

Perrottet's \$100 gesture just a tad off key

By Richard Gill

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When a child learns a musical instrument, a brand new world of possibilities opens up to them. Yes, they learn how to read and play music, but they also develop a special set of skills that enables them to not only play in their school band or orchestra - but to work in any group setting.

They learn how to work with and listen to others, to co-operate to achieve a common goal, and to take responsibility for their contribution to that goal.

Above all of this is the opportunity to learn how to enjoy and relish the sound of the music and to learn to love the making and playing of music for its own sake. To learn to love what we do is surely one of the greatest things a human being can experience.

So the [NSW government decision to contribute \\$100 towards lessons in music and other arts disciplines](#) for every school-aged child in the state is welcome, in that it recognises music lessons cost money and that learning a musical instrument is a valuable activity for a child.

But ... all of these benefits for only \$100?

I called my local musical instrument dealer and asked for prices on student models of flutes, clarinets and saxophones. He told me I could buy a flute or a clarinet for about \$550 and an alto saxophone for a little over \$1000.

At a local state primary school I know, lessons are \$50 for half an hour, for 10 weeks of the term. The yearly cost of tuition is \$2000, never mind the cost of the instrument, sheet music, repairs and accompanists for exams.

One of Sydney's top private schools offers students 30 lessons a year at a cost of about \$86 for every 40-minute lesson. Together with a \$55 hiring fee per term for an instrument, if the child doesn't own one, and the annual minimum charge climbs towards \$2800. Multiply this by six years of high school, for example, and the parents are looking at forking out \$16,800 by the time their child graduates.

For many parents of children in NSW primary schools, the costs of learning music are simply prohibitive and their children will miss out. A \$100 voucher isn't going to cover much.

The state government must re-examine its entire rationale for teaching music. Its money would be better spent on getting a properly trained specialist music teacher into every school, someone who can teach every child in that school to use the one instrument we all will have, generally, for life - and that instrument is our voice.

The first thing humans do when they come into the world is use their voice. And our voices, when used for singing, can teach us practically every musical concept we need to know. We can learn to read music, to compose, to improvise and to develop a series of complex musical skills which will, as a special and amazing bonus, translate into extra musical benefits in all learning.

Yet many primary schools in NSW have no access to any music education whatsoever. So thank you, Treasurer Perrottet, for your \$100 gesture. But I propose you extend it to include the training of specialist music teachers, who will pay you back a thousand fold by enriching the lives of hundreds of thousands of children.

Through the arts, and especially music, we can change the state of education for the common good. A child is worth more than \$100.

Richard Gill is the founder and director of the National Music Teacher Mentoring Program.