

Australia's National Cultural Policy

Submission by

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Australia's National Cultural Policy must recognise Music Education not as an optional enrichment activity, but as foundational cultural infrastructure essential to the nation's future cultural life, social cohesion, wellbeing, and creative identity.

As a lifelong NSW public school music educator, I have seen firsthand the transformational power of sustained classroom music programs. During my career — particularly through the enduring music program developed at Gorokan High School — I witnessed how music can engage students, build confidence, strengthen identity, improve wellbeing, and create deep community connection across diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

Every Australian child — in Pre-school, Primary and Secondary education — should have access to a substantial, sequential, classroom-based Music Education program delivered by appropriately trained teachers and supported by long-term national commitment.

Music education should be:

- sequential, elemental and developmental,
- practical, creative and participatory,
- grounded in music literacy and understanding,
- culturally inclusive and diverse,
- and accessible regardless of postcode, socio-economic status or school sector.

Children should be given the tools to understand how music works — rhythm, melody, harmony, structure, creativity, listening, performance and expression — so that they can participate fully in Australia's cultural life as:

- creators,
- performers,
- listeners,
- collaborators,
- and informed audiences.

Not every child will become a professional musician, nor should that be the objective. But every child deserves the opportunity to engage meaningfully with music throughout life, at whatever level and in whatever musical traditions they choose.

A strong national Music Education framework contributes directly to:

- literacy and numeracy development,
- emotional wellbeing,
- confidence and identity,
- intercultural understanding,
- community participation,
- creativity and innovation,
- and lifelong engagement with the arts.

- Importantly, music also builds national cohesion.

Through singing, instruments, listening, creating and performing together, children learn cooperation, empathy, discipline, mutual respect and shared cultural experience. Music enables young Australians from different backgrounds, cultures and communities to encounter one another positively and constructively.

In an increasingly fragmented society, music education can help strengthen:

- social connection,
- mutual understanding,
- civic belonging,
- and a shared sense of Australian cultural identity that respects both diversity and common humanity.

To achieve this, Australia requires a genuinely national commitment to Music Education.

This commitment should include:

- A comprehensive National Music Education Curriculum from Pre-school to Year 12.
- Guaranteed sequential classroom music education for every child throughout primary schooling and into the compulsory secondary years.
- Proper staffing and resourcing of all secondary schools to provide meaningful Music Education programs for all students in Years 7 and 8.
- Strong elective music pathways in Years 9–12.
- High-quality classrooms, rehearsal spaces, instruments, technology and teaching resources in all school sectors.

Crucially, all Pre-school and Primary teacher education courses should include substantial Music Education training so that graduate teachers are equipped to deliver meaningful music experiences and foundational music learning to children.

Australian universities and teacher-training institutions must be properly funded to provide this training at a high standard.

At the same time, governments should fund extensive refresher and in-service Music Education training for current teachers, particularly primary teachers who may not previously have received adequate preparation in music.

High School Music teachers should receive rigorous specialist preparation enabling them to deliver world-class classroom Music Education in both:

- compulsory non-elective settings (Years 7–8),
- and elective Music courses.

This preparation should also include substantial training in:

- choral direction,
- instrumental music pedagogy,
- ensemble rehearsal techniques,
- and community music leadership.

Music teachers should be equipped not only to teach classroom music, but also to establish, build and direct:

- choirs,
- concert bands,
- orchestras,
- vocal ensembles,
- instrumental programs,
- and community performance pathways within their schools.

These ensemble experiences are often the heart of a school's cultural life and provide some of the strongest opportunities for teamwork, discipline, creativity, belonging and public contribution.

The findings of the National Review of School Music Education remain highly relevant today. Australia cannot sustain a vibrant national cultural life without sustained investment in the cultural foundations that begin in schools and communities.

Professional arts companies, orchestras, festivals, audiences and creative industries all depend ultimately on generations of children first experiencing meaningful music education.

Music Education must therefore become a central pillar of Australia's National Cultural Policy — not peripheral to it.

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