



Auckland Pipe Band College

So you want to play bagpipes or drums in a pipe band? Well the Auckland Pipe Band College is the perfect place to start. With access to top quality tutors, the College has a programme designed to put you on the right path from the very beginning. We work in conjunction with local bands and private tutors to provide a team learning experience for young pipers and drummers, and a juvenile band to get them out on parade and to the competitions. We also work with adult learners, and in improving piping and drumming standards across Auckland bands.

What is a pipe band?

A pipe band has pipers, side drummers, and the bass section of tenor drums and bass drum. Ideally a band has at least 12 pipers, 4 sides, 2 tenors and 1 bass:

- Pipe music is generally played in unison (ie, one part), although sometimes pipers will add harmonies ("seconds") for some tunes.
- The side drums are snare drums, and play the distinctive "ratta-tat" rhythms with hard sticks, like in other marching bands.
- The tenor drums and bass drums play with soft-headed sticks, making a "boom" sound, and focus on rhythms which reinforce the main beat.

Tenor drums look like large side drums, and are also carried about the waist. The bass drum is easy to spot! "Flourishing" (ie, twirling the sticks) in the bass section gives an exciting visual effect.

The Drum Major ("DM") carries a mace (which is often flourished, sometimes spectacularly) to lead the band on parade, and is responsible for drill and uniform.

The Pipe Major ("PM") plays in the ranks but is the overall head of the band. The PM is assisted by the leading side drummer, the Drum Sergeant ("DSgt"), who writes the band's drum settings. The PM and DSgt are responsible for teaching, music and repertoire.

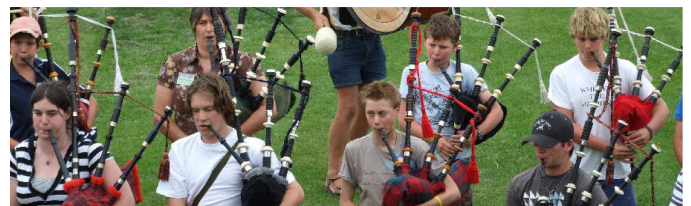
Pipe band scene

Pipe bands have long been an important part of New Zealand heritage, popularised by Scottish immigrants and following from British Army traditions. You see them on street parades and community events. Pipe bands are popular in Commonwealth countries (including the UK, Canada, Australia, India and Pakistan), and there has been a surge of interest across Europe, the US and South America. So there is a vibrant local and international pipe band scene.

Pipe band activity is basically seasonal: Winter is the "off-season" for learning new tunes and practicing, and by Spring the first competitions and Christmas parades are kicking off. The Auckland Highland Games (at Three Kings) in November is the shake-down competition in Auckland for bands and solo piping, and other competitions (such as the solo piping at the Waipu Highland Games on New Years Day, and the Paeroa Highland Games in February) lead into the provincial "Centre" finals in late February and the Nationals in early March. After the ANZAC Day parades in April most bands hunker down to get ready for the next season – or for some bands the World Championships in Glasgow in August!!!

Grading

Competing bands are graded based on performance at previous competitions. Grade 1 is top (there are about 6 grade 1 bands in New Zealand, with Auckland & District being the current champions), down through grades 2, 3 and 4. Grade 4 has the most bands, including social bands. There is an optional "juvenile" category, which is not a grade as such, but covers bands whose members are under-18 years old. The College competes as a juvenile band. School bands often compete in both juvenile and graded events. Players should expect to move to higher graded bands as they progress over time.



Lifetime of music and friendships

The pipe band scene is welcoming, and you will soon have many new friends in local bands, New Zealand and internationally. There is a competitive slant to piping and drumming (with a bit of a sports-team atmosphere), and this good-natured rivalry keeps everyone on their toes and keen to improve. Events are family-friendly (as well as being a nice day out), and the Highland Games often have Highland dancing competitions as well.

One of the great things about pipe banding is that it involves all ages and stages, people of diverse backgrounds, and both boys and girls. Usually there is some Scottish ancestry, but not always. There are many other piping traditions around the world (including in the UK, Europe, the Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Middle East), and the Great Highland Bagpipe is a great gateway to them.

Opportunities

Pipers are often asked to play for weddings, funerals and other events, and there is a busy solo piping scene in New Zealand and overseas. Piping can lead into other music forms such as celtic rock and folk music, and to other types of piping which feature at some of the international events such as the "Festival InterCeltique Lorient" in Brittany, France. While pipe bands play a lot of the traditional tunes, there has been an explosion of new compositions in the last 20 years, and most players try their hand at writing a tune or two. Pipe band drumming is quite technical, and is an excellent grounding for any other marching band percussion, and for other styles of drumming.

For more information and links to local bands, have a look at the RNZPBA website www.nzpipebands.org.nz. There are plenty of other piping websites with video clips and information, and there is also YouTube.

Getting started

Should I play pipes or drums? Well, you are probably best to go with whatever takes your fancy. It's important to like the instrument you are learning, because you will do better at it. Either way, it will take about 18 months before you are stepping out on parades with the band.

Our programme is based on the Royal New Zealand Pipe Band Association's Syllabus and Certificates:

- **Year 1:** Pipers start learning the basic fingerings and some common tunes on the practice chanter. Drummers learn basic rudiments and tune beatings with sticks and pads. This takes at least 6 months. After passing the Preliminary Certificate in October / November, you are ready to start on the actual bagpipes and drums.
- **Year 2:** Over the summer and into the next school year you start playing on the bagpipes and drums, getting the basic parade tunes going, and working towards passing the Elementary Certificate in October / November. That summer you should be stepping out with the band on your first parades and maybe some competitions.
- **Year 3** and onwards: Once you're playing well, you will work towards passing the Intermediate Certificate, and improving your general playing skills. You will be competing with the band and playing on all parades. In time you can work towards the Advanced Certificate.

The College has about 15 fortnightly sessions during the school year, and additional sessions through the summer holidays. We will also participate in two "musicians days" during the year organised by the Auckland Centre of the RNZPBA – these will be a good opportunity to check your progress.

Other tuition

The group tuition provided by the College is not a substitute for weekly individual tuition which you need to arrange through a local band or a private tutor. We can help you find an appropriate tutor. If you're really

keen you can also attend the attend the 5 day RNZPBA summer school in Christchurch.

What will it cost?

The annual College fee is \$30. Local bands may have membership fees, and you may have to pay for your individual tuition depending where you get it from. We have limited supplies of practice chanters and sticks which we can lend learners for the first few weeks, but you will need to buy these for yourself (about \$100 for a practice chanter).

Uniforms and drums are provided by bands. Pipers completing Year 1 need to get bagpipes. We have some sets for hire (for up to 2 years). Second-hand pipes can be found, and new sets tend to cost about \$2,000. Don't worry too much about this yet – If you're keen and doing well we will find a way.



What do I need to do?

For the first College session you need to bring:

- A plain exercise book, a sheet music book, a plastic sleeve "insert" folder (for handouts and tunes), a pen and pencil.
- \$30 (cash or cheque) as the College fee.

We provide you with our tutor book, copies of the band tunes, a copy of the Certificate syllabus and our session timetable for the year.

Finally, a practice tip: Piping and drumming rely on learned reflexes and muscle memory. Practise slowly and often. A good 15 minutes a day is better than longer periods of unfocused practice. Accuracy - not speed - is the important thing. The other two important things are accuracy, and accuracy. Bad habits cannot easily be unlearned, and will prevent further progress. Get things right to begin with and keep it that way. Good luck!!!

We are grateful for the support of



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