EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 15 April 2013

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Ms M. J. Capps, Chief Executive Officer, and
Ms H. King, Victorian State Manager, Musica Viva.
The CHAIR — I welcome you to the hearing, especially Mary Jo for flying down to be with us this morning. There are a couple of things I need to point out in terms of these hearings. Firstly, Hansard will be recording the evidence today and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript for any typographical errors and have those fixed. Secondly, the evidence that you give is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. That applies to the hearing proper, but not to anything that is said outside of the committee itself. You are aware of what we are looking at today and what this hearing is about. We might hand over to you to start with some brief introductory comments, and then we will have a number of questions for you.

Ms CAPPS — Thank you very much for inviting us to meet with you this morning and for your flexibility in changing the schedule around to accommodate the joys of air travel on a Monday morning. I will dive straight into the background of our program and why we feel so strongly and so supportive of this inquiry into music education in Victorian schools.

Musica Viva began in 1945 largely as a concert-giving organisation and realised as it progressed that indeed the support for music in schools, even by the late 1970s, was starting to wane, both in the education qualifications of the teachers who were teaching music and in what was available for students — for all students, beyond those who were studying music in an extracurricular way. So in 1981 Musica Viva in Schools began as a pilot project. It is now the largest private provider of music education in Australia and perhaps in the world. I will not make too many claims, but we certainly know it is substantial, covering all states and territories. Over 1000 schools participate in the program, and we have roughly 300 000 children a year reached.

Overheads shown.

Ms CAPPS — We decided in this model that we were going one-to-many. What was going to be the most effective way of taking music to a large number of children began with live performances. The idea was taking highly trained professional musicians, interacting with students in their own environment and getting them to participate, to understand and to more fully appreciate music. It has never been about teaching actual executant skills; we are not trying to create the next great violinist or pianist. Instead it is very much focused on singing, on clapping, on body percussion — on things that there is no barrier to entry so every child can participate.

In that we particularly became enthralled with the opportunities that music presented for special needs schools, and I know that is a particular area of interest to the inquiry. This has always been part of our mandate — the mandate we have chosen to follow — in that very much we are focused on providing music education for all children, including those who are remote, those who are in small schools and those who have special needs. That means that those programs often need to be tailored in smaller numbers and things that are not necessarily seen as commercially viable, even with the subsidy that is needed to present them.

We have worked in juvenile justice centres, in schools for the intellectually handicapped and physically disabled in a variety of ways. One that is of particular interest perhaps is that in Furlong Park School for Deaf Children, where we have been for the last three years. In that we have a tailored program, a musician who comes on a weekly basis and works with the students. The transformation in this particular school was so outstanding that the private philanthropic trust that was funding it has gone against all its rules and has continued to fund it for the next two years. The musician who is doing that is now off on a Churchill Fellowship extending her study further.

For profoundly deaf children one does not assume that music is necessarily going to be the first line of attack, but what they found was that it was the most effective means for teaching group dynamics. There were a variety of listening afflictions from profound deafness and some with autism, so this was a way that made them interact, helped them listen to one another and brought forth confidence in these children who previously had not been confident students at all. The school was delighted, and the teachers and parents absolutely so moved to see their children succeeding far beyond their expectations.
The Composer in the Classroom or the Musician in the Classroom has been an ongoing part of the program. For instance, we had a very successful residency at Sunshine North, where the principal there decided to use music as the common language to unite 27 different languages, largely from African origin. There was a great distrust amongst parents in the school community of people in authority because of their own background, so he decided to use music as a unifying means. We supplied the musician, who worked there on a weekly basis. The children’s presentations then became a reason for the parents to come into the school, bring food and clothing from their own region and share and celebrate together. It was very important in the social cohesion for the school.

As we know, music reaches children who otherwise fail to be caught in the regular education system. For those who may be holding back and troubled for a number of reasons, music is another way in of learning which has been well researched and documented, and that is what we capitalise on.

For high school students we have recently developed Anatomy of Music. This is relying very strongly on digital connections. We have been doing songwriting workshops, again seeing that as being a way in for most kids. By high school age many of them aspire to be songwriters and band members, and we have had fantastic artists. This slide obviously pictures Katie Noonan. She worked here at ACMI, where we were in a central theatre, but then we were linked by videoconference to a number of more remote schools. The kids were tweeting in and interacting, and it was a very powerful experience, and then they walked away with resources to put into effect after that. We are certainly very aware that that again becomes a vehicle of engagement not only with creativity, which is so important for Australia generally, but also as a way of engaging them with their fellow students and with their school often when they have failed to do so.

The CHAIR — If I could pick up on that, do you think that use of technology could be a way of being able to access programs in a broader sphere, particularly in rural and regional areas?

Ms CAPPS — Absolutely. We surveyed all our teachers in our one-to-many model. The idea was about teaching someone to fish, and that meant that the teachers had to be more trained. There was certainly extensive research conducted in the last few years, but the Music Council of Australia is showing the low level of formal study for pre-service training for primary school teachers in particular. Obviously there are more music specialists in high school level, but for primary school teachers, where it is so important that that begins, most of those teachers are getting as little as 3 to 17 hours in their entire degree. Effectively we are asking them to go into classrooms and teach German when they have never spoken it, where they have no confidence in it and where they do not even know what the written language looks like. Our program has become very focused on providing professional development for the teachers before they begin; that is the first step in the program.

The CHAIR — That is to generalist teachers at schools?

Ms CAPPS — Yes; generalist and specialist. Even if you are a specialist, you might be the best classical flute player in the world, but you may know nothing about Indonesian music. Because our program covers a very wide range of genres, we find that specialist teachers embrace it very quickly and happily as well, because it provides complements to their skills and extensions, so all the activities that we provide to the teachers start from the most basic — breathe, move, here is everything pointed out — through to if you are already a skilled teacher, here are some advanced — —

The CHAIR — And how do you determine which schools access the programs?

Ms CAPPS — Schools self-select, so we market to all 9000 schools across the nation. Our overall business model is 50 per cent user pay, 30 per cent government funding, 20 per cent private sector. Obviously for those schools that can afford to pay, the model is more weighted on the user pays, and for those who are more disadvantaged, they rely more on the philanthropic and government support, so we balance it. Because of the size of the program we are able to do so.

We then ensure that the teachers are able to access information, but that still meant attending programs. That might mean that if we were holding a particular professional development course in a regional centre,
probably we could be driving for hours. It can be very difficult and demanding, so the drive towards delivery online has become a very important part of our development as we proceed.

We are very focused on providing teachers with the straight technical skills of what they need to do in teaching music. It is all curriculum linked, so they receive a grid in advance — ‘You do this activity with your year 2 class; you are ticking the following boxes; you should expect the following outcomes’ — so that it is very straightforward for them to do, and, ‘This links in with the following other curriculum areas, so you can also explore in literacy and social studies, in language development and a number of other cross-curriculum areas’. Music in itself is good, is important, is a necessary creative study. It also has a whole range of flow-on benefits for the students’ development, for their studies in other areas. Certainly there is a wealth of research showing that students who are engaged in music education do better in so many other academic areas.

We are now onto the role of the future. Back in 2008 we held a very substantial market research program funded by the Australia Council where we went to teachers right across all schools — private, public, independent, Northern Territory, inner-city Melbourne — asking them what were the most important things that they needed as they looked into the future. Number one was ICT-based material — that they wanted more technology utilised in the delivery of music education. We then had the good fortune of receiving federal government funding which we then matched with Rio Tinto funding to go ahead and develop these resources. Last year we released the first tranche of those. Every one of our 28 groups had programmed their programs specifically launched for digital.

This was not just digitising the programs that we had. I must say initially we thought this will be great, this will be very easy, we will just digitise what we have and offer it online — very simple and straightforward. The reality is that going online for teaching totally changes the pedagogy for the online teacher. But I can see by the change in the resources that we need to supply that there was no app that was available, no means of using the hardware of these interactive whiteboards for music in classrooms. There we had all this fantastic technology sitting in classrooms and nothing for music with which to work. We then spent the next two years developing a customised application on which sits our interactive program, which was launched and distributed last year and is now in over 1000 schools. We had to cover through interoperability issues, through firewalls and schools’ downloading speed — these are very, very advanced programs. The kids adore it because it’s all click and drag stuff that they totally understand, the aim being that they can create their own music. They will be taught notation, they will be taught rhythm, structure, all the basics of music, but it is totally hands-on. My favourite comment was that there were tears in a Year 3 class when the lesson ended with this because the kids just get right into it.

These were all related to the performances still that we put on in schools; it was not replacing live but it was a supplement to the live program. What we will be launching in the middle of this year are stand-alone digital modules that link directly to the new Australian curriculum, and this is absolutely the way of the future. It will mean that we still hope to get groups out to every remote location that we can, but the reality is it still remains a big country, there are still big distances to cover and there are still very busy people. They should not be kept from the richness of a music education. So using this customised app we have now essentially used that as the basis for the toolkit and loaded into it movie files, MP3 files, PDFs and customised lesson plans that the teacher can modify — again all curriculum linked for their particular state for their particular age and stage. We are working with ACARA and they will be put up through the ESA website. We are also looking at a number of other portals of where we will take these.

**The CHAIR** — Is there a cost for schools to access this?

**Ms CAPPS** — There is, but that is ultimately being determined. We are licensing it. Again there are no rules for this so we have had to do a lot of making it up as we go along. How would we best get this out? How would we have a means where we could have it cloud-based but still have it accessible in schools, because up until now we have had to deliver our program on USBs to get around some of those firewall issues. Some teachers can download it, but the vast majority cannot. There are real technical issues that everybody who goes into this digital space should be so mindful of because it is enormous. With these, we are going to a cloud-based set-up, but they will still be able to use it. We will still have USBs as a backup.
for those who are really untouched by easy access and on them will be a self-contained unit of study. So if you are a Year 4 teacher in Warrnambool you will be able to go on to the ACARA website. It will list what you need to do, here are the digital resources that will help you do it, and they expect Musica Viva to be up at the top of that list.

With that so far we are moving into Queensland and New South Wales and we expect this to move nationally to deliver more of the professional development online as well. So that has been a big change for this year. It has just started and again there are challenges, technical and in every other way, because you teach very differently in an online environment. What we are finding is that we are aiming for a richer professional development so that the teachers download the resources first, they have a few weeks to look through them and then we have the professional development so that they are actually sharing difficulties, asking questions from a position of greater knowledge. We see that as the way of the future.

I think that might do it.

The CHAIR — We might go on to ask some questions. Gayle, I will hand over to you because my question has been answered.

Ms TIERNEY — My first one has been, too. In terms of the last point you made about professional development and online teaching, how much time does it take a teacher to do a unit or a module and how does that fit into their workloads as they stand at the moment? What support do they get generally, or what is considered to be adequate support from the school itself in terms of them taking on this professional development?

Ms CAPPS — Obviously there are a huge range of responses in terms of the support that they receive, but what they get in our existing resources is basically a term’s worth of work. Rather than being something that adds to their workload, this actually provides them with a mapped out program for the term. One of the things that makes it so very popular with teachers is that they know that even if they are not skilled music teachers, they have a path forward which is accredited, which is quality, which is the highest level of resources. I think that the actual professional development course itself has traditionally been 2 hours. It is accredited by all the institutes of teaching and therefore they get support from the school to do that, because it fits in within that framework but it is not an onerous program, particularly considering the pay-off that they then get that saves them down the track.

Similarly, the new digital resources are the professional development program. It is accredited and assists them in delivering probably five to seven weeks of classes from using the material. They can stretch it out longer than that; it is up to them as to how much they use on that. But again it is a time saver for them because they have the best of all these resources across multiple genres available for them.

Ms TIERNEY — It sounds as if you are the cutting edge of PD online. Are there other government departments or other education disciplines that are monitoring what you are doing and interacting with you about applications for their own territory?

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Ms CAPPS — Yes, absolutely. We are in very close contact with DEEWR about that. I just met with them a few weeks ago, again updating them as to what we were doing, and they are very anxious that the learnings that we have are shared across the departments federally. We also try as much as possible to be in contact with each of the state departments of education and arts as well as our fellow arts organisations. One of the suggestions we have made is that we do not want to have a VHS/Beta debate, with everybody rushing off and having customised apps and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, as we have, and after several years each of us to end up with slight variations on a theme. We have said we do not wish to hold this just to ourselves; it is far more important that we get arts education out there. We have also spoken to people like Life Education Australia and other similar bodies that go into schools to offer something for the whole school.

The CHAIR — Just extending on from that question, how do you also fit with some of the other programs that are out there, like Musical Futures, The Song Room and some of the others?
Ms CAPPs — We are complementary. We are bigger than all of them, so I guess part of it has been that they have been spin-offs from us. For instance, we have done some joint programs with The Song Room. In the past theirs has focused more on replacement, where the musician comes in and the teacher is free to do something else, whereas we have always gone in to train the teacher and then leave them to continue doing that after we have left. In ours people pay for it, by and large. As I said, we do have programs to assist those who are disadvantaged for any number of reasons, whereas The Song Room has focused solely on the disadvantaged and has provided it for free. That has always — —

The CHAIR — And Musical Futures? Is that a similar model?

Ms CAPPs — Musical Futures I am not as familiar with. It is smaller and newer and I am not as familiar with that.

Ms MILLER — In terms of partnerships, what is your view on the importance of partnerships with the arts organisations to deliver music education and opportunities to enhance them?

Ms CAPPs — I think it is vital. One of the reasons for that is probably the result of where we have come from in the first place. We are unusual, particularly amongst the major performing arts, in that we do not own anybody. There is no single group of performers that we have to keep employed throughout the year. We say we are major only because we do such a lot of small to medium activities. We utilise a number of groups within our program — 700 musicians a year. Collaboration is how we have existed. We have had active discussions, certainly with AMPAG and through the Australia Council, to say, ‘Working together on this is really important’ and ‘Let’s not all get bogged down on the technology side’.

Mr CRISP — I want to expand on an earlier reference you made to disadvantaged schools and that you have set up a philanthropic program to support disadvantaged schools — we also talked about special schools in that as well; there is a difference — to access your program. What is the demand from schools for this support and what difficulties do the schools face in delivering that music education to the disadvantaged?

Ms CAPPs — I might hand over to Helenka on this, because she has dealt most closely with the Victorian implementation of Equal Music.

Ms KING — Equal Music started in 2011, so it is still growing. We are finding a much greater demand as people at schools become aware of the program. It started with CAP, the Country Areas Program, which was a fund from the Australia Council?

Ms CAPPs — No, the federal government.

Ms KING — Sorry, from the federal government to allow music education in regional areas across the nation, which was immensely successful. Of course when that funding was ended all those regional schools were left with nowhere to go. This is why the Equal Music program was set up. There were a lot of challenges for regional schools, obviously, and for other schools. First of all, there is the financial challenge. If they are disadvantaged they cannot afford a music program; and the demographic may be that people do not see the importance of it. Equal Music provides the subsidy, so that we can put the program into place. I think, as Mary Jo said, when parents see the benefit of the program, that it includes them, it is very much an engagement process. There are a lot of teachers who are under trained and under confident. Having our program is something that trains them up to be better at music education. That is a great thing because, as we have said, it creates a term’s worth of training, which is quite something. It is quite an advantage for someone who is flailing with it.

Regional schools are particularly at a disadvantage because they are remote. The teachers cannot travel long distances. They do not have the time and the resources. My understanding also is that for out-of-school travel sometimes they are not paid, which is interesting. One of the things that we do with Equal Music is provide an ability for them to cluster. We will subsidise them if their schools are too small in terms of student numbers. It makes it difficult for us financially, but if they can cluster it creates a great collegiate thing with the schools in those areas. We have discovered one aspect of the Equal Music
program in regional areas is that when we have come to talk to them about the Anatomy of Music there is already a precedent for clustering and being collegiate, so that has been very good. We have twice as many schools applying this year, so we think it is a growing program.

The CHAIR — We have heard quite a bit so far from a number of people that music programs have been in decline in Victoria since about the 1980s, particularly in the primary school arena. Given that we have heard such good evidence of what the benefits of music are to young people in a whole range of different areas, why do you think it has not been embraced the way it should be?

Ms CAPPS — Gosh, have we got all morning? There are so many factors that weigh in on that. We would contend that one of the practical ones, and we get this regularly from teachers, is that they have a choice — and that was one of the directions that was chosen in Victoria — in creative arts. Music is the one that actually needs a specific language; therefore it is going to fall to the bottom of the list if you do not speak that language. It is much easier to do dance or visual arts or even theatre. We have discovered that many teachers would sooner swallow razor blades than have to do something public like that, even though teaching is such a performance art in itself. When a choice was given in the creative arts curriculum, it has been a matter of music being the hardest one, so it fell to the bottom of the heap. That is why it was even more important that training teachers and making it easy for them has been our focus since that time.

I think there is another element as well, which is that more recently — and I am sure you have heard lots of the reasoning — the focus has become more on NAPLAN and on competing for students and all those sorts of things. We know now that we have schools that have used us for years, that have said, ‘No, sorry, we are spending those four weeks’ — it is now four weeks — ‘planning for and training for NAPLAN’. So they are training them to do the test. There has just been a change in emphasis.

The CHAIR — On the flipside of that, if you were sitting on this side of the table and you wanted to turn that trend around — without the comprehensive submission you have given us, and a whole lot of recommendations and everything — what would you suggest would be one or two quick wins that we could actually do to change the trend of declining music in Victorian primary schools?

Ms CAPPS — We all tend to respond to some sort of rules and framework. Mandating music education, as opposed to creative arts education, is the most basic one. Everything else flies off that.

Ms TIERNEY — In terms of the Equal Music program and professional development again, is that online as well, with the clustering of regional teachers, or is there physical release from the school to undertake a PD? That is my first question.

Ms CAPPS — It is a combination. At the moment it is still face-to-face instruction. They may still cluster to do that, but it would be physical clustering at this stage as opposed to clustering through videoconferencing.

Ms KING — We are now looking in Victoria at doing video PDs because there is such a demand for it for teachers. We quite often do them in two different places. We are looking at that very clearly; we are going to have a test run this year to see how the regional schools like that.

Ms TIERNEY — Have you found, as is my understanding, that when teachers leave the school for PD their wages are paid by the department, but the backfill is not there, which often feeds into the decision of the teacher actually putting their hand up and saying, ‘I want to do a PD course’?

Ms KING — I think that is exactly right, and that is one of the reasons we are looking to do more online. We find it is very much the case that teachers will take the program but you will not get 100 per cent take-up on the PDs, and that is what we want to encourage because it is such an important aspect of the experience.
Ms CAPPS — They were traditionally offered after school hours, so it was from four until six that they would be held, but doing them online means it can be any time that they choose.

Ms KING — I think there is a difference between the take-up of PDs in the Melbourne metro and regional areas for those reasons.

The CHAIR — We have come to the end of our questions, and I want to thank you very much for the comprehensive nature of the submission that you put together. Thank you for that, for appearing before the committee today, for flying down and for the great program that you do in schools. Keep up the good work.

Ms KING — Thanks for the invitation.

Ms CAPPS — I would not have missed it. I think it is so important that this inquiry is happening, so hats off to you for doing it and for inviting us to join you today.

Witnesses withdrew.