



Music Education Right from the Start

FEDERAL ELECTION 2022

Smarter, Healthier, Happier

Music Education for *All*
Australia's Children

Our Vision

All Australian primary school children need, and have a right to quality, sequential and ongoing music education.

The Opportunity for this Election

The unanimity of Australia's education ministers in delivering the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration in December 2019 was a cause for celebration. The vision of a world class education system that explicitly commits to excellence and supports all young Australians to be confident and creative individuals who are successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of their communities is one that can be shared by educators, parents and the broader community across the country. We all share the ministers' recognition that no education system can lay claim to being world class unless its benefits are available to all young people 'no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenge they may face'.

The ministers gathering in Alice Springs could not have realised that within a few months they would be confronting the new, unprecedented challenge of the COVID 19 pandemic. As we resume a degree of normality with the re-opening of our schools there is something of a stock-take underway. It is charged by reports of a greater inequity in access to learning and uneven outcomes; there is deep-seated concern for the health and well-being of a significant number of students as well as the strains on schools themselves.

There is no silver bullet but we can say with confidence that there is at least one way – backed by research and experience – to lift the spirits, build collaboration and a sense of belonging, to get the creative juices flowing and to simulate the brains and lift attainment in literacy and numeracy for our students.

Quality music education does all this and more and there is no need to take our word for it: we can show you.

We would like to explore opportunities to change elements of the existing system to lead to better outcomes for all young people as envisaged by Governments and embodied in the Australian Curriculum.

We are confident, based on solid research and a succession of reports (including government reviews), that the key barriers have been identified and that related

strategic changes to the existing system (for example, improved music education for generalist teachers; improved awareness amongst primary Principals of the place and purpose of music education; and clear guidance on how to implement a program), in conjunction with innovative programs, could dramatically improve the status of music education in Australia and the delivery of quality music education in our schools.

The **Music Education: Right from the Start** initiative recognises that the forthcoming Federal election should be and will be focused on a number of major issues from national security and climate change through to secure employment and economic recovery amidst the financial demands and uncertainty of COVID-19.

However, these issues should not preclude consideration of opportunities that are not only relevant to our contemporary challenges but have been demonstrated to deliver significant personal and public benefits at a modest investment. The benefits go well beyond any simple calculation of return on investment: music is a counterweight to the emotional and mental health distress and the sense of dislocation that is rampant among young people in these turbulent times. Music education is an antidote and an educational booster in the same package.

The provision of quality music education for every Australian primary school student ticks all the boxes.

There is no time to waste so we have a small number of suggestions to get things moving.

We would urge the Government/Opposition's electoral commitments include the recognition of the importance of quality, sequential and ongoing music education for all Australian children and identify quality music education for primary school children as an immediate priority backed by several initial undertakings.

The **Music Education: Right from the Start** initiative urges the Government/Opposition as a matter of priority to:

- 1 Develop a national cultural plan as recommended by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts creative industries inquiry report *Sculpting a Cultural Plan* [Oct 2021] embracing support and measures for delivering quality music education.
- 2 Recognise the centrality of First Nations heritage and culture to a national cultural plan which extends to support for First Nations engagement in the evolution of quality music education in Australian schools.

We recommend several immediate steps the incoming Australian Government should commit to:

- 1 Better equipping primary teachers to deliver quality music education through increased support for relevant professional development and the enhanced provision of music learning in Initial Teacher Education for primary teachers including working with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to that end.
- 2 Commissioning the collection and analysis of agreed baseline data covering access to quality, sequential and ongoing music education including its provision in primary schools; the data collection to be in collaboration with State and Territory education ministers with the results to be made publicly available.
- 3 Providing direct assistance, including capital funding, for primary schools with - or with plans to deliver - quality music education programs; the funding could be used for specified purposes including for instruments and necessary music spaces/facilities in high-need schools.

We note and support the House of Representatives Committee's recommendation that the Office for the Arts establish a Music Access Assistance Program to increase active participation of school students in musical endeavours, particularly in low socio-economic, rural and regional areas. As noted in the report, the Music Access Assistance Program should provide affordable access to music education opportunities including instruments, music books and other musical equipment.

The Benefits in Brief

While the social sciences have long shown the personal, emotional and social benefits of music, there is also extensive research on music learning in the fields of neuroscience and psychology. The research provides substantial evidence for the benefits including that a quality music education:

- Increases attention stamina and focus
- Improves social skills and personal wellbeing
- Heightens empathy and valuing of diversity
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Improves learning capacity
- Supports reading and numeracy skills
- Improves self-regulation
- Improves cognitive connectivity and efficiency
- Honours neural synchronisation to enhance learning
- Supports immune health
- Boosts academic performance in English, Maths and Science

A summary of the core research findings regarding music education can be found in our report

Music Education: A Sound Investment.

Appendix: An Understanding of Quality Music Education

An explainer summarising the understanding of quality school music education has been adopted by **Music Education: Right from the Start**, a collaborative initiative led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation. It has been developed both to guide our own efforts and to encourage a common understanding of this critical question in our collaboration with those who share our commitment to music education. While the explainer recognises that music learning can be, and so often is, enjoyed throughout our lives, the focus here is on quality music education in primary schools.

A quality music education is above all centred on the student and, in common with learning more generally, flourishes when it is connected to students' lives and experiences, is engaging and enriching.

The explainer has been produced by Dr Anita Collins and the Alberts team in close consultation with music scholars and educators. It draws directly on the substantive body of existing research. Recognising that we are operating in a dynamic research and educational environment, we expect this understanding will continue to be refined over time.

The explainer can be downloaded **here**.

Music Education: Right from the Start

Music Education: Right from the Start is a collaborative national initiative, led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation, and driven by our collective belief in the power of music to change lives. It focuses on the place and purpose of music within a quality education, and how to ensure access for all Australian primary school children. It has been developed in consultation with, and is supported by, individuals and organisations spanning the music industry, education, research and philanthropy.

The initiative is guided and supported by an expert Advisory Group:

- Louise Barkl: Arts and Education professional, adviser & consultant
- Tina Broad: SongMakers Project Director
- Geoff Day: Chair, Day Family Foundation
- Dr Rachael Dwyer: Lecturer in Education, University of Southern Queensland
- Dr Jason Goopy: Music educator and President, Kodaly Australia
- Stephen O'Doherty: Arts advocate & Board Director
- Nicholas Pickard: Executive Director, Public Affairs and Government Relations, APRA AMCOS
- Hywel Sims: CEO, Musica Viva
- Alex Masso: Executive Officer, Australian Music Association

Our Knowledge Base Working Group:

- Dr Rachael Dwyer
- Dr Jason Goopy
- Louise Barkl
- Associate Professor Neryl Jeanneret
- Dr Tanya Vaughan

Our Project Team:

- Emily Albert: Executive Director, Alberts
- Dr Anita Collins: Senior Adviser
- Eric Sidoti: Project Lead

“Students who engage in music learning perform better academically, contribute to their communities, form positive relationships, continue their education into university, earn more through their lives and age better, physically and cognitively.”

DR ANITA COLLINS

For more information contact us or go to our website: www.alberts.co/music-education

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