EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 15 April 2013

Members
Mr P. Crisp
Mr N. Elasmar
Ms E. Miller

Mr D. Southwick
Ms G. Tierney

Chair: Mr D. Southwick
Deputy Chair: Ms G. Tierney

Staff
Executive Officer: Ms K. Riseley
Research Officer: Ms A. Madden

Witness
Mr J. Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School.
The CHAIR — Thank you for joining the committee today, Jeremy. Firstly, these microphones are for Hansard purposes so we will be recording the evidence you give today. You will have the opportunity to be able to review the transcript and make any typographical changes. Also, the evidence is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament; it applies to the hearing itself, and not to anything said outside the hearing. You know why we are here —

Mr LUDOWYKE — Yes.

The CHAIR — We will start by hearing brief opening remarks from you, and then we will get into some questions.

Mr LUDOWYKE — Thank you. In doing so I will hit up on a few themes which I am hopeful the committee will be interested in exploring in more detail. I will give you the context of the program at Melbourne High School. Firstly, Melbourne High School, in case you are not aware, is one branch of the oldest government secondary schools in the state of Victoria, with now well over 100 years of existence. Together with Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School we are the oldest school. We are also one of the department of education’s four selective-entry academic schools.

Despite its reputation for being predominantly academically oriented Melbourne High School, to my knowledge, is the only state school which has a compulsory music program throughout all of its year levels and therefore incorporating or including every student right up to Year 12. This occurs largely through a mass singing program. Students at junior levels undertake one timetable class of singing instruction per week, and our senior students undertake one per fortnight in addition to then performing their repertoire at a variety of school or community performances. That program is pivotal to the school’s now national — and, to some extent, we would almost claim international — recognition as a school of musical excellence, and that was exemplified through the 2010 ABC FM Flame awards.

However, the program is more than just the choral program of the school. Additionally every student undertakes the formal classroom study of music until at least Year 10. On entry we find that on average only one in three of our students will have had any formal training or study of music education. Increasingly the classroom program is made up of delivery through some high-end communication technology, more recently through the use of iPads as a companion device — and I am sure you have all heard a little of that from VCASS as well — as a platform to deliver that core curriculum.

As a selective-entry school none of our students are selected on the basis of musical ability. However, in addition to that full, school immersion through the choral program, 330 — or at least one in four — of our students are also involved in an instrumental music program at the school. Again, we find that on entry it is something like less than one in five of those students have previously been involved in an instrumental music program at their previous school, remembering that our intake starts at Year 9. We have on that basis developed what to my mind is one of the largest and most diverse instrumental music programs in the state. It is certainly one of the most complex in its diversity. It includes ensembles ranging from a 60-plus piece full orchestra, music big bands, classical ensembles — a variety of 30 different ensembles in total across the school, right down to contemporary rock groups. The school has won state and national performance awards across that full range of musical styles and genres.

Nevertheless the school resources this program in quite an unusual way, from my knowledge of other schools. We receive the equivalent of 3.5 days in regional instrumental music funding, and that is significant. It buys us less than three full days of actual staffing, and I hope to return later to some of the vagaries of the instrumental music teacher resourcing. We maintain an effective full-time staff in instrumental music, and this is outside of, then, the administrative support provided to the program and some of the classroom teaching support of approximately the equivalent of five full-time teachers.

However, the costs that are passed on to students to, in a sense, assist the school in providing that depth of program is — again, from my experience of other schools — moderate. I will not say modest, but moderate. The instrumental music levy, which would only be paid by those students who are accessing the instrumental music program — it does not apply to either the classroom or the choral component — is $400 per year. If it is required that they hire an instrument — not all will; some will have their own instrument, and some will be using instruments that are not necessary to hire, such as piano or vocal being obvious cases — it is only
$250 per year. That is not an insignificant cost, given that our students come from literally the full gamut of socioeconomic backgrounds. We have students who come to us literally from every postcode in the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne.

Where there are instances where the student’s family — and we can attest to that through some fairly acceptable messages, such as the receipt of an EMA — is unable to afford that, they will access the program at no cost. If they can afford to make a contribution, they will. If they cannot, they can access the program. It has been the philosophy and the principle of the school that any student wishing to access that program has an entitlement to it. Therefore the mathematics of that simply will not add up in terms of those locally raised funds and the regional supported funds. The school therefore underwrites the residual cost out of its own budget and does so, if you like, willingly because over the years the value of having a high-end, high-quality program — which we would claim ours to be, not only in relation to the performance within the music program but in relation to what it brings to the culture and to the ethos of the school as well as to the wellbeing of our students — we have actually been able to attest to and track.

I will not go into the significant research — and Dr Anne Lierse, who is sitting behind me, has addressed this certainly in significant detail in her submission — as to the complementarity between high achievement in education and a high quality of music education, as well as the spin-offs for wellbeing and engagement for students. We see all that significantly. That is why we are prepared to, in a sense, commit a significant part of our general budget to the provision of music education and particularly instrumental music education.

In conclusion, the last thing I would say about the Melbourne High School program is that I think it has some salient advice to provide to the committee because the school has never been identified formally as a lighthouse school, which is a system that used to exist across the state system and which you have probably, I am sure, come across; yet it has always been one of the highest performing schools in terms of music education. We have, in a sense, had to find our way to excellence rather than, in a sense, having it determined for us by our status in some way. I will stop there. I am sure there are a number of those themes which the committee would like to take up.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. I was not going to ask this, but I will now that you have said that. What would you propose would be your secrets, and what of those could we then attribute to other schools across the state?

**Mr LUDOWYKE** — One of them, in a way, goes to what I believe might need to become part of the resourcing principle for an effective but also equitable system, and that is that rather than relying upon the sources of resourcing available through the government system, whether that is instrumental music programs, instrumental music teachers or program support, we have in a sense matched that dollar for dollar from our own funding.

Despite its appearance, Melbourne High School is subject to the same rules of funding — and, also for that matter, additional fundraising — as any other government school of the state, so in a sense it is not that we have some secret, additional source of income we can draw upon. But there has been one aspect, and it is not insignificant in terms of its contribution to instrumental music. To my knowledge we are one of the few schools that are on the national register of arts associations or art entities. There is a national register if you can demonstrate your status, and that is only on the basis of broad, community outreach — that you are doing more than just providing a service or a program for your own cohort, which we have been able to do to the satisfaction of the purpose of the federal ministry of arts that in the end has regulatory control of that register. That register has therefore enabled us to set up a special trust which can foster sponsorship and support from philanthropic trusts, from which we have received a very, I would say, modest amount of support, but also which can potentially attract a DGR or tax-deductible donation.

A significant number of our ex-students, particularly those who have themselves had, if you like, their passion for music and music education created through their experience at the school, have made generous donations, which have then be able to be used to build the level of quality of our program. We do not rely on that funding, because by its intrinsic nature it is unreliable, but it has enabled us to do things like provide a concert grand piano for our high-end piano students so they have the experience of using it. I would say that very few schools, particularly in the government sector, would have that instrumental capacity. But the secret to our success in a way has been in exploring the opportunities that are available, but often not accessed, by government schools or more generally.
Ms TIERNEY — In your submission you propose a new model for an instrumental music program. Can you provide an overview of this model and outline why you think it would be an improvement on the current model?

Mr LUDOWYKE — I will do this with two hats on. One is as a passionate idealist around music education, and the other one is very much as a pragmatist as a school principal. If we were to start with what I would see as an effective model at primary school, I think we should take as a given that the idealist in me would say that every student at every year level in every school in Victoria should be accessing a quality music program, but there is immediately then, wearing the other hat, a pragmatism about how you could resource that across every primary school, given that primary schools can range in size from in some instances small rural schools with between 15 and 30 students to primary schools that now stretch to 700 to 800 students. How do you provide a model that is capable of providing quality music education to each and every one of those students in those diverse settings?

In my view a key element of that could, and possibly should, be a choral program. Why? Because the research tells us that it is the form of musical expression that the majority of human beings will engage in throughout their lifetime. While they may have preferable engagements with music in a variety of its forms across their lifetimes, it is probably the closest thing we have to a universal experience of music throughout our life cycle.

There were models for the provision of an often centrally resourced choral-based music program through things like the ABC’s music for schools program that existed sometime around the 1960s. I was certainly a graduate of that program. It was my immersion in the value of music education. Those models provided an opportunity, with the right specialist support, not only for a more practical form of engagement with music, but also for one which will have in my view a greater impact across a person’s life span.

The model I propose is that there ought be a compulsory component of music education in pre-teacher education, and we know that is a model that has worked well in other elements of, for want of a better name, the skilling up of primary teachers. The idealist in me would say that the goal over time, if you were to build that program, would be to have a music specialist in each primary school, although if you were to do the maths on that, it might be a goal that was a long time coming. In my view the only way to deliver a universal program to primary schools would be through a choral program and possibly through an IT-based platform.

I think there is a different issue and it is one that, from my knowledge of what has been presented to the committee to date through the submissions, I think has been somewhat lacking in attention — that is, the need to provide then that high-end specialist and extensive diverse program at a secondary level. I unashamedly would advocate for that, as a secondary school principal and someone whose background has been in the secondary system. I think that without that we are, in a sense, cutting off the pathways for the expression of music education. There is, in a way, a necessary progression that students would take. I would argue that, whilst it is not essential that every primary school offer an instrumental music program — and if you were to do that, that is why I would focus on choral as the appropriate idiom for that — as students progress through, and I would be suggesting, as the idealist, every student, you would want to give them exposure to engagement with the performance of music through an instrument.

The further you take that in terms of excellence, the more you have to diversify the program and therefore the resource to it. It is not a simple thing to say we could put a specialist instrumental music teacher in every secondary school and deliver a quality program; it is simply, by the nature of what it is they would need to deliver, impossible. You actually need a diversity — if you like, a whole team — of instrumental music teachers who are capable of being specialists in their instrument. That is the only way you will get that high-end excellence.

The CHAIR — Are you suggesting that the problem with doing the earlier is diluting, if you like, capability and expertise?

Mr LUDOWYKE — That is right. The pragmatist in me would say that whilst I see both the necessity and the benefit of having a broadbased program existing in primary schools, if you do that and then you do not also provide the much higher end, and for that reason higher cost and more diverse program at a secondary level then you are leading students astray — you are leading them into a brick wall. It will not be for every student, but where do they then pursue their passion for music? Schools like VCASS are fantastic in providing, if you
like, that beacon on the hill, but — and I am sure Colin Simpson, my colleague, would say — they cannot provide that service across the whole of the state of Victoria and in each and every school. So there needs to be the capacity to have, if you like, that second-tranche provision, and again you will not be able to deliver that, for purely financial and resource reasons, across every secondary school in the state of Victoria. So in the end there have to be some hard decisions made about how to provide those pathways in a way that will be equitable across the state and yet accessible to every student for whom it would be appropriate.

**The CHAIR** — Just on that, what are your views of, in those early years, to at least be providing those kids with some element of music — if we were to take the argument you just have — and of providing some form of generalist music to at least give them something as opposed to nothing?

**Mr LUDOWYKE** — I would be urging for it. I think it is critical, and I am sure there will have been some discussion about the shaping paper from ACARA. What I am increasingly alarmed to see, even at a secondary level, is where schools are saying that not only the offering of music education becomes increasingly marginalised or optional, but in a sense the offering of art as an overarching discipline, the Arts, becomes more marginal. I think that would be a travesty of what ACARA intends. It is my understanding that ACARA is in the throes of providing more specific advice. Of course Victoria is entitled to determine its own path with that.

My own view would be that it may be a more deliverable alternative through what is called AusVELS, Victoria’s commitment to its own version, if you like, of the Australian Curriculum. I just say that there would be a preference of music as the default art discipline and that that should be a compulsory experience at primary school. If you were going to do that and then deliver that effectively, I think your resourcing would be through the upskilling of teachers, through either pre-service education or in-service education, with that ideal goal of having a specialist instrumental music teacher in every primary school. I know that is the ideal, but it is a matter of how far you move along that continuum or perhaps plan for that continuum over time.

**Ms MILLER** — Does Melbourne High have an IB program?

**Mr LUDOWYKE** — No. Up until a year and a half ago it was the policy of the department of education not to enable schools to offer the IB program at diploma level — that is, the high-end level. That has changed recently. We would potentially accredit. We have investigated and are in a position to accredit as an IB school within a year if we chose to; however, I have been very heartened by the movement by the VCAA towards the concept of the Victorian baccalaureate, which is in a way a mimic of some of the structure of the IB, but in my view is almost a more rigorous framework. Through the IB we would use that in a sense to reinforce the philosophy and the commitment the school has always had to music education.

**Ms MILLER** — With the impacts of the music and the culture within your school, how does it impact on the culture, if at all?

**Mr LUDOWYKE** — Your secretariat would have had the opportunity to witness some of that. We invited the committee to come and see the choral competition at the town hall recently. I will give you three anecdotes that might give you some of the spirit of that.

One is an anecdote which is in the school’s centenary history. In fact it was by a private school student. It said:

> My experience of Melbourne High School students is that as soon as you gather three of them together they will break into song. That shows how much they identify singing as something that is absolutely core to their experience at the school, and they carry that through life with them. I myself am on record as saying that if the spirit of the school has a voice, the voice is through song.

At that choral performance, I do not know if your secretariat was there at the very end, but when they announce the winner it is something — we are talking about adolescent boys here — that is akin to winning the AFL flag. You will see literally a sea of people collapse on top of each other in joy. It is that capacity to encourage a sense of human spirit and joy which I think is so difficult to describe and intangible in a way, but which is done through singing.

I have done a lot of work and have a lot of background in gender education, and I asked my predecessor at the school a question: if there was one single program you would introduce to break through some of the strictures associated with masculinity, what would it be? He said, ‘A singing program’. At the time I was sceptical, but...
that would be now the same thing I would say. The reason that is so is that if you can break through what is something like an iron cage that often young boys can feel they have to operate, and they on their very first day sit there and hear their colleagues sing and sing with them, as our teachers would say, after that anything is possible. From that, you have given them permission to take what would otherwise for them be an impossible risk, and they have done it with comfort and with a sense of accomplishment. From there on you can ask them to risk take in their learning in a whole range of ways.

The last anecdote in terms of capturing that spirit would be about our speech night, which I would have to say is the only experience you will ever get of a 1370-strong massed male choir singing. Speech night often occurs in the same week as what has now become infamously known as schoolies week. In any year we will be lacking less than a handful of our Year 12s — that is, of 330-plus students less than 10 will not be there. We have got no hold on them any longer — they have finished with the school — but they will all come because for them that is the culmination of their year. Literally they will be on stage singing and in tears. If you can create that in any school, you are creating something special and, what is more, something that is very useful in what as an educator you can work with in that sort of environment.

The CHAIR — You just mentioned the synergies of singing and risk taking.

Mr LUDOWYKE — Yes.

The CHAIR — Has there been evidence or research that you are aware of that picks up on that?

Mr LUDOWYKE — A couple. There is the Champions of Change series, which was a series of monographs of studies undertaken in the US, for example. One of those I am aware of was a violin-based program in a very disadvantaged school in New York, where around engagement — even just basic engagement and attendance at school — that program had an extraordinary effect in not only engaging very disadvantaged cohorts of students but really built not only their confidence and engagement with schooling but their achievement across the board. There is certainly a significant amount of research that would demonstrate that music makes a contribution to academic excellence. If you look at the OECD PISA studies et cetera, and you do some back analysis of those schools that are at the high end of performance, all of them have very strong music education programs, and I do not think that is simply a coincidence.

The CHAIR — Also picking up on your point about music being the preferred art discipline, how do you think that would go if I asked for recommending something like that at the expense potentially of other art disciplines?

Mr LUDOWYKE — It is a matter that the government and the department of education are going to have to grapple with. There are some real challenges being thrown up through ACARA about the provision of our curriculum. It is going to be a very thorny and vexed area. The way I would phrase it is I cannot see another one of the core art disciplines as the default art discipline. The sorts of issues that you would already confront with music as the default one — around resourcing, the capacity to upskill each and every primary teacher, which in the end would need to be the case, to deliver a quality arts curriculum — I think you will face double or threefold with any of the other disciplines. Could you train each and every primary teacher to be a visual arts teacher when that may not be something that they have any direct professional or personal engagement in? Pretty much all of us have at least a personal engagement with music. I have yet to come across somebody who has not, but some of us do not have any engagement with other art disciplines. If it is the most universal, in my view it makes sense for it to become the default. Yes, that may therefore marginalise, remembering that people unfortunately are concentrating on the minimum of what the ACARA shaping paper proposes. It would not preclude there being a diversity apropos of art disciplines, but I would still strongly argue for music to be the most practical and the most universal.

The CHAIR — Okay. Great. We have come to an end to our questions. Is there anything that we have not covered that you think we need to?

Mr LUDOWYKE — The only other thing I would urge the committee to consider, and I wonder if it has been put before the committee, is in my view the fairly dire position that we put our instrumental music teachers in. I am sure you will have had presentations to you about, in my view, the travesty of the way in which they are treated through registration by the VIT, but given that I have played a role in the deployment of instrumental music teachers in three of the major regions of the state, I am often troubled by what we impose upon them by
neglect in terms of their actual work experience. It is possible that for an instrumental teacher to garner a living they may work across five schools and attend a different school each day.

I will leave you with an anecdote of an instrumental music teacher who I interviewed for a position that was in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Their two other current placements were in a school near Dandenong and a school in Yarram. They had two days at the school in Dandenong, two days at Yarram. They actually had to drive to Yarram — which, if you do not know it, is near Sale in the further reaches of Gippsland — and live in a hotel overnight to go and perform their work at that school. The next job they were looking for was at a school in the northern suburbs. I do not know too many of us who would countenance that as part of an obligation on them to work their craft, yet I think we have treated them with disrespect in the way in which they are recognised for registration purposes. I see some terrible practices now in a number of schools where they are effectively working on scales, because they are permitted to be, as instructors or as program aides which deny their professional training and quality. That really troubles me in terms of the treatment of an important branch of the teaching service which I think we completely disregard in terms of what they have to offer and the professionalism with which they deserve to be treated.

The CHAIR — Jeremy, thank you very much for appearing before the committee, your work, your submission and your passion for good teaching. Keep up the great work.

Mr LUDOWYKE — Thank you. I wish you well in your endeavours.

Committee adjourned.