

Australia releases report on school music education

At a time when school music education is being cut back in many countries, an important government-instigated report was released recently in Australia. It finds that music education is in crisis and recommends a major increase in the provision of school music education in Australia's public schools. The national music council in Australia was in part responsible for this government action, and mounted a successful campaign to get the public interested.

In fact, the campaign caused the largest number of submissions to a government inquiry in the history of the national parliament! This demonstrated to the politicians that there is wide public interest in the issue and that they will have strong support for positive change.

The report includes an extensive literature survey and a round-up of music education provision in similar countries around the world, as well as a detailed analysis of the situation of music education in Australia.

The report was released officially by the then national Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson MP and Senator the Hon. Rod Kemp, Minister for the Arts and Sport. The music community was gratified to hear the Ministers give their full-throated support to the principle that every Australian child should learn music in school. The Ministers gave some minor funding immediately, but full implementation of the recommendations will require significant funding and cooperation at both Federal and State levels.

Minister Nelson has subsequently moved on and a new minister, Julie Bishop, has taken the portfolio. There is now a period of some anxiety as the community awaits signs that she will continue Minister Nelson's commitment.

The report runs to 300 pages and the actual recommendations are too extensive for re-publication here. You can read the full report at http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/C9AFAE54-6D72-44CC-A346-3CAF235CB268/8944/music_review_reportFINAL.pdf Make sure you cut and paste the entire address.

The report does put into short form the **key messages**, and we reproduce these for you below. The key messages are essentially the Recommendations put into digestible form.

It should be noted that the report itself made a strong recommendation that all primary school children should have access to a music education *taught by specialist teachers*. This tends to slip on and off the various manifestations of the report. It seems to have been omitted from the key messages. It is, however, a crucially important plank in the Music Council's position and will be pressed strongly in its advocacy for implementation.

Music education is valuable and essential for all Australian school students	International and national research shows that music education uniquely contributes to the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth of all students. Music in schools contributes to both instrumental and aesthetic learning outcomes; transmission of cultural heritage and values; and, students' creativity, identity and capacity for self-expression and satisfaction.
Students miss out on effective music education	While there are examples of excellent music education in schools, many Australian students miss out on effective music education because of the lack of equity of access; lack of quality of provision; and, the poor status of music in many schools.
Action is needed	Music education in Australian Schools is at a critical point where prompt action is needed to right the inequalities in school music.

<p>Priorities</p>	<p>There is a need for immediate priority on improving and sustaining the quality and status of music education.</p> <p>Action is needed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the equity of access, participation and engagement in school music for all students; • Improve teacher pre-service and in-service education; • Improve curriculum support services (advisory, instrumental music, vocal music and music technology); • Support productive partnerships and networking with music organizations, musicians, the music industry and the Australian community; • Improve music education in schools through supportive principals and school leadership, adequately educated specialist teachers, increased time in the timetable, adequate facilities and equipment; • Improve levels of accountability; and • Improve the overall status of music in schools.
<p>Quality teaching is a key</p>	<p>The quality of music education depends on the quality of teaching, in partnership with quality support. The work of teachers is enabled through the support provided by systems, sectors, schools, principals, parents, the wider community and through partnerships with music organizations and industry.</p> <p>Music-specific professional development is urgently required for generalist classroom teachers currently in schools.</p> <p>Music teachers currently in schools need greater assistance through curriculum support materials, advisory services, networks, mentoring and professional development.</p> <p>This Review has developed <i>Guidelines for Effective Music Education</i>. All key stakeholders need to endorse and implement these guidelines.</p>
<p>Effective teacher education is essential</p>	<p>Hours for pre-service teacher education for music have contracted radically in the last ten years and do not adequately prepare generalist primary teachers for teaching music in schools. Urgent action is needed to address this problem.</p> <p>Pre-service teacher education for specialist primary, secondary, instrumental and vocal teachers needs to be reviewed and improved.</p>
<p>The partners in effective music education need to take leadership and action roles</p>	<p>At a national level, the Australian Government has an active leadership role to play in stimulating and supporting effective music education in schools through, for example, initiating curriculum projects, supporting partnerships across jurisdictions and sectors, supporting improvements in teacher education, providing stimulus grants, and ensuring national accountability mechanisms are used. Cohesive approaches to music education and national consistency are needed.</p> <p>State and Territory governments have an active leadership role to play in their respective jurisdictions through departments of education; curriculum authorities; and partnerships across agencies and with local government, music organizations, musicians and the community. Their focus is on ensuring access, equity, engagement and participation for all students in their jurisdiction, through the provision of teachers, facilities, equipment, support and valuing of music. Accountability measures are also crucial.</p> <p>Catholic and Independent school sectors have leadership and action roles to play in collaborating with education and music partners to ensure that standards of music education are met for all students in their jurisdictions.</p> <p>At a local level, principals, school leadership groups and teachers have leadership and action roles in timetabling, resourcing, supporting and valuing music education in their</p>

	<p>schools. Partnerships with music organizations are critically important.</p> <p>Teachers are vital to the quality of music education for all students and need to take proactive roles in ensuring the quality and status of music in schools through developing their own professional expertise, learning and values.</p> <p>Parents and caregivers have a role in valuing and supporting music education as integral to the engagement and retention of students in schools.</p> <p>Communities play a vital role in effective music education.</p> <p>Professional and community music organizations, the music industry, musicians and music professional associations have necessary partnership roles to play.</p>
<p>Raising the status of music in schools will improve the quality of music in schools</p>	<p>Raising the status of music education will have a positive impact on the quality of music in schools.</p>

Actions to date

Ministers Nelson and Kemp indicated that they were prepared to engage in the “hard slog” over the next year to ensure that the Review is actually implemented. They will need dialogue with the States, which in Australia have the main responsibility for schools.

Federal Minister for the Arts Rod Kemp has been very supportive and we understand that the Recommendations will also be taken to the meeting of the Cultural Ministers’ Council.

For now, the Ministers announced at the launch that:

- Minister Nelson would write to all school principals and alert them to the Review
- Minister Nelson would fund the Australian Society for Music Education \$400,000 over four years for the development of leadership within music in Australian schools – in other words, probably for a set of national teaching awards
- Teaching Australia will get \$500,000 to develop university teaching models in response to a number of the recommendations regarding teacher training
- Music will be prioritised in the Quality Teaching Program and \$500,000 will be committed to developing curriculum resources and 'harmonising' curricula
- The Australian Government will support a ‘summit’ conference, branded as a Music. Play for Life event and organised by the AMA and MCA for the first half of 2006. The purpose will be to produce proposals on how to get from the recommendations to implementation. There is a need to put a price tag on the new proposals and that might need to be worked into this assignment.

These are welcome but preliminary steps. The full implementation of the report will be expensive and we have yet to see what financial commitments will be made by governments. The announcements of funding cannot take place until mid-2007.

Source: Music Council of Australia