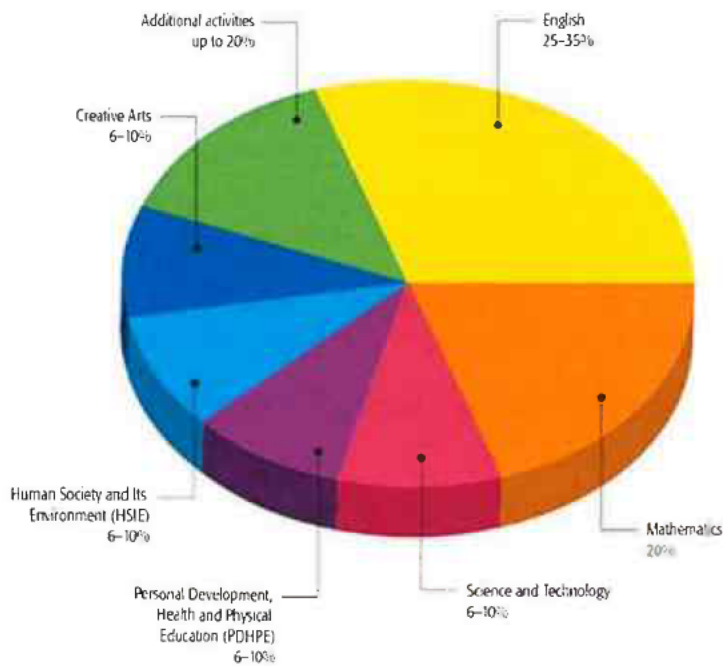
As the Committee would appreciate, delivery of lesson covering each of the KLAs is a complex process and results in busy week for students and teachers in a primary school.

NESA recommends the following breakdown as a "guideline" only.

¹ [Music Education: Right from the Start](#)

² [K-6 curriculum requirements | NSW Education Standards](#)

³ [Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus \(2006\) | NSW Education Standards](#)



The objectives of the current Creative Arts K-6 syllabus states that in Music, “students will develop knowledge, skills and understanding:

- in performing music of different styles and from different times and cultures by singing, playing and moving using musical concepts
- in organising sound into musical compositions using musical concepts
- in listening to and discussing their own music and that of others.”

Federation draws the Committee’s attention to the fact that a new Creative Arts K-6 curriculum⁴ has recently been released for familiarisation and is due for implementation in 2027.

While it remains a mandatory syllabus as before, there are no mandatory hours of study prescribed.

The new syllabus states that, in addition to outcomes in Dance, Drama and Visual Arts, in Music:

“Students engage in Performing, Listening and Composing as interrelated practices in Music. They develop deeper knowledge, understanding and skills as they apply their learning to inform and enrich their music experiences. Music may be performed, accessed and composed through the senses.

Performing involves singing, moving, playing and using listening skills. Students have opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in performing, using the elements of music to communicate musical ideas. They engage with music from various cultures and contexts, performing repertoire by others and their own compositions. Students develop an understanding of the roles of performer and composer.

⁴ [Creative Arts K-6 - Course overview | NSW Curriculum | NSW Education Standards Authority](#)

Listening involves students using aural awareness to experience sound. Students engage with repertoire and music styles from various cultures and contexts. They use listening skills to explore how the elements of music are used in their own singing, moving and playing, and in the music they experience.

Composing involves organising sound by using the elements of music to convey musical ideas. Students use performing and listening skills as they explore and compose music through singing and playing. They have opportunities to imitate, improvise and arrange the music of others and create their own compositions. Students use symbols, graphic notation or staff notation to represent musical ideas.

The Creative Arts K–6 Music focus area builds the foundational understandings which are further developed in the Music 7–10 Syllabus (2024)."

The final sentence above is critical, as it identifies the importance of **sequential** music education; ie. It recognises that secondary students will be required to have attained particular competencies at the primary school level (at least by the end of Stage 3) before moving onto the 7-10 syllabus, which contains a mandatory course in Stage 4 with 100 hours of indicative study.

The only way to achieve that is to have minimum mandated hours of regularly timetabled music education in primary schools, taught by a qualified music teacher.

The 2019 report "Music Education: A Sound Investment"⁵ by Dr Anita Collins et al identified 8 factors considered to be "core components of a quality music education", including, that the education must be "ongoing, active, structured and sequential".

Another important consideration is the extent to which curriculum breadth and depth is able to be achieved whilst ever high stakes testing of students is imposed on schools. The Federation's view of NAPLAN is on the public record, but it is worthwhile placing here a quote from a 2019 media release in which former President Maurie Mulheron said: "NAPLAN is a crude, unsophisticated and damaging test, developed by commercial interests, that has come to dominate the classroom experiences of young people and their teachers. In doing so, the test has supplanted the syllabuses, led to a narrowing of the curriculum, privileged low level drills over complex skills, created a test cramming industry, drowned schools in unreliable data, and, arguably, led to a decline in student outcomes."⁶

The ongoing phony phonics "wars" are another consideration, as increasingly, mandated testing is imposed on students at younger and younger ages, placing pressure on schools and teachers to further deprioritise other parts of the curriculum such as the Creative Arts.

The heavy focus on "literacy" and "numeracy" lessons and "explicit teaching" of such also ignores the fact that these skills can be, and are being, taught across the curriculum, and that music education in particular, supports the process from verbal language to reading, writing and understanding language.

2. Qualifications

The vast majority of Federation members who are working as primary school teachers have attained what we are going to describe here as "generalist" university qualifications in Primary Teaching. They are expected to be able to teach the K-6 syllabuses in the KLAs outlined above.

⁵ [Alberts Music-Education-Report A4.pdf](#)

⁶ [NAPLAN must go \(nswtf.org.au\)](#)

There are a very small number of exceptions to this, including, for example, teacher-librarians in primary schools (and secondary schools) who require both a degree in Primary Teaching AND a Masters of Librarianship in order to be appointed to a permanent teacher-librarian position in a NSW public primary school.

A small minority of Federation members who work in primary schools have attained university qualifications in a second (or more) teaching method, including music education. Such dual qualified teachers are uniquely qualified to teach music to primary school students but are rare, and the current staffing procedures do not require the acquisition of such. Where they exist, they are likely to be in precarious employment, subject to the whim of the school principal.

Those people who are musically-inclined with a desire to become a school teacher, more often than not, train as secondary school music teachers to increase their chance of a permanent position in a NSW public school.

No such barriers exist for the employment of trained music educators in the Catholic and independent school systems.

To be clear, the Federation does not advocate for the removal of the requirement for a primary teacher to hold a primary teacher degree, and the same for secondary. There are however, other pathways that assist with creating a workforce of qualified music educators in primary schools, including one previously canvassed in the former NSW government's 2013 "Great Teaching Inspired Learning – A Blue Print for Action"⁷.

It recommended that:

"The Institute (the then NSW Institute of Teachers) will work with school authorities and ITE providers to:

■ *develop primary teacher education course patterns that allow specialist elective strands that could scaffold into a secondary teaching certification (for example, mathematics and science) or a specialist role (for example, special education or school counselling). Undergraduate teachers gaining primary qualifications could also gain qualification for a secondary teaching method, which would allow them to be **recruited into primary schools with a specialist role**, or in secondary schools as a secondary teacher".*

3. Initial teacher education

Compounding the issue outlined above, are the findings of the report by Dr Rachel Hocking for *Music Education: Right from the Start* titled "Fading Notes: The State of Music Education for the Next Generation of Primary Teachers"⁸. A survey of universities indicated that in NSW, on average, a primary teaching degree comprised of only 9.39 hours of compulsory music education across the entire degree.

For those university student teachers who do not have any music background themselves, this is completely inadequate. In some schools when they commence teaching, it is possible they will find themselves teaching primary students who have more knowledge and skills than they do, which is unlikely to boost their overall confidence at the start of their career.

4. Professional development

⁷ [GTIL - A Blueprint for Action \(educationstandards.nsw.edu.au\)](http://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au)

⁸ [Music-Education-ITE-Report_A4_130623.pdf \(alberts.co\)](#)

To address the issues above, as well as improving the training offered in initial teacher education courses, an immediate focus on providing professional development for the **current** workforce of generalist primary school teachers is required.

Such professional development should be created and delivered by a strong well supported and resourced non-school based teaching service, likely located in the Department's Arts unit.⁹ Federation understands that there are already professional learning experiences that can be accessed by teachers, but these are largely online, and without any mandated hours of curriculum delivery, the impetus for an individual teacher to access these is minimal, and likewise there is not a significant imperative for the Department to compel teachers to access these professional learning activities in school time such as carving out time on School Development Days.

Federation understands that many current teachers and non-school based teachers work significant unpaid overtime in order to provide high quality Arts experiences, such as the Schools Spectacular. Regrettably, such experiences are only available to a relatively small cohort of students, many of whom already have the benefit and good fortune of being engaged in external tuition.

These experiences whilst invaluable, are built of the back of goodwill of many Departmental employees, and, importantly, on their own, do not equate to a quality music program. Indeed, they may in fact give a false impression as to the breadth and depth of music education offered in NSW public schools.

5. Educational benefits

The 2019 report "Music Education: A Sound Investment"¹⁰ also identified the **benefits** of a quality, sequential and ongoing music education in terms of both human and societal development. These include cognitive effects on language, comprehension and memory-making and consequently, a strong correlation between academic attainment and music learning. Dr Collins also identified some significant benefits for physical and emotional development, including spatial awareness and empathy.

Critically, especially for the current times, is that Dr Collins found that music learning "*promotes social cohesion through the experience of physiological synchronicity, experience of diversity and desire to seek out and value novelty and difference*".

St Marys North Public School case study

Dr Collins was able to utilise her research skills to identify the benefits of a particular music program at St Marys North Public School¹¹ including:

- Developed students' musical skills, including improved auditory processing and pitch awareness, rhythmic ability, and increased musical literacy
- Improved students' physical development, including posture, gross and fine motor skills
- Increased students' attitude, motivation and engagement at school
- Improved students' emotional and behavioural development including focus, concentration and self-regulation

⁹ [Home | The Arts Unit](#)

¹⁰ [Alberts_Music-Education-Report_A4.pdf](#)

¹¹ [Making waves through music at St Marys North Public School \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

- Improved students' verbal and written communication (reading and spelling) and numeracy.

Federation would prefer to see such a program not an anomaly but something that every child in every public primary school can access.

6. Segregation

Quality music education must be available to all students, not just those who can afford it.

For the most part, the current situation is one of user pays. Federation is aware of some schools utilising a portion of their flexible funding in their budget to subsidise a music program which is then delivered by a private provider. The remaining costs of such programs are then funded by parents and carers, who should have every right to expect that all curriculum delivery is available **for free** at their local public school.

Federation acknowledges that principals and schools may be choosing such options with the best of intentions, including addressing the likely issue that there are no trained music educators in the school, and none of the "generalist" primary teachers feel confident to teach it.

Principals may also feel pressure to compete with neighbouring schools who offer more comprehensive or advanced music education programs so will do whatever is possible in order to provide something to their students and school community.

Most schools have a "School Band", but again, this is often delivered fully or in part by private provider, after school, at significant cost to parents and carers of those students who "apply" to be in the band.

Musical "experiences" such as Musica Viva, while being of high quality and inherently valuable, are mostly one-off (as opposed to a critical step in a sequential and ongoing education process), and again, subject to additional incursion or excursion fees for parents and carers.

Currently the determining factor of whether a primary school student is receiving quality music education come down to chance or fortune. The good fortune that their parents and carers can afford to pay for private tuition, the chance that their school happens to employ a musically-trained primary teacher (a teacher who is a musician!), or even more rarely, a dual qualified teacher in both music and primary.

Conclusion

If we are to deliver quality music education to all students, the NSW government must develop a comprehensive plan or strategy **now**, even if such a strategy is a 3 to 5 year plan, with interim goals. Federation stands ready to assist with such an endeavour.