

Building a musical school

A RESOURCE KIT FOR TEACHERS,
SCHOOL LEADERS, AND PARENTS.



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If you're here, you've probably watched ABC-TV's Don't Stop the Music.

You've seen that music education can transform schools by improving brain development. You might also know that access to a high-quality, ongoing music education has significant benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have heard up to 30 million fewer words before they reach Kindergarten (or start school) than their more fortunate peers.

You've seen the series and you know the benefits. However, you might be wondering: can I do this in my school? Building a musical school is hard work, but it's achievable and has the potential to transform your school permanently. You don't need a film crew, celebrity guests, or a huge budget. We've seen it happen all around Australia.

This kit is designed for motivated teachers, school leaders, and even parents who are looking to get a music program started in their school. If you've got a vision for your school we think you can make it happen with the help of this kit.


We're excited to see what you will achieve.

Dr Anita Collins
award winning music educator, researcher, and writer





QUARTER REST

This kit isn't intended to be read cover-to-cover like a crime novella. It's intended to stimulate action. The quarter rest is a musical symbol that indicates the musician should briefly rest before resuming playing music. Where you see the quarter rest symbol  we want you to put the kit aside and do something. Seek help, ask questions and make plans at various points throughout the kit.

Part 2

WHAT YOU'RE SIGNING UP FOR

PART 1: YOU



Start with a Vision

Building a musical school involves a lot of work and takes a lot of time. It's noisy. It needs time in the school calendar. It costs money. It requires skilled music teachers. You're likely going to be upsetting the status quo in your community. Given the work involved, it is worth asking the question: Why do you want a musical school?



It all starts with you and your why. We'd like you to reflect, for a moment, on what is driving you to get a music program started in your school. Grab a sheet of paper and write a list of dot points. This needn't take more than five minutes.

Part 2

WHAT YOU'RE SIGNING UP FOR

PART 1: YOU

Here are some of the reasons we've heard before:

EDUCATIONAL



Music education has significant cognitive and developmental benefits.



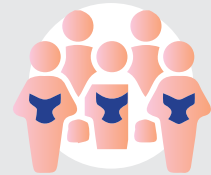
Music education improves students' attendance, attention, and impulse control.



Music can build community and strengthen social bonds.

EVERYTHING ELSE

A school choir, or band, could really add a spark to our assemblies.



Having beautiful music in a school can really liven things up.



Music is a great way for children to express themselves.



There are a lot of reasons you might want to start or expand a music program. We put them in to two categories: **educational reasons** and **everything else**. An educational reason is something that relates to the cognitive and developmental benefits of music education. These are impacts that extend beyond simply getting better at doing music and touch many aspects of a child's life.

If you're serious about building a musical school, it must be for these educational reasons. **Are your reasons primarily educational?** If they are, you're in the right place. If not, we suggest viewing the Don't Stop the Music series on iView to see the significant educational impacts of music education.

Part 2

WHAT YOU'RE SIGNING UP FOR

PART 2: YOUR STAFF

If you've interrogated your own reasons behind your interest in music education, it's time to find out how some of the other school staff feel about music education. Building a musical school requires highly trained teachers and strong, ongoing school leadership. Getting staff informed and motivated is a vital ingredient for success.

If school staff don't understand the full educational benefits of music education you're going to encounter a lot of opposition to making this happen.

A simple straw poll exercise can help you gauge staff's understanding of music education.

STRAW POLL EXERCISE

Ask a sample of teachers and leaders in your school to answer the following questions:

1. Finish this sentence: "Every child should learn music because..."
2. Finish this sentence with one word: "Music education should be..."

It's best to get these answers through conversations and staff meetings rather than through e-mail. You'll get people's unfiltered, immediate and honest responses this way.

You're hearing things like...

- Every child should learn music education because children need to express themselves.
- Music education should be fun.
- Every child should learn music because it helps ease them in to the day.

Your staff don't yet fully realise the benefits afforded by music education. Reflect on how the answers above would appear if 'maths,' was in place of 'music education.'

You're hearing things like...

- Every child should learn music education because it has great outcomes for development.
- Music education should be challenging.
- Every child should learn music because it improves attention and impulse control.

Your staff understand the benefits of music education (or at least they're starting to).

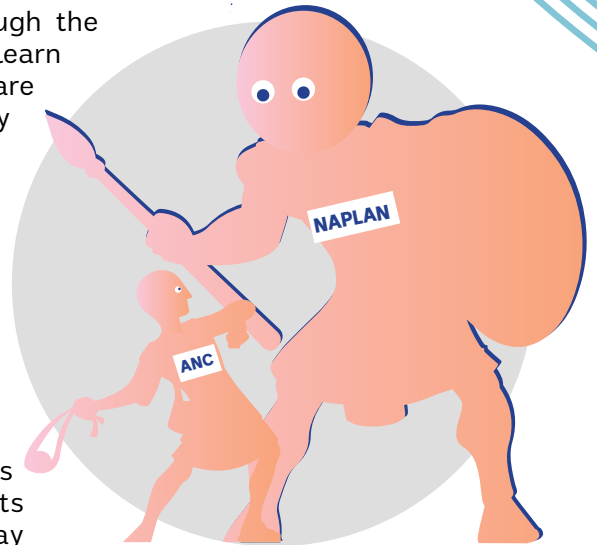
The science behind music education is new, so bringing your staff on this journey will take time. You can introduce staff to the Don't Stop the Music series on iView or connect them with our free professional development resources made available by [Musica Viva](#) and the [Sydney Conservatorium](#). These resources will enable your staff to explore how music education looks and feels and the time commitment is only a few hours. You could also engage an external provider to visit your school and present on the benefits of music education.

Part 3

STATE OF MUSIC EDUCATION

We're not pretending it's easy to do this in Australia. Although the [Australian National Curriculum](#) requires that students learn music, we recognise that teachers and school leaders are under enormous pressure to deliver on literacy and numeracy due to the external accountability of NAPLAN. There's an old saying: "You get what you measure," and we're not doing a good job of measuring music education.

Over several years, music education will have significant impacts on your students' literacy and numeracy understanding and skills. This may seem farfetched, but it's what the latest research is telling us, and it's backed up by the experience of many schools around Australia. A long-term investment in music education will feel like a leap of faith, but it's not blind faith. Although music education has enormous benefits for literacy and numeracy, those benefits take time to be fully realised – and in the mean-time, you may feel as though you're swimming against the tide.



**8.7 MINUTES PER DAY FOR
MUSIC EDUCATION¹**

LUNCH

**3.5 HOURS
PER DAY
FOR LITERACY
AND NUMERACY**

If you're in need of a little inspiration, skip to the end of this kit on page 21 to get an idea of what your musical school might look like over time. In the long-run, a musical school will see improvements in literacy and numeracy scores on NAPLAN tests.

Part 4

WHAT IS A HIGH-QUALITY MUSIC EDUCATION?

We know a high-quality, sequential, ongoing music education has significant cognitive and developmental impacts, but what exactly makes a music education high-quality?

The technical definition, adapted from Hallam, S., & Council, M. E. (2015):²

A high-quality music education involves singing, movement, and playing musical instruments. These must not be done in a way that is primarily participatory or solely for enjoyment but as a disciplined, heavily scaffolded educational experience with the goal of developing sound musical skills over three to seven years. Active music learning involves learning musical notation, developmentally appropriate technical language and high expectations of personal and musical performance. Active music learning should be taught by a well-trained educational expert.

In short, a high-quality music education requires everything you need to teach any subject. It should be continuous, sequential, and developmental, and taught by someone who has had training in music education.

MUSIC EXPERIENCES

In Australia, access to music education is highly inequitable. To address this, many not-for-profits and other music organisations offer music experiences in schools. This might involve, for example, structured workshops leading up to a performance by a visiting group. These performances can be a great way to introduce music in to your school and excite students and staff. However, a music education is different in that it is an ongoing, long-term commitment and students participate not only as audience members, but also as performers. Ideally, a high-quality music education includes both school-based music education every week of the year and music experiences delivered by professional music organisations.



Part 4

WHAT IS A HIGH-QUALITY MUSIC EDUCATION?

MUSIC EDUCATION SHOULD ALSO:



Start as early in life as possible.



Occur at least weekly, every week of the school year.



Involve group work.



Include performance opportunities.



Teach students pitch, rhythm, singing, instrumental work, composition, improvisation and reading notation.

Part 4

WHAT IS A HIGH-QUALITY MUSIC EDUCATION?

PART 2: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

How does a high-quality music education look, feel and sound? Here we provide some ideas of what you might observe. These guidelines aren't intended to be an acid test — to fully understand the type and level of music education happening in your school, you will need the help of a specialist music educator. We'll help you find one in the next section.



Organised Chaos

THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 7 AND 8 ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

According to the Australian Curriculum, by the end of Year 8 students will identify and analyse how the elements of music are used in different styles and apply this knowledge in their performances and compositions. They evaluate musical choices they and others from different cultures, times and places make to communicate meaning as performers and composers.

Students manipulate the elements of music and stylistic conventions to compose music. They interpret, rehearse and perform songs and instrumental pieces in unison and in parts, demonstrating technical and expressive skills. They use aural skills, music terminology and symbols to recognise, memorise and notate features, such as melodic patterns in music they perform and compose.



WHAT DOES A HIGH-QUALITY MUSIC EDUCATION LOOK LIKE?



	VISUAL	LOOKS LIKE	SOUNDS LIKE	FEELS LIKE
K TO YEAR 2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An open space with no children sitting in chairs or at their desks. • Lots of movement and a bit chaotic, but still under the expert direction of the teacher. • Students will typically be changing activity every five minutes, learning simple ideas like rhythm and turn-taking in a thousand different ways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of laughter. • Students might be singing folk tunes within a narrow vocal range and might not sound exactly in unison. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaotic, enjoyable, and experiential
YEARS 3 TO 6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A semi-circle with children seated and reading music, possibly with their teacher as conductor. • Look out for recorders, ukuleles, and percussion instruments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students begin to sound more like an ensemble, all singing and performing the same songs at the same time. • Between songs, it's quieter and they're focused and attentive. • The teacher will be using some basic music terminology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging, focused, and wanting to succeed.
YEARS 7 AND 8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger and more ordered groups of students. • The whole class will look like a disciplined ensemble, working together, often producing pieces of music that are several minutes long. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will sound like an ensemble. • Singers will have an expanded range and instrumentalists will be proficient. • Between songs, the students and their teacher will be explaining things using musical terminology. If you're a non-specialist, it might be difficult to make sense of what they're talking about. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewarding, disciplined, and working as an ensemble

Part 5

ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL

Every school has music education. If it's not a comprehensive music education, it might be singing the national anthem, a weekly music lesson run by an English teacher, or a teacher who uses musical games to teach Kindergarten students. The goal of assessing your school is to better understand what you're currently doing and develop a plan to enhance your program.

This section is going to take some time and it's around here that you might want to think about getting some help.



Taking Stock

Here are a few of the people and organisations you might be able to get to help audit your school:



A music teacher from the local high school



A music teacher or leader from a private school



Conservatoriums and state orchestras



Music education not-for-profits



Your state [ASME branch \(Australian Society of Music Educators\)](#)



Use internet searches and personal networks to identify three specialists you might be able to contact to help you with this audit.

Once you have your list, it's time to pick up the phone. You can say something like:

“We think music education is really important and we're trying to get it started in our school. However, I'm not too sure about the quality of what we're delivering so do you think we could have someone come watch us for the day to give us a sense of what's going on?”

Part 5

ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL

There are a few things you can look for as a school leader who is not a music educator to assess the quality of what is being delivered in your school. This is by no means a substitute for the eye and ear of a specialist music educator – however, this information can help your specialist better understand what is going on.

VISITING YOUR MUSIC CLASSROOM

It's difficult as a non-specialist to distinguish whether your music programme is hitting the right notes or in need of improvement. You know you may have a problem if...

Kindy to Year 2	It looks like a traditional classroom with students seated and watching the teacher or a video. Like all early childhood learning, music education at this stage must be embodied and experiential.
Years 3 to 6	Focus isn't shared by the whole class. If it looks like some students are engaged and playing but other students are failing to contribute, you have a problem. The students should be able to tell you what they are learning using musical terms.
Years 7 and 8	You aren't hearing technical language and a high level of musical proficiency. Both singing and instrumental practice should be taking place and practical work should have elements of formative assessment and progress tracking included.

HOW MUCH TIME IS MADE FOR MUSIC?

Grab the school calendar and try to figure out how much time your students are doing music education in a year. Some things to look for:

ON TRACK	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every week of the school year• Regular performance opportunities• A small amount of time every day• Consistently early in the day• During school hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some weeks students go without music• No performance opportunities• A single long lesson once a week or less• Consistently later in the day.• Outside school hours

Don't worry too much about scoring these results. A specialist can help put them in to context. For example, depending on what you want to achieve, it can be okay to begin with music education that is outside normal classroom time.

Part 5

ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL



Proficient teaching staff are essential to music education. Indeed, a music program can be built without a single instrument if you have confident teaching staff who are highly-trained in teaching singing. Only a specialist will be able to look at a music teacher and assess where their strengths and challenges lie and suggest ways to improve their skills and confidence. When these observations are paired with self-efficacy assessments, we can develop a rich picture of where to begin improving your staff's capacity to deliver high-quality music education.



TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY QUESTIONNAIRE ³

The self-efficacy questionnaire is simple but revealing. You can either run the full questionnaire or you can run a shortened version by asking your teachers two questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 how confident do you feel **doing** music?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 how confident do you feel **teaching** music?



[DOWNLOAD THE FULL SELF-EFFICACY QUESTIONNAIRE.](#)

The results can provide direction as to the kind of support your staff will need.

Low confidence doing (1-4) High confidence teaching (7-10)	Medium confidence doing (4-6) Medium confidence teaching (4-6)	High confidence doing (7-10) Low confidence teaching (1-3)
This pattern of responses occurs more often in music than you might think. Educators here need musical training , though they may also need specialised teacher training . They may not know what they don't know.	With these educators you will need to go a little deeper and find out where their strengths and weaknesses lie. It's likely that they feel confident in some areas (e.g. singing) but not others (e.g. leading a band).	Educators here need specialised teacher training . Music education not-for-profits like Musica Viva can provide this sort of professional development.

WORKFORCE PLANNING

A high-quality music education requires multiple trained teachers to ensure variety and sustainability. When considering specialised teacher training and music education within your school improvement plan, make sure multiple teachers are involved right from the beginning.

Part 6 WHERE TO BEGIN?

You've had a specialist visit your school and you've got a sense of what's going on in your music classrooms and across your music program. You've got all the information you need to get started building a musical school.



Staggering your Approach

SUCCESS STORIES



Casuarina Primary started with almost nothing – very few teachers had any musical competence and there were no instruments on hand. However, through assemblies and guest performances the school had a real love of singing. They decided to start singing with Kindy students.

Karri Valley Primary consulted their school community for help and found one parent ran a private music school. Two Year 5 teachers used to play guitar in a band, so they paired them up and started an elective guitar program for Year 5 students.



At Challis Primary School, donations of instruments were made available by [Musica Viva](#) and [Just Brass](#). Generalist teacher Simon, who teaches general music classes and choir demonstrated a willingness to learn and improve. With consistent in-service training, Simon and other teachers at Challis will be able to grow their music programme year-on-year.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE YOU START

In deciding where to begin building a musical school, here are a few additional things you should consider:

CHORAL VS. INSTRUMENTAL

The end-goal of any music program involves both singing and instruments, but you may choose to begin with one or the other. A common misconception is that singing is cheaper and easier to implement because there are no instruments — however, teaching singing is more challenging and a greater investment in professional development is required.

Whilst best practice in music education is to start with singing in foundation years, beginning with instruments may be more palatable for the parental community. There is a lot to consider here, so draw upon your school assessment from Part 5. and your school development plan in deciding where to begin.



Joseph, Challis student

ELECTIVE VS. COMPULSORY

Whilst the end-goal is a compulsory music education available to all students, it can make sense to begin with an elective program. If you have a cohort of interested students and supportive parents around a certain age group, then a music education program for that group can be a great place to start creating and sharing success. However, in your planning you should consider how you will eventually transition your program from elective to compulsory.



Just Brass students

Part 7

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE YOU START

FINDING SPACE AND TIME FOR MUSIC



Finding Space and Time

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to building a musical school! McDowall State School in Queensland made the bold decision to put their music class right in the middle of the school. This was the principal's way of making it known that music education was a high priority — if that's going to work in your school, go for it!

FINDING TIME FOR MUSIC

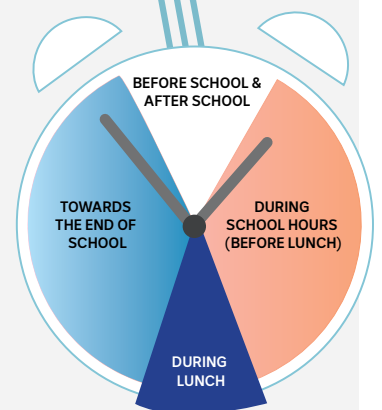
Timing matters with music education. Whilst the long-term goal is always to have music be a compulsory part of every child's education, that isn't necessarily where you will start. When timing your music program, here are a few things to consider.

Before school & after school: This can work but it may ruffle some parents' feathers.

During school hours (before lunch): this is ideal and the end-goal of any music program.

During lunch: this is typically difficult because students need time to eat and play.

Towards the end of school: music education is cognitively taxing, so earlier is usually better. However, there are teaching practices that can engage students after lunch.





Rachel John, strings teacher, & Anita Collins

Part 8

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

PART 1: FUNDING

Building a musical school is a long-term investment with long-term rewards. It should be a line-item in the budget for five years.



There are three main costs you'll need to consider:

1. an initial capital injection for instruments
2. ongoing tuition costs
3. professional development costs

Principals can fund music education through government grants, discretionary spending, professional development funds, and in some cases by charging tuition fees to parents. You can also source donations to cover initial capital expenses through philanthropists or a fundraising platform like [Schools Plus](#).

It's difficult to anticipate what your musical program will cost. It all depends on where you start, what you're trying to accomplish and how you grow it. To give you an idea of costs, here are a few vignettes from schools around Australia.



Part 8

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

PART 1: FUNDING

CHALLIS AFTER DON'T STOP THE MUSIC

Music education continues at Challis Community Primary School. To provide 45 students across two classes of Year 3 and 4 students with an intensive instrumental program costs around \$45,000p.a. Most of this (around 80%) is tuition as Challis brings in external specialist music teachers in to teach instrumental music. Challis was able to cover most of its capital expenses (instruments) with private donations.



At Challis, instruments were donated by [Just Brass](#) and [Musica Viva](#). Your school may be able to cover its initial capital costs through a fundraising platform, P&C effort, or private donation.

Challis students with donated instruments.

A SINGING SCHOOL

A public school engaged the National Mentoring Program to train two of their staff to teach singing to a class of 18 kindergarten students. [The National Mentoring Program](#) connected them with a neighbouring school's music teacher who took ten days relief to train the two staff. The school developing the program paid the school providing the mentor \$5,000 for the ten days relief provided. Capital costs are low for singing programs and the school's main concern now is making sure their trained staff have the time and space to deliver a high-quality music education (see page 16 for more information on finding time and space).

AN INSTRUMENTAL SCHOOL

McDowall State School in Queensland runs an instrumental music immersion program. A massive effort by the school and the P&C funded the building of a \$200,000 music room. \$75,000 worth of instruments (initial capital costs) were purchased over two years from public grants. The education department committed a static 0.7FTE to the program which covered tuition costs in the first year. As the program has grown from 138 to 322 students over five years, school spending and parent fees now cover additional tuition costs.

Part 8

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

PART 2: SUPPORT



Getting Parents Involved

GETTING PARENTS ON-BOARD

In addition to frequently communicating the educational value of music to parents, educators must be aware that learning music can disrupt students' home lives. Once parents understand the value of music education, they have a basis for why they should support their students' practice habits. Parents who understand the value of music education will be able to take an interest in their child's learning and say things like "That sounds better than it did last week!" rather than cringing any-time they hear the clasps of the saxophone case open.

Part 8

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

PART 2: SUPPORT



Building Your Support Network

BUILDING YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

You've got a long road ahead of you – it's time to think about who might be able to help offer support along this journey. Ask yourself these two questions:

- What formal resources and organisations are available in my area to help? (e.g. Musica Viva State Education Offices, Department of Education and partner Partner schools).
- What informal resources are available within my community who might be able to help? (e.g. a supportive parent or a neighbouring high school music teacher.)



Grab a sheet of paper and draw a three by two grid as follows:

Formal – known	Formal – unknown	Formal – channels
Informal – known	Informal – unknown	Informal – channels

In the “known” boxes, write names of people or organisations you have a relationship with who may be able to lend a hand. This should include whoever helped you with your school audit.

In the “unknown” box, write names of people or organisations who you don't have an established relationship with who may be able to offer support.

In the “channels” box, write some tools you have available to reach out to those unknowns. For example, you could reach out to your parent community through the school newsletter.

Part 9

TAKING OFF

You're in this for the long-haul. To keep you inspired, here are some milestones to look out for – things you might see on your way to becoming a musical school. Keep this guide handy as a source of inspiration and as a reminder to celebrate the victories.

THE FIRST YEAR - ESTABLISHING

Term 1:

You've upset the apple cart: The timetable has shifted, people are using different rooms, and the school is much noisier. Commit and re-commit to your vision as this is the hardest part.

Term 2:

Students will start to make small gains in confidence. Reticent and shy students may begin to speak out more and music class will be a source of excitement and happiness.

Term 3:

You'll see improved interest and focus in academic work. Students who were previously unable to may have the focus to finish a maths sheet or a book. You will have had your first performance, and it'll reflect a culture shift of rewarding students for simply having a go.

Term 4:

Key measures of school success will all be on the rise – attendance, attention and impulse control. It will begin to feel as though things are coming together, with broad benefits for all students participating in music education.



THE SECOND YEAR - CONSOLIDATING

You'll start to see a significant impact in academics, especially around language and literacy. Students will start to take more risks with their learning and be more comfortable with difficulty and failure. Higher-level social skills will emerge around conflict negotiation, self-awareness, and impulse control. The program may start to feel like a success here – but it is still in a fragile stage and now is not the time to take your foot off the pedal. You probably won't see changes in your NAPLAN scores but your formative literacy tracking measures should begin to shift upwards.

THE THIRD YEAR - TAKE OFF

The whole school culture will have shifted – parents and teachers will see the school differently. Behaviour management practices may need to shift away from punitive systems as students are now able to negotiate. Academic impacts will be felt across language, literacy and numeracy as well as a confidence to give things a go. The benefits of music education will be understood by teachers and the wider parent community.

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