NEWCASTLE CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC

SCHOOLS PROGRAM HANDBOOK

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA

CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC

Information for Parents and Students

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

OUR PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENT

Our band program is committed to connecting with young musicians, professional educators and local creatives, and inspiring them to develop their musical potential through engaging learning and performance-based opportunities. With the Conservatorium's values of equity and social justice, excellence, engagement, innovation, integrity, and sustainability as our core principles we aim to contribute to its vision of becoming a 21st Century Conservatorium within an Australian context.

Our program strives to offer multi-disciplinary music-based programs that cater to a range of ages and skill levels, and support social inclusion groups and Indigenous programs and events. We believe that music is a powerful tool for fostering creativity, self-expression, and personal growth, and we are dedicated to providing life-long music learning opportunities and initiatives to the community.

Our program aims to equip students with life long autonomous learning skills through reflective practices. Concepts such as intention, execution, reflection, varied repetition and consolidation all contribute to our students musical and personal development, and overall growth mindset. These skills in conjunction with the well documented benefits of music to brain development and health are proven indicators of students academic, social and emotional well-being.

We aim to maintain high standards of professionalism and best practices in our staffing and administration processes, and to be financially sustainable in order to continue providing quality musical experiences to our students and the wider community. By working in partnership with local schools and other community organisations, we seek to strengthen pathways and community exchange throughout regional NSW and beyond.

The Conservatorium is passionate about music making and the role it plays in enriching young people's lives. We are committed to providing a supportive, inspiring and inclusive environment where students can develop their musical skills, explore their creative and learning practices, and create a strong and diverse community with others who share their love of music.



Rock Con: Hamilton South Public School Students

THE BENEFITS OF MUSIC EDUCATION

BRAIN GROWTH

Studies in neuroscience show that music can enhance brain function in children. Musical activities (such as playing an instrument, singing or just listening to music) stimulate the brain, and this brain workout leads to improved brain structure with the formation of new neural connections.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Studies also show that young children who participate in music classes have improved speech development and learn to read more easily. Learning music helps to develop the left side of the brain (related to language and reasoning), assists with sound recognition, and teaches rhythm and rhyme. Songs can also help children remember information (just think of the Alphabet song!).

MATHEMATIC SKILLS

Music can help with the development of mathematic skills. By listening to musical beats your child can learn basic fractions, pattern-recognition and problem solving. Children who study music also have improved spatial intelligence and ability to form mental pictures of objects – skills that are important for more advanced mathematics.

MEMORY, ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATION

Recent studies have shown that people who are musically trained have better working memory skills, helping them to remember things even while their minds are busy with other matters – important aspects of mental arithmetic and reading comprehension. Learning music also requires significant levels of concentration, training children to focus their attention for sustained periods.

INCREASED COORDINATION

Just like playing sports, playing and dancing to music helps children develop their motor skills. Making music involves more than the voice or fingers; you also use ears and eyes, as well as large and small muscles, all at the same time. This helps the body and the mind work together.

ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE

Learning music teaches children to work towards short-term goals, develop routine and practice self-discipline. Setting aside regular time for practice develops commitment and patience. Mastering a new piece of music leads to a sense of pride and achievement, and helps children to learn the value of self-discipline.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Making music with other people (like in a band or choir) improves children's social and emotional skills. They learn to work together as a team and develop their sense of empathy with others. Researchers have found that when children play music together – from simple rhythms to larger group performances – they are better able to tune into other people's emotions.

THE JOY OF MUSIC

Music can give children a way to express themselves, to unleash their creativity, to be inspired and uplifted, to relax, and to relieve stress and tension. Just think about listening to a beautiful piece of music, singing along to a favourite song with friends, or dancing to a great song on the radio. Music education is a gift for life.

MUSIC FOR LIFE

With all these benefits, try to expose your child to music as much as possible – listen to music together, sing songs, play rhythm games, go to concerts or make your own instruments together. Your local library, community centre or music society may offer music programs for kids. If your child wants to learn a musical instrument, your options may include a school music program, private music teachers, and group music activities such as choirs, recorder groups and bands.

THE MUSIC PARENT

FOR BEGINNING STUDENTS

Did you know that in some cases there can be a high rate of students quitting after their first year playing in an ensemble? Parent engagement can make all the difference so it's important that we bring you into the loop to help students complete a successful first year so that they continue for many more to come. You may like to take the 15-minute New Music Parent Course made available by NFHS (National Federation of High School Associations).

Also, consider having your beginning students teach their instrument to you so that you both can perform in a Parent Band in the final concert of the year. We all know that when you teach, you also learn, so use this to your advantage. End the year on a high note with you and your child participating in this fun activity by playing 2-3 tunes from the method book.

MUSICAL TALENT

In many school areas between the third and sixth grade, many students start on an instrument as part of the school curriculum. But one year later several of these students are no longer playing. Why does this happen?

The answer is not simple, and there can be several factors at play. However, there has been one constant:

Most parents and students are not armed with enough information to get a solid start on their musical craft. This is not always the educator's fault.

After all, students may have only one lesson a week of short duration and in groups of varying size.

In a school that has music lessons every week, students will probably have a maximum of twenty hours of instruction on an instrument for the entire year. That's a long way from the 10,000 hours it takes to master an instrument.

The reason most students quit an instrument after their first year of playing is not because they do not have musical talent, but rather because:

- The student has no idea how to practise and, therefore, doesn't put in quality time and becomes frustrated.
- The students' parents don't have enough knowledge to support their children through the beginning stages of their musical growth.

Everyone is capable of playing an instrument at a proficient level with the right support and mindful practice. Therefore, the first step is the most crucial: picking an instrument that suits the student's identity and personality and picking one that they want to play (hopefully for a long time!). Also remember that students can change instruments although this needs to be done with careful consultation with tutors.

SELECTING AN INSTRUMENT

The most important thing to remember is that students must be actively involved in the process when picking what instrument they want to play. The second most important thing to be aware of is how many instruments are available. Not only should a parent and student learn about the different instruments prior to making a decision, but the student should handle and play several instruments.

Students need to hear instruments played to their fullest potential, both before choosing it and also during their weekly study.

This can happen in one of a few ways:

- Going to a live concert
- Attending an instrument "petting zoo" hosted by the school, where students can try out each instrument and hear them played by professionals
- Checking out performances on YouTube

One of the biggest reasons students quit playing their instrument is unnecessary frustration. Instruments are challenging enough to begin with, so any physical limitations that could be avoided should be considered ahead of time.

Consider these points. A student who lacks fine motor coordination may struggle with a flute but manage a trumpet more easily. They may not have the lung capacity for the trombone but can play the clarinet.

Students should select their first, second, and third choice of the instrument they want to play. That way, they are excited to select an instrument that both interests them and fits them physically.

An important decision that parents must make is whether they should rent or buy an instrument for their student who is just beginning to play. While there are some fortunate families that attend schools that provide instruments to beginners, it is certainly not the norm. Usually, a family must be able to provide their own instrument before beginning lessons–many times with help from the school system in collaboration with music vendors.

RENTING VS. BUYING AN INSTRUMENT

This is an important decision that can have an impact not only on your finances, but on whether or not your child stays with (and enjoys) their instrument for years or quits in frustration after a few months. Although renting or buying an instrument are both good and necessary options, it is certainly worth weighing the benefits of both before embarking on your child's musical journey. Naturally, the fear of a student losing interest in the first year or two drives many parents to choose to rent rather than to buy.

Although renting does not provide a fail-safe to a student losing interest, it could provide some security in the short term, yet may add to the overall expense of owning an instrument in the long term.

A major advantage to buying a new instrument is that buying gives both students and parents a greater sense of commitment to playing and studying the instrument. This often translates into the student being further encouraged to keep playing the instrument they have chosen. Parents tend to encourage daily practice a bit more, which is key to longterm engagement in music.

You can buy a new instrument from a music store, private dealer, or over the internet. If you are fortunate enough to have a local music store that carries new instruments, this is a great opportunity to select the instrument of your choice. If possible, ask your child's teacher for advice on brands, and help in the selection of the best instrument for your child. Buying online is always a viable alternative if you have good support from the tutor.

Again, ask your child's tutor for advice on the best student-model instrument. Buy from an online retailer that will allow at least thirty-day returns. A great alternative to buying a new instrument is to buy a good used instrument. This can be an excellent, cost-effective alternative to buying new.

However, if you elect to buy a used instrument, it's important to have your child's tutor inspect the instrument. It's very frustrating for a beginning student to try to learn on an instrument that is leaking, sticking, or has some other mechanical problem.

PRACTISING

Many teachers use "practice logs" that get sent home in order to ensure students have spent time on their instrument each night. Parents sign off on it and the student turns it in each week to the teacher. Sometimes these are useful, sometimes they are not.

This is because mindful practice trumps mindless playing every single time. Meaningful practice is not measured in minutes, but in the number of high-quality repetitions a student executes.

Parents should expect that teachers have taught their students that five minutes of practice a day is better than one hour once a week, students should embrace routine and practice at the same time every day, and students learn about having "grit" when they practise at times they want to the least.

Teachers should demonstrate and teach students how to practise using the fundamentals of each instrument, but also the additional tools and approaches.

This includes:

- How to use a metronome
- How to use a tuner
- How to set goals for each practice session (what should the student be able to accomplish at the end of their session that they could not accomplish before?)
- How to break sections down into little "chunks", then put it back into the larger piece
- How to practise bits at a very slow tempo, then increase the tempo systematically

Teachers should also discuss with students how the brain works; repetition is key. Students have to practise sessions of music for days in a row until the skill is engraved in the brain.

Practising a musical instrument regularly is tough for most students. That does not mean that when your child is giving you a hard time about practising it means that they hate music and want to quit. They just don't like practising, and that's okay...for now. There are many ways to get your student to practise. Some days will be easier than others, and sometimes you will have to lose the battle in order to win the war. But eventually, your goal should be to give your child ownership of their own learning.

WHAT IS OWNERSHIP OF LEARNING?

Basically, when a student understands “why,” “how,” “where,” and “when” to practise, they have been given power. They will feel a sense of responsibility, which will then lead to self-motivation and routine. Ideally, we want our children to have ownership over their own learning in every aspect of life, and music education is a wonderful way to teach this.

Ten minutes of practice a day (for beginners) is better than nothing, and 99% of the time ten minutes turns into twenty minutes. As long as your teacher gives clear assignments, ten minutes will certainly extend to a half an hour easily. Many school music teachers send home practice charts that have to be filled out and returned each week.

If you are the type of parent who needs concrete numbers, try this:

- Beginning = 10-20 min/day
- Intermediate = 20-30 min/day
- High school = 30-60 min/day

PRACTICE AND TECHNOLOGY

There are a lot of growing music technology companies and app developers out there these days, so make sure to investigate and look into them.

For instance:

- Students practice with background accompaniment and get visual and audio feedback on each piece, which makes practice more meaningful and productive.
- Using software motivates students to continue practising to improve their scores, similar to a video game, which makes practice more fun.

Students can practise solos and full band/orchestra pieces while hearing the entire ensemble as they play—it’s like performing with a piano or in an actual ensemble.

Listening to music is an important way to continue to fill the brain with beautiful sounds, which is so important in the process of learning to play an instrument. Don’t forget to attend some concerts— many are free and outdoors, which makes for a great family outing.

FUN MUSIC GAMES AND APPS

- Kahoot Music Quiz
- Blob Opera
- Incredibox
- Typatone
- Patatap



IN SCHOOL LESSONS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

When students begin taking music lessons in school, parents, teachers, and even administrators may become worried that the student will fall behind academically if they attend the pull-out lesson.

On the surface, this may seem like a rational concern, but there is no data that shows that students suffer academically from half an hour per week of pull-out lessons. In fact the overwhelming data showing the overall academic success of music students should alleviate any concerns.

Here are a couple of credible articles on this subject:

- National Association for Music Education
- The Effect of Pullout Lessons on the Academic Achievement of Eighth Grade Band Students
- Pullout Lessons in Instrumental Music Education



BOOST PROGRAM

The BOOST program (Building Outstanding Orchestral Skills and Talent) is a cornerstone of the schools program and allows schools to access the Conservatorium's world class staff and facilities. These "theme" days can be rotated through approximately a three year cycle to cater for the average participation of a primary school band member.

Days are designed to focus on the specific needs of an ensemble, to ensure variety whilst maintaining high quality educational outcomes and to respond to the diverse cohort of students found in schools in the 21st Century.

Flexibility is a feature of these days as partial roll outs of selected themes can be coupled with more traditional rehearsal models depending on the requirements of specific ensembles.

The teaching and technical staff involved in these days are qualified, experienced and have strong relationships to the local music community. They are engaged to support each individual school's needs and the Conservatorium's public profile.



REFLECTIVE PRACTICES FOR THE STUDENT

1. What sparked your interest in learning to play an instrument or pursue music?

2. What are your expectations or goals for yourself as a beginner musician, and how do you plan to achieve them?

3. How do you stay motivated and disciplined in practising your instrument, especially during times when progress may feel slow or challenging?

4. What are some of the biggest obstacles or difficulties you've encountered so far in your musical journey, and how have you overcome them?

5. What do you hope to gain or learn from your musical pursuits, both personally and creatively?

6. How do you approach learning new techniques or skills on your instrument, and what strategies do you find most effective for your own learning style?

7. How do you balance structured practice routines with exploring your own creativity and improvisation?

8. What role does music play in your life beyond the technical aspects of playing an instrument? How does it affect your emotions, well-being, or sense of self-expression?

9. How do you handle feelings of frustration or self-doubt that may arise during the learning process, and what strategies do you use to regain confidence and motivation?

10. How do you seek feedback or guidance from more experienced musicians or teachers, and how does that feedback help you grow as a beginner musician?

11. What are some musical genres or styles that inspire you, and how do you incorporate those influences into your own playing or compositions?

12. How do you approach mistakes or setbacks in your practice sessions, and how do you turn them into learning opportunities?

13. What strategies do you use to manage time effectively and ensure consistent progress in your musical development?

14. How do you overcome the fear of performing in front of others, and what steps are you taking to gain more confidence in sharing your music?

15. How do you celebrate your achievements and milestones as a beginner musician, no matter how small they may seem?

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

1. What musical achievement(s) are you most proud of this year?

2. On average, how often did you practise this year and for long? Was it enough practice for what you wanted to achieve?

3. What are valuable tips you learned this year in your practice or in your music lesson?

4. What is something that was hard for you to do on your instrument at the start of the year but is easy now?

5. In what area of your practice do you feel you made the biggest improvement?

6. In what area of your practice could you have made more improvement?

7. Which piece(s) of music did you enjoy learning this year?

8. Of the pieces you learned this year, which one helped you grow the most as a musician?

9. What advice would you give yourself if you could redo this year?

10. What advice would you give other musicians from what you learned this year?

TERMS, CONDITIONS AND FEES

For full information on our terms, conditions and fees:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_sdmCIJDEw_RXDV54N5ugcVa3Ll9Elxx/view?usp=sharing

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