

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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CHALLENGES FOR THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS SECTOR

From the Executive Director

The United Kingdom's Labour Party at its September 2019 Conference voted to adopt a policy which would abolish private schools in the UK by effectively integrating them into the state sector¹. This would be achieved through three measures – the abolition of charitable status, public subsidies and tax concessions, a 7% cap on university admissions from private schools and the redistribution of their endowments, properties and investments.

Not surprisingly, the reaction from independent schools² has been swift and strong – “how can you stop a parent choosing to pay someone to teach their child?” and “an act of unprecedented vandalism” were amongst some of the responses. The Independent Schools Association condemned the policy as a “worrying proposition”.

Opponents of the policy have pointed to the additional costs for government of taking an additional 600,000 students into the state system.

Could a political party in Australia ever adopt such a position in relation to independent schools?

This would appear to be highly unlikely. Over a third of students attend non-government schools in Australia (and in some metropolitan areas, more than half). It would be a brave political move to take away the right of parents to choose schooling options for their children.

Independent schools in Australia are far more diverse than in the UK. Most students attending independent schools are from Australian middle-class families. There are also many independent schools serving low socio-economic areas, as well as severely disadvantaged students.

The philosophical basis for UK Labour's policy which includes a challenge to the “elite privilege of private schools” and a pledge to promote “social justice” would not appear to be so relevant in Australia.

Further, any such policy at a national level in Australia would need the support of all states and territories given they have the constitutional responsibility for the provision of schooling. State and Territory Governments would face a significant additional cost burden to educate the students currently attending independent schools, estimated to be in the vicinity of \$4.5 billion annually in recurrent costs alone.

The major political parties in Australia have long recognised and supported choice in education and the contribution that non-government schools make to the community. Even the Australian Greens in recent years have shown some recognition of the role of non-state schools. Their current national policy position articulates a priority for public education over private education and talks about “scaling down of public funding to private schools”³. Whilst their national policy would see restrictions placed on the growth and establishment of new private schools, it makes no reference to abolishing non-state schools.

Whilst a policy to abolish non-government schools in Australia is not realistic, there are often threats to specific tax concessions rightly granted to independent schools as important builders of community. The exemption granted to independent schools from the payment of rates is a regular subject of policy discussion. As reported in the *Sunday Telegraph* (29/9/19), the North Sydney Mayor has recently asked the New South Wales Government to consider charging independent schools rates. The Mayor is quoted as saying “Schools in the North Sydney area sit on land that has a total value of more than \$389 million, yet they pay no rates.” Whilst such calls ignore the contribution independent schools make to local communities they, along with any other proposal to eliminate tax concessions or the charity status of independent schools, remain a threat.

1 <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/education/news/106731/labour-commits-abolishing-private-schools-if-it-wins-next-general>

2 The independent sector in the United Kingdom consists of approximately 470 private schools educating 600,000 students or 5% of total school enrolments.

3 See <https://greens.org.au/policies/education>

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In terms of the place of independent schools in Australia, a more probable scenario might be an integrated schooling system like that in New Zealand. Independent schools in New Zealand receive no government support. They are a very small part of the schooling system with around 5% of total enrolments.

However, most non-state schools in New Zealand are state-integrated schools⁴. They are fully funded by the government yet have their own sets of aims and objectives to reflect their own particular values and are set within a specific philosophy or religion. They charge fees. State-integrated schools educate about 10% of all New Zealand students.

The concept of a fully integrated state schooling system has not been the subject of any policy discussions in Australia in recent times. Some might argue that an integrated system already exists with many non-state schools receiving high percentages of their funding from governments.⁵

The implementation of changes to the Commonwealth funding model for schools from 2020 is likely to promote some debate about whether independent schools which source income from private sources above their School Resource Standard entitlement should receive any government funding. Even though every child, no matter which school they attend, is entitled to government

funding support, there will be some that will argue high fee independent schools should not receive government funding.

A future prospect might be that some independent schools might choose to not take government funding. As recently reported, Reddam House in Sydney has announced such a position – that school will forgo some \$5 million annually in government funding.

Not accepting government funding would allow an independent school to operate on a for-profit basis and potentially might mean a higher level of autonomy and independence (although such schools would still be subject to State/Territory accreditation requirements).

Over the years, some independent schools have scenario planned for a time when they would not receive government funding. However, don't expect to see a rush of schools opting out of government funding. The reality is that operating a school without government funding would be a significant financial challenge. Further it would be a disservice to the parents who are entitled to government support towards the costs of educating their children.

Whilst potential changes in government policy will always pose threats to the sustainability of the independent sector, perhaps the biggest threat is the affordability of independent schools.

Fee increases continue to run at levels above Consumer Price Index rises and wages growth has stagnated in Australia for some years. Given nearly 90% of parents rely on their salaries and wages to pay school fees⁶, affordability is an issue that should be on the agenda of all school boards.

There is some interesting reporting from the United States about an increase in the number of colleges pursuing “tuition resets”⁷. Tuition reset is a one-time reduction in school fees, usually accompanied by a reduction in scholarships, bursaries and fee remissions. The strategy is a shift from a “high-cost/high-aid” model that can lead to an increase in enrolments that can result in improved school finances.

There are some interesting consumer and economic concepts at play in “tuition resets” including the Chivas-Regal Effect⁸ which occurs when increasing the price of a product or service increases the demand for the product on the basis that consumers assume a higher price means better quality, and the Laffer Curve⁹ which explains why cutting the price of something can actually result in an increase in total revenue.

Christopher Brueningsen, the Principal of The Kiski School near Pittsburgh, USA, which has announced a tuition reset for 2020 said “the reset solution represents a deliberate shift away from the high-cost-high-aid model that has most colleges offering deep discounts on hyper-inflated tuition rates through financial aid.” He said, “affordability has become a major issue for college students and their families” and “65% of students eliminate colleges in their selection process based on published price without any further research.”¹⁰

There are examples of independent schools across Australia which have “reset” their tuition fees in recent

4 State-integrated schools were established under the *Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975* where most former private schools integrated into the state education system, becoming a state school while retaining their special character.

5 For example, Catholic schools on average receive about 70% of their income from governments, see https://www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/images/2019_NCEC_Facts_on_School_Funding.pdf

6 See ISQ's *What Parents Want* survey at www.isq.qld.edu.au

7 See for example www.savingforcollege.com/article/surge-in-number-of-colleges-cutting-tuition

8 <https://bizfluent.com/facts-7569473-chivas-regal-effect.html>

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laffer_curve

10 Quoted from www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/tuition-reset-college-affordability-private-schools-20191002.html

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years, although it is not a common practice. For each independent school the ability to do so will depend on a wide range of factors such as capacity for additional enrolments and the “discounts” already offered (noting that American independent schools have substantial aid programs with the medium percentage of students on financial aid at 25%¹¹).

Whilst independent sector leaders should rightly monitor political policies and advocate strongly for a regulatory environment that allows independent schools to prosper, it will be fee-paying parents who will sustain the success of independent schools into the future. Past trends clearly indicate that parents value school choice and

are prepared to spend their after-tax income contributing to the costs of school education for their children. In the past fifty years, the independent sector has been the fastest growing of the schooling sectors – in Queensland alone, enrolments have increased from 15,000 in 1968 to over 123,000 today.

The challenge of affordability and the burden on parents who have endured a decade where fee increases have outstripped inflation and wages growth is perhaps the greatest challenge for independent schools. Independent schools will need to be innovative in addressing this issue to ensure longer-term growth is sustainable and independent schools remain as a viable option for parents.



DAVID ROBERTSON
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11 See National Association of Independent Schools “Facts at A Glance” at www.nais.org

MUSIC LIFTS LEARNING OUTCOMES – IS IT TIME FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH?



SHARI ARMISTEAD
Director (Strategic Relations)

“...music education can be used not only for developing music skills, but also for developing individuals’ social skills, problem-solving skills, cognitive skills, critical thinking dispositions and skills and academic achievement.”

ONUR TOPOGLU, 2014, p. 2254

The benefits of music to student learning are well documented. Many schools, particularly in the independent sector, are aware of the advantages with more than 80 percent of Australian independent schools providing music education, compared to about 20 percent of state schools (Donoughue, 2018). The submission from the Director General Queensland Department of Education and the Arts to the *National Review of School Music Education – Augmenting the Diminished* “noted that all primary schools in Queensland participate in mandatory primary music programmes ‘usually delivered by a specialist music teacher’” so the percentages are higher in Queensland (The Centre for Learning, Change and Development at Murdoch University, 2005, p. 135).

These numbers indicate that independent schools clearly value music education, however, often it is isolated to music subjects with a music teacher. Some educationalists say this is because school leaders are reluctant to integrate music into other areas, so they leave it to specialist teachers. Perhaps it is appropriate at this point to quote the hymn, *Be Not Afraid*, which was written to help people facing uncertain transitions (Dulle, 2018). If fear is indeed what is holding some schools back, evidence of the benefits

of music to better learning outcomes may help school leaders make an informed decision about transitioning to a more integrated approach.

Aiding academic achievement

A University of British Columbia population-level analysis of the associations between school music participation and academic achievement, the largest study of its type, found “students highly engaged in music were, on average, academically over one year ahead of the peers not engaged in school music” (Guhn, Emerson, & Gouzouasis, 2019, p. 1). This study looked at the educational records of more than 110,000 students and identified evidence of positive relationships between school music participation and high school exam scores in English, mathematics, and science. The positive relationship between music engagement and academic achievement was significant and independent of students’ previous (Year 7) achievement, gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status.

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can help students' self-confidence, self-discipline and teamwork. It has also been shown to improve attendance and can be particularly beneficial for students who are not achieving well in school (Music Australia, n.d.).

There are a number of researchers studying the relationship between learning and understanding music, and problem solving through listening (for example, Jeanne Bamberger). The scientific study undertaken by Zellner (2011) aimed to explore the relation between instrumental music education in Years 8 and 11 and critical thinking as assessed by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. The results indicated that the instrumental music sample consistently outscored the non-instrumental music sample when compared to the reading and mathematics skills of the samples.

Helping children learn to read

There is also strong evidence that learning music in the early years of schooling can help children learn to read. ***“Neuroscience has found a clear relationship between music and language acquisition... Musically trained children also have better reading comprehension skills... Music can also give us clues about a child's struggles with reading. Research has found three- and four-year-old children who could keep a steady musical beat were more reading-ready at the age of five, than those who couldn't keep a beat”*** (Collins & Adoniou, 2018).

Award-winning neuromusical educator and Adjunct Professor Dr Anita Collins says music can enhance the biological building blocks for language: “Music both prepares children for learning to read, and supports them as they continue their reading journey” (Collins & Adoniou, 2018, para. 19).

Dr Collins worked with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on

Table 1: 10 Benefits of Music Education

1	Language skills
2	Improved test scores
3	Self-esteem
4	Listening skills
5	Math skills
6	Making the brain work harder
7	Relieving stress
8	Creativity
9	Helping special needs children
10	Higher graduation rates

(Martin, 2014)

three-part documentary series *Don't Stop the Music* which highlights the transformative effects of teaching music in primary schools. The series follows the journey of primary school students in an underprivileged area of Perth as they embarked on a music program. The students had no prior music knowledge, and many had never touched a musical instrument, but nearly nine months later they performed on stage at the Perth Concert Hall. During the series, the benefits of learning an instrument became clear; higher attendance rates, improved concentration and a sense of happiness and confidence amongst the students. The *Don't Stop the Music* call to action campaign also led to Australians donating at least 4,500 instruments to students (Donoughue, 2018).

Dr Collins said the prevailing belief was that learning an instrument was just a pastime, one that students should be free to abandon once the practice stops being fun. “We have this really narrow idea – and I mean the general public as well as the education fraternity – that you study music, or any art, in order to be a musician, or an actor, or to be a visual artist,” she said.

Table 2: Music Is Good – 8 Facts About School Music

1	An education inclusive of music maximises student opportunity.
2	Australian parents value music and want their kids to be involved.
3	Music improves confidence, self-expression and fosters creativity.
4	Music promotes teamwork and collaboration.
5	Music develops neural pathways and enhances brain function.
6	Australia lags behind other countries in provision of school music.
7	Too many kids miss out on quality music education at school.
8	Music is good for Australia's social, cultural and economic growth.

(Music Australia, n.d.)

“As opposed to: every child should study it so their cognitive connectivity is as fantastic as we can possibly get it” (Donoughue, 2018, para. 19).

Collins and Adoniou (2018) explain that there is a neurological connection between processing music and developing language in a child's first years, and assert that music is actually a child's first language.

Connecting disadvantaged students

Dr Collins says music education is especially effective with children from disadvantaged backgrounds and advocates globally for improved access. “It's actually addressing some of the fundamental underlying cognitive issues that they're dealing with,” she said. “I do a lot of work with disadvantaged communities, many of them in remote areas, where children are living very challenging lives” (Collins, as cited in Fullon, 2019, para. 10). Unfortunately, it's disadvantaged students who are least likely to have music learning in their schools. Yet research shows they could benefit

MUSIC LIFTS LEARNING OUTCOMES – IS IT TIME FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH? CONTINUED

the most from music learning. “When we look at the Year 3 NAPLAN results in disadvantaged schools, the kids are always below the state or the national average and, unfortunately throughout their school career, they never really catch up. However, about nine months after they start [music education] we see a real change in attention levels, and attention is one of the first ingredients we need for learning” (Collins, as cited in Fulloon, 2019, para. 13).

The *Bridging the Gap in School Achievement through the Arts* report (Vaughan, Harris, & Caldwell, 2011) emphasised the benefits of schools engaging in free music and arts-based programs to develop robust music programs for disadvantaged students. The Song Room, a national not-for-profit organisation assists with this development in school contexts where students have experienced disadvantage and hardship. Results from data collected as part of these programs indicated higher rates of school attendance, improved National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and higher rates of social-emotional wellbeing as measured by the Australian Council for Educational Research survey (Vaughan, Harris, & Caldwell, 2011).

Bringing joy to communities

The evidence for music’s extraneous benefits make a strong case for an integrated music program in schools. However, the sheer joy students

experience making music and the shared community celebration music affords should not be forgotten.

TEACHX Excellence in Teaching Award winner and St Aidan’s Anglican Girls’ School teacher Carla Trott explains that music goes beyond talent and extends to access to music-making:

“...Every child has musical potential. By the time they are 10 they have already had six years of the Every Day Music program – that’s over 150 lessons, exposing them to 80 songs, games and rhymes each year. They sing, dance, laugh and play; all the while the teacher is secretly making them learn! The children are not auditioned yet, their level of ability to think in sound, analyse, read and write, and to perform music astounds many adults. ‘They must be so talented; I often hear. No, they are not talented. They have simply been given the chance to access what is innately human; a joy in rigorous education and a love for making music together.’”

Music bridges social background, culture and distance. *Music Count Us In* is an annual event organised by Music Australia, funded by an Australian Government grant. The event celebrates music education across Australia, with school children singing a specially composed song at the same time (11.30am Queensland time) on the same day (Thursday 7 November). Last year more than 700,000 children took part. The song is published in early July and is available along with a set of 10 lesson plans for teachers to use.

Similarly, the Australian Music Examination Board’s (AMEB) Online Orchestra is a community celebration promoted as “a nation united by music”. The official 2019 AMEB Online Orchestra video performance of ‘I am Australian’ was live streamed to the AMEB Facebook page on 22 October 2019. Participants, which included students from several Queensland independent schools, downloaded their scores, practised, recorded their videos in various stunning Australian locations and sent them back to AMEB for inclusion.

Conclusion

In addition to the sheer joy music and music-making provides students, research has shown that it also benefits learning. There is strong evidence of a positive relationship between music participation and higher academic achievement in maths, English and science. Neuroscience shows it helps children with language skills and learning to read; and there is further evidence music engages previously disengaged and disadvantaged students in learning; and aids with attention and problem-solving.

School leaders don’t have to look too far to find numerous studies that show the benefits of music participation to learning. Perhaps it is timely, when school leaders are planning for 2020, to discuss with staff this research and whether a more integrated approach to music would benefit student outcomes.

“Where words fail, music speaks.”

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

DIVERSITY OF DELIVERING MUSIC EDUCATION

All independent schools follow the Australian Curriculum P-10 The Arts, Music and Senior Syllabuses in Music. Queensland has a proud history of music education with the most continuous and comprehensive classroom music tradition, especially in primary, compared with any other state or territory in Australia. Independent schools in Queensland augment the curriculum with a diverse range of approaches, methods and philosophies. Some examples are below.

Montessori

Maria Montessori noticed that rhythm and musicality were an intrinsic part of childhood, and it followed that a music education should be woven into school curriculum (Rajan, 2010). “She believed that children should be ‘charmed’ and invited to make music” (Rajan, 2010, p. 34). She observed that “[t]he children feel the legato, answering it with very reserved movements. The staccato lifts them from the floor. The crescendo makes them hurry and stamp their feet. The forte sometimes brings them to clap their hands, while calando restores them to the silent march, which turns, during the piano, to perfect silence” (Montessori, as cited in Rajan, 2010, p. 34)

Because children responded to musicality, Maria Montessori created classroom materials to support musical growth; activities which encouraged memory and muscular development, sound recognition, voice and musical notation.

“Montessori believed that music was a necessary part of a complete education, one that supported sensorial education and child-centred learning. Most importantly, it was her intense belief that all teachers can, and *should*, integrate music education into their classroom” (Rajan, 2010).

Five independent schools across three Queensland regions offer a Montessori education.

Kodály

Hungarian composer, Zoltan Kodály believed music education is the right of every child and should begin as early as possible in a person’s life – first at home and later within the school curriculum (KMEIA Queensland, 2015). Kodály’s philosophy established that a sequential and developmental singing-based program is “the most inclusive and effective way to develop musical literacy for people of all age groups” (Kodály Australia, 2019).

Key to the composer’s beliefs was access to music education. The voice is the most accessible of all instruments and this makes it most suitable for musical instruction. Sequences are closely related to child development as Kodály believed that musical instruction should reflect the way that children learn naturally (KMEIA Queensland, 2015).

Several independent schools deliver every day music programs based on Kodály’s philosophy, including Anglican Church Grammar School, Brisbane Boys’ College, Clayfield College, Moreton Bay Colleges, St Aidan’s Anglican Girls’ School and St Peter’s Lutheran College.

St Aidan’s Head of Instrumental Music Carla Trott recently won the TEACHX Excellence in Teaching Award on the eve of World Teacher’s Day (24 October 2019). Participation in music ensembles at the school has increased to 50 percent with Carla’s Every Day Music lessons for Kindergarten to Year 3 students cited as one of the reasons behind the school’s outstanding literacy and numeracy outcomes. Carla also co-founded the Emerging Music Teachers Network to try to stem the isolation experienced by many music teachers. The Network’s streamed meetings now attract teachers from all over the world. (Queensland College of Teachers TEACHX Awards program).

Industry-centred

Some educators believe that real learning occurs for students when interest and curriculum converge.

Music Industry College delivers an innovative music-integrated educational program “that empowers young people to succeed [particularly] in the music industry” (Music Industry College, 2019).

The Spot Youth Service music program provided Principal of Music Industry College, Brett Wood the idea to start a music school.

“A school that would re-engage the disengaged, help talented and passionate young people pursue a career in the music industry – and achieve a high school education and a university entrance at the same time” (Wood, 2019, p. 69).

“Music Industry College has chosen to operate the QCAA curriculum model with some vocational options added to the mix – a Diploma in Music Industry and Certificate III Music Industry. Currently, this mode of curriculum gives us the flexibility to contextualise our teaching and learning to the music industry” (Wood, 2019, p. 191).

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Further Information

AMEB Queensland Advisory Committee

Shari Armistead, Director (Strategic Relations) is the Independent Schools Queensland representative for the independent sector.

2019 AMEB Online Orchestra video

ABC documentary: Don't Stop the Music

Emerging Music Teachers Network

Music Count Us In

Register to participate, and to access program resources. Celebration day will be held on 7 November 2019.

Queensland Music Teachers Association



Mike Tyler, Principal Education Officer for Queensland Department of Education and Chair of the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) joins The School Bell podcast to discuss the importance of music in education.

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