

# Music Education

By Lauren Djakovac

**Music is a subject that caters for an array of backgrounds and interests, and helps students develop both practical and creative skills.**

However, the lack of music teaching in South Australia, and across the country, is well documented. This is especially evident in government schools where specialist music teachers are limited.

## **Music teachers and programs in South Australia**

Dr Jennifer Rosevear, Head of Music Education at The University of Adelaide and author of 'Engaging Adolescents in High School Music', believes "only a relatively small (and possibly declining) number of state schools have music specialist teachers - in contrast to non-government schools where there are a greater percentage of primary schools with a music specialist teacher".

At the primary school level, Dr Rosevear states there is a long-standing expectation by DECS that general classroom teachers incorporate the Arts (music included) into their curriculum. But the problem is that many primary teachers have consistently indicated that music is the area in which they feel the least confident to teach. Mrs Elizabeth Silsbury, Adjunct Senior Lecturer from Flinders University, estimates "about half the primary teachers in SA have enough skills and knowledge to give their classes a reasonable amount of music through singing, musical games and listening to recordings of music suitable to the age level".

At the secondary level, Dr Rosevear says "providing inclusive music programs is a key issue, along with having a music curriculum which is balanced and caters for local needs". She feels that "New SACE requirements may harm the number of students studying music - which will undermine secondary school music programs".

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There are several programs that exist to assist children who are particularly interested in music education - but such programs are unlikely to fully flourish without specialist support within the school. Some of the programs include;

- The DECS Instrumental Music Service
- At the secondary level, Special Interest Music Centres
- The Song Room - providing services to disadvantaged and/or special needs communities with limited access to music and creative arts.

## **Encouraging more children to engage in music education**

Dr Rosevear says teachers and parents need to promote the idea that everyone is musical, and that all children should be encouraged to engage in music education - rather than a select few.

Mrs Silsbury believes a powerful push from misguided educators to make music lessons 'fun' and 'relevant' in the early 1980's caused enormous damage to the entire field of music education - by encouraging children to emulate pop stars. It has been proposed in the media that students were missing out on an important part of their cultural heritage in the failure to study classical music, suggesting that all students should study the work of Western classical composers.

## **What needs to be changed?**

The decline in music education were highlighted in the 2005 report of the National Review of School Music Education. 15 recommendations were made, but Dr Rosevear says there has been little action in real terms (such as staffing and resources) since the review.

More specialist music teachers are needed in primary schools and both Dr Rosevear and Mrs Silsbury agree that musically unskilled teachers should rely on team teaching arrangements. Dr Rosevear suggests this could be implemented by "having a music specialist teacher assigned to a small group of 3-4 primary schools, where the specialist would support and team-teach with generalist classroom teachers". ■