EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Blackburn High School — Thursday, 16 May 2013

Members
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Witnesses
Allegra, Year 8 student
Susannah, Year 8 student
Bridie, Year 8 student, and
Guy, Year 8 student, Blackburn High School
Ms MILLER — Good morning everyone. The format for today will be the committee has organised to hear about your experiences and view of music education. The committee will use the evidence from the hearing, so all the information that you have given us to the questions that we ask you as a compilation of a report that will be part of some recommendations for this inquiry.

All the information that you tell us is protected by parliamentary privilege so you can say whatever you like in here and you’re under the parliamentary privilege, but if you were to repeat that outside, then it’s a different scenario.

So, Hansard, the gentleman on our left over here, he’s recording today’s proceedings. We will provide the Principal a proof of the version of the Hansard transcript so everything that we talk about today and she will make sure that everything is all correct.

So we’ve got a number of questions we would like to ask you. To assist, as I said, our Hansard reporter, state your name before speaking. If you forget that’s okay, because I’ll help you out. Is that all right? Yeah, great.

All right, well, my first question will be — and we’ll start with the Allegra, if that’s okay — what instrument are you learning, when did you start to learn it, and why?

ALLEGRA — Well, I’m learning flute and piccolo and also piano at the moment and I started when I was very young when I was 4 and-a-half years old, so a while ago. And, I decided to learn them — well it was mainly because I really liked the sound of the flute and piano and I’d always been fascinated by the way that could play so many different sounds and so many different level of volume. And then when I tried it for first time I decided that that was the instrument I wanted to learn, and it just went from there.

Ms MILLER — Great. Are your parents musical?

ALLEGRA — No, my parents aren’t very musical.

SUSANNAH — I learn clarinet, saxophone and piano. I started clarinet last year, and I love it. I picked it because, well, the girls were really amazing and they encouraged me all the time. Like, they’re like amazing. And, I just loved the sound of it. It’s so similar to saxophone, which I started three years ago, which I started because my sister was like, so cool. And I started to get really into it, and then I went to Mt Gambier with the school and it made me want to keep going and it motivated me so much to just keep going with that because it was so amazing.

Ms MILLER — Great. Are your parents musical?

SUSANNAH — Yeah. My dad sings and plays the piano and accordion.

Ms MILLER — Great.

SUSANNAH — And my mum’s a piano player.

Ms MILLER — Really cool, great.

GUY — I learn French horn at the moment. I started when I was in Year 3. I played the trumpet. I played that for one and-a-half years and I got a new teacher and I was struggling a bit. So, she gave me a French horn, because my mouth is not suited to the trumpet, and I just loved it straight away
and I switched. And I haven’t looked back since.

**Ms MILLER** — Fantastic. Are your parents musical?

**GUY** — Mum is a bit; not really. My mum plays the piano; not that much.

**Ms MILLER** — Okay, we will just welcome Bridie. How are you going? I’m Elizabeth. This is Nazih. And we’ve got Kerryn and Anita. We’re just talking about giving evidence. So, what we’re going to do is ask questions and listen to answers. You’re under what we call parliamentary privilege so that means you can say whatever you like now, but you can’t necessarily repeat it out there.

So, the question I asked your colleagues was what instrument are you learning? When did you start learning it and why?

**BRIDIE** — I’m Bridie and I learn violin and double base. I started learning violin when I was in prep under the influence of my grandma, who was successful in violin, and started double bass last year in Year 7 for the music expo.

And, I started learning violin because I liked the classical side of it and I loved the flow of it and everything, and double base because there are so more like — like, it’s not just classical. You can go so much further into it like jazz sides and everything like that.

**Ms MILLER** — Great. Are your parents musical?

**BRIDIE** — Yes, they are. My mum is a music teacher.

**Mr ELASMAR** — We in the committee, we understand that all the students study music as a subject in years seven and eight.

Now, my question to you is what are your favourite things about the subject? Are there any aspects you would improve about the subject.

**ALLEGRA** — I am in Year 8 and doing classroom music.

I think what I like about doing classroom music is it’s a very creative subject. Sometimes you do things like theory, but we also get the opportunity to create and perform. And, I like it because with music there are many different levels. You don’t have to be Einstein at music to be able to do it.

Although, the one thing I would change about it is I would include more composition into the subject, because we do some of that, but I think it would be very helpful to do more.

And, also what I think would be helpful is teaching us how to set up sound equipment for our performance because I find a lot of the time you learn how to play your instrument really well, but you don’t necessarily really learn how to help yourself perform.

**SUSANNAH** — I love classroom music, to be honest, because you get to hang out with your friends and you get to do it with your friends and encourage them in whatever instrument they play and doing like the projects, and I love the projects, and I love performing, and we get that chance a fair bit in class to do a performance in front of the class with our instrument or whatever we like to do, singing. But, I agree that they should put some more composition because it’s really helpful, and
it’s really like interesting and you learn a lot from it.

**BRIDIE** — I like classroom music because you get to learn about music outside of the instrument that you’re doing if you doing an instrument and get to learn about yourself, and say, last term, we did guitar so we learnt the notes on the guitar and how to play the guitar, so I think that’s what’s good about classroom music, just knowing more about what you are doing in its own way. And I agree with Susannah and Allegra, the more compositions and being able to perform would be better, so doing it.

**GUY** — I like classroom music because it’s a different aspect of music. You can play with the horn like band stuff. You learn the basics of like cords and everything. And, the projects are really good. Like, I’m doing a movie one at the moment and I like it because you can incorporate like emotions and stuff. And, I agree with everybody else.

**Mr ELASMAR** — We understand that your school has many bands and orchestras. So, which of these do you participate in and how much time do you participate in rehearsing. And, what do you enjoy about performing as a group, and what are some of the events you have performed? We will start with you again.

**ALLEGRA** — At the moment I’m currently in symphonic band and the symphony orchestra. In symphonic band, we practice two hours after school on Mondays, and every second week we have a rehearsal before school for an hour on Wednesday. We also run student run sectionals once a week at lunchtime and I really like the symphonic band because I find it’s challenging for me, and I get to play with other people.

Recently we have performed at the Top Sounds concert and in a couple of weeks we’re going to perform at the Top Acts which is the next level, as you know. I am also in the symphony orchestra, and with that we practice two hours a week after school on Tuesdays, and every week we also — Friday mornings we practice for an hour. And, I think I like that even better than symphonic band because it’s not every day you get to play with a full orchestra with strings and percussion, and I think that’s really cool.

**SUSANNAH** — I’m in the concert band and the junior stage band and in the concert band I play my clarinet.

I love it because it is a challenge for me because I’ve only been playing the clarinet for a year. But, it’s a really good challenge, and when you get it, it’s really rewarding, and when you go to a concert and you know you’ve done a really good job, it’s the best feeling in the world.

And, I performed with that band — not this year much actually, but we have a concert on Saturday coming at Genazzano girls’ college for like invitation only. There are four bands playing, and I honestly can’t wait for that, because we’ve been working really hard after school. On Thursdays, we do a one and-a-half hour rehearsal on Thursdays after school and an hour rehearsal on Mondays before school and for junior stage. I like that I lot. I like that so much, because it’s more of a jazz kind of thing and I love playing my saxophone. We went to Mt Gambier, as I told you before, and it was just amazing, and really inspiring.

**BRIDIE** — I’m in the concert strings orchestra, and I think doing the orchestra is really good because you learn to listen what’s going on around you and not just playing solely by what you know, so you have to listen to everybody else to be able to play what you’re playing right.
Last year for the concert strings, we got to — even though we were one of the junior orchestras we get to go out and perform as well — so last year we went to the South Australia competitions and we actually won them.

**Ms MILLER** — Congratulations.

**BRIDIE** — Thank you. So that was really rewarding knowing that we had worked really hard in doing that and we practice an hour after school on Mondays, and sometimes we take what we learn from orchestra into our lessons as well, so to be able just to play it over and really get that you know what you’re doing.

**GUY** — I’m in the symphonic band symphony orchestra, and I’m also helping with a concert band at the moment.

The symphonic band is really good. It’s really, like, elite, and everybody knows what they’re doing. It’s almost professional in a way, because everybody works really hard every week and it sounds fantastic. When you perform, it’s really good to know. It’s really good to know you’ve got a really good group behind you.

The symphony orchestra, it’s pretty different, because it’s a completely different style, which is also good because it’s variety. Yeah, you know that you practice. And just the range of instruments you can play with is really great. You don’t get it anywhere else.

**Ms MILLER** — You are clearly all very passionate about your respective instruments. I can see it in your faces and hear it, which is clearly wonderful and a credit to you all.

Do you — Bridie sort of touched on it before. Do you learn more from seeing or hearing? You talked about, you know, being a part of it and hearing other instruments to actually refine or perfect what you’re doing. Would you feel that being part of a big ensemble helps you perfect your technique? It’s open to anyone who wants to jump in.

**BRIDIE** — I definitely think it does, because if you’re playing by yourself you know what you’re playing and you know how it sounds. But, if you’re playing with other people you have to know what they’re sounding, like, as well, to be able to make the end result sound good.

So, being in like an orchestra or a band or something and listening to everyone else, really gives you knowledge on what you have to do better in order to make that sound good as well or vice versa.

**ALLEGRA** — I would agree with Bridie, although I also think in orchestras it’s really good to be able to play with your peers, because if there’s something that you’re struggling with then they might be able to provide you with advice. And, it’s good to be able to play in a different scenario than just by yourself.

**Ms MILLER** — Do any of you sing as well?

**SUSANNAH** — Yes, I sing. I’m in the choir. It’s really encouraging to have an amazing conductor up there because she is so passionate and she loves it. Every week she comes in with a big smile on her face ready to sing with us. And, it’s so, so good. Like, you couldn’t ask for anything better than what she provides us with.

**Ms MILLER** — Do you find that the music that you’re learning and the instruments actually
helps you learn in other subjects like English and maths or languages? It’s open to anyone.

**ALLEGRA** — I think that especially in bands it might not help directly with things like maths, but it teaches you a lot of skills. Like, you have to be very confident when you’re playing. You can’t just sort of do a half job on stage and you have to be able to communicate well with the other players in the ensemble because if you never talk to each other, you’re not going to really get anywhere. And, you also have to use a lot of teamwork and cooperation skills because by yourself you might be a really good player but in order to make the band sound good, you need to understand each other and you need to sort out problems together.

So, I think though it might not necessarily help directly with things like maths and science, music teaches you a lot of all-round skills.

**Ms MILLER** — It’s a very mature observation, Allegra. Well done. Anyone else?

**BRIDIE** — I think doing the option of that, I think it also helps with languages a bit because lots of the terms used in orchestras are from your pieces of music, are from different countries, so going to a language and knowing them ahead of everyone else is kind of an advantage, in a way.

**Ms MILLER** — In terms of your primary school offering you music, what was your experience there?

**GUY** — I went to St Thomas’. They offered classroom music, but they didn’t have really any resources or anything to put a proper music program together.

**Ms MILLER** — Do you think if they had have you might have taken up an instrument at that point?

**GUY** — If they had had a music program — yeah, probably, yeah.

**BRIDIE** — My primary school didn’t have a music program really at all. We had classroom music, and for those students who learnt instruments like in school because we had music teachers come in to school to teach us instruments, there was a small orchestra going but not much music in that really. It was just for those students in particular.

**Ms MILLER** — And if they had have offered instruments in a program would you have taken it up do you think?

**BRIDIE** — Yes, definitely, I think. We were quite a small school, so they were competing with like sport and like a maths club or chess club and stuff there weren’t many students who wanted to do it, and take it out of their time as well.

**ALLEGRA** — Well, at my primary school we had a band program, because I actually went to a private school which had from prep to Year 12, and their band program was all right, although it was a lot more limited than Blackburn. We had one main band and it was very small, so in Year 5, I started coming to the Blackburn junior band and I immediately noticed that there was a big gap in standard between that band and my school’s band. So, then, Blackburn was the obvious choice for me when I got to high school age.

**SUSANNAH** — I went to a primary school with a lot of music. They had three bands and when I got to Year 5, I heard the Year 6 band play and it was really cool, because they were the older kids
and they were the ones who I always looked up to. Because they were playing, I picked up the saxophone in about Year 6 and it was like, oh, I want to be like that person. That person is amazing. And, that person actually helped me through like when I needed help with my saxophone even though they were in high school. They helped me out. It was really nice just to have someone there. Yeah, it was just awesome.

**Ms MILLER** — Good. And do you think any of you might take up music as a career once you finish your secondary schooling years?

**ALLEGRA** — Yeah. For a long time I have been considering continuing flute as a career. I thought that it would be a really good career option to maybe play in an orchestra or something like that, especially after being able to play in an orchestra, and I thought what if I could to this all my life for a living and meet a wide range of people, so, yeah, that was an option.

**SUSANNAH** — I would definitely. It’s one of my massive options to take up music as a career. Maybe not even performing. I would love to perform because that’s what I love doing but also just teaching kids music and also just like going around the world just like with other countries that don’t have it as good as us in Australia, to teach them or just go over and have some fun with the kids and teach them like what you know about music. That would just be awesome.

**BRIDIE** — I’m definitely considering music as a career, because it’s really the only thing that appeals to me that I would want to do for the rest of my working career. And, as Susannah said, being able to pass on knowledge to other kids like our teachers have given to us that we can pass on to someone else is really something that I would really love to do.

**GUY** — I’m not quite sure yet. I’m not saying no, because it would be good, but there are also other things that I’d like to do. It’s not the only things I’m good at. I can do other stuff.

**Ms MILLER** — Like, what other interests do you have?

**GUY** — Sport and stuff. Well, I wouldn’t be doing that. I don’t know. It’s a pretty hard industry to get into, but it would be great. It would be really good.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Music technology. How much do you use music technology at school and what do you use it for?

**ALLEGRA** — Well, if you mean technology as in computer programs and things like that, we do use it fairly often in classroom music. We have been using the program Sebelius, which is a program for writing your own music where you can compose even huge orchestra scores, so we’ve been learning the basics of that. We’ve also been learning programs for mixing, so like taking one track and putting it to another one. I think we’re using one called Acid. So, yeah, there’s so many good things to learn, and they’re really fun, too.

**SUSANNAH** — I agree. Like, the same as Allegra. We use it really often like now in music and it’s lots of fun and you can learn in so many different ways also with that by hearing it and actually writing, writing down and like seeing it on it — yeah, sorry, I can’t really explain it.

**Ms MILLER** — So, you find that using the technology and then performing and then sort of playing it back, if you like, so you can sort of see how it all sort of works? Is that what you’re getting at?

**SUSANNAH** — Yes, sorry.
Ms MILLER — You’re right. It’s fine.

BRIDIE — In my music class we’re using a program called Acid, and composing our own TV ads at the moment and really describing what the music sounds, like what music you put in to describe the ad. And, I think it’s good because, as Allegra said, you get to play back and listen and see what fits and what doesn’t and really like make an understanding of what music would go well with it.

Ms MILLER — What is the advertisement you’re working on?

BRIDIE — Oh, we’re doing a banana ad.

Ms MILLER — And, what about the banana? Nothing against bananas?

BRIDIE — No, nothing against bananas. Just you really had to make a song about it and so really describing why bananas are good and stuff like that, so it’s really fun.

Ms MILLER — How is it going?

BRIDIE — Good; interesting results in that.

Ms MILLER — Will we get a copy of this?

BRIDIE — Maybe.

Ms MILLER — You might need to table that as part of our evidence. Well, good on you. And did you choose that, or did your teacher?

BRIDIE — Our teacher assigned us to what fruit or whatever originally.

Ms MILLER — And is that just the one, say, for the semester, and will you do a new one every semester?

BRIDIE — Oh, no, I think that was just the starting point. We have just finished a project where we get two pieces of music from a movie and describe what the music does for the scene. So, I think the banana — the fruit ads were just really a build up to that, knowing what music you need to describe something.

GUY — I have been using Sebelius and Acid and it’s so much more fun than writing on a piece of paper, some notes. Yeah, you get a preview as well, so you can record it somewhere if you want.

Ms MILLER — Well, that concludes our questions for today.

Is there anything anyone wants to say in addition to what we’ve already spoken about? No.

Well, I want to congratulate each and every one of you on coming here today and sharing your story with us, your good stories and the talents that you have. I wish you well for your endeavours in the future and also with your performances, representing this lovely school. So, well done.

Witnesses withdrew.