

At risk and disadvantaged students benefit from music participation

Research has shown that arts education, and in particular music, can assist the development of at risk or disadvantaged students. US researchers noted increased self-concept amongst at risk children following their participation in an arts program that included music¹⁴.

Why should my child learn music?

For many years, we have believed that children should learn music 'for music's sake', because music was an excellent accomplishment and part of a well rounded, balanced education. And so it is.

But these days children are expected to learn so many more skills and parents have begun to ask which subjects their child could drop. The answer is: not music! As music is the one subject that 'uniquely contributes to the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth of all students.'¹⁵

Research shows that playing music can make significant differences to children's abilities related to learning, memory and social interactions. Learning music can make the difference for your child.

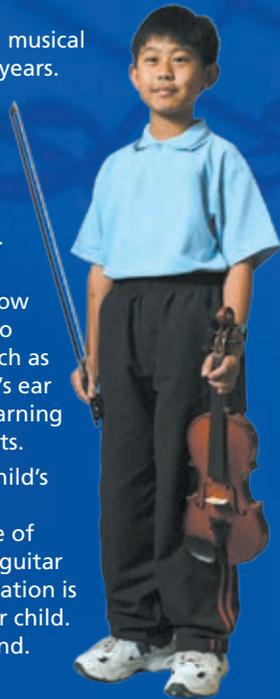
When should a child start to learn music?

Any time is a good time, but the earlier the better. The important thing is to match your child's musical experiences with their developmental stage and to establish playing music as an ongoing part of their life.

From six months to around three years: musical experiences are important during these years. Group classes where children develop rhythm, pitch, concepts such as high and low or fast and slow, and use their voices help a young child to internalise the precepts of music and prepares them for learning to play an instrument.

From around three years to six years: children's brains and motor skills have now usually developed sufficiently to begin to consider learning to play instruments such as the violin, keyboard or piano. The child's ear is more fully developed, and they are learning to master language and abstract concepts.

From six years onwards: by now your child's fine motor skills have begun to develop and they can master a more wider range of instruments, such as a flute, percussion, guitar or trumpet. Now an important consideration is also to find an instrument that suits your child. Music teachers can advise and recommend.



How can I find a music class for my child?

There are many easy ways to find a music teacher for your child. Try these:

- Ask at your child's school to see if they have a music program or can recommend a local music teacher or private music school or studio.
- Contact your local musical instrument retailer who will know who the local music teachers, studios and schools are.
- Each State has a music teachers association, which can provide lists of teachers near you.
- Look in the newspapers and Yellow Pages for music studios and schools offering private and group classes for children of all ages.



This brochure was produced by the Australian Music Association in conjunction with the Australian Council of State School Organisations.

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MUSIC makes the Difference

Music is a wonderful skill for any child, but **new research** shows how learning music can **help your child** in so many **more ways**:

- Improved reasoning capacity and problem solving skills
- Improved maths and language performance
- Better memory
- Greater social & team skills
- Assisting disadvantaged children
- Developing creativity



Everyone has musical ability

It's true. Every child is born with musical ability, but if it's not tapped into early enough then it can fail to develop¹. Being 'unmusical' is more likely to be an outcome of poor training or lack of opportunity than it is from lack of ability, and everyone has the capacity to improve their musical skills.

Research published in early 2001 indicates that all babies are born with perfect pitch - it's how they are able to recognise their mother's voice and to learn language. But if they don't learn to use their perfect pitch, they then lose it. Early music lessons help a child to retain that fundamental musical skill, which is also so critical in learning a mother tongue as well as foreign languages².

Playing music increases memory and reasoning capacity, time management skills and eloquence

A series of research experiments in Hungary in the 1950s explored why children studying at special music kindergarten and primary schools had higher academic scores than those at the mainstream schools. The studies concluded that learning and playing music improved not just academic performance, but also memory, reasoning, working as part of a group, time management and the ability to think in the abstract³.

Playing music improves concentration, memory and self expression

A massive two-year study in Switzerland run with 1200 children in more than 50 classes scientifically showed how playing music improved children's reading and verbal skills through improving concentration, memory and self expression. Younger children who had three more music classes per week and three fewer main curriculum classes made rapid developments in speech and learned to read with greater ease.

Other effects revealed by the study showed that children learned to like each other more, enjoyed school more (as did their teachers) and were less stressed during the various tests, indicating they were better able to handle performance pressure⁴.

Playing music improves the ability to think

Ongoing research at the University of California-Irvine and the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh⁵ demonstrate that learning and playing music builds or modifies neural pathways related to spatial reasoning tasks, which are crucial for higher brain functions like complex maths, chess and science. The first studies showed that listening to a Mozart sonata temporarily improved a child's spatial abilities. Further studies compared children who had computer lessons, children who had singing lessons, children who learned music using a keyboard and children who did nothing additional. The children who had had the music classes scored significantly higher - up to 35% higher - than the children who had computer classes or did nothing additional⁶.

Music training improves verbal memory

A preliminary study at The Chinese University of Hong Kong has shown that adults who had had music training before the age of 12 years had an improved ability to recall spoken words - ie. verbal memory. The study tested 60 adults of which 30 who had had six years or more of training with a Western musical instrument, and the balance had some training through to none⁷.

Music students more likely to be good citizens

High school students who participate in the performing arts, including the school band program, are far less likely to be involved with drugs, crime or have behavioural problems, according to a longitudinal study being pursued in the US. Called Champions of Change, the study is being undertaken by a number of researchers including those at Harvard, Stanford and Columbia. This finding is supported by the Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse which reported in 1998 that 'secondary students who participated in band or orchestra reported the lowest lifetime and current use of all substances' (alcohol, drugs, tobacco).

Learning music helps under-performing students to improve

Researchers at Brown University in the US discovered that children aged 5-7 years who had been lagging behind in their school performance had caught up with their peers in reading and were ahead of them in maths after seven months of music lessons. The children's classroom attitudes and behaviour ratings had also significantly improved, and after a year of music classes were rated as better than the children who had had no additional classes⁸.

Music assists in the development of social skills

A 1997 Norwegian study, showed that participation in music programs had a positive impact in reducing harassment, bullying and ethnic tension amongst students⁹. Similar findings emerged from the 2004 Australian Government report Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools which showed that two music based programs provided students with the ability to work with others developing socio-cultural skills that led to a more positive interactions and greater tolerance for other cultures¹⁰.

Music is a creativity tool

Noted education expert, Sir Ken Robinson, argues that creativity is critical to the future development of our culture and economy. He says creativity is not a purely personal process but rather is drawn from the ideas and stimulation of others¹¹. As a social art, music is well placed to provide the stimulus for creative thinking as most school-based music programs are group based and collaborative in nature. Early research on music and creativity has shown that Grade 1 students who were given 30 minutes of music learning daily exhibited significant increases in creativity¹². Another study found higher creativity scores among university students majoring in music than their non-music peers¹³.

To learn how you can be an advocate in your community go to <http://musicaustralia.org.au/advocacy/>

