EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne and via regional link-up — Thursday, 16 May 2013

Members

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

Mr D. Southwick
Ms G. Tierney

Chair: Mr D. Southwick
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Witnesses

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SECONDARY COLLEGE
Leuca, Year 8 student
Tyler, Year 8 student

MIRBOO NORTH SECONDARY COLLEGE
Ryan, Year 11 student
Shane, Year 11 student
Rona, Year 7 student

WONTHAGGI SECONDARY COLLEGE
Jett, Year 10 student
Brittney, Year 10 student

LEONGATHA SECONDARY COLLEGE
Bec, Year 11 student
Jake
Sarah

KORUMBURRA SECONDARY COLLEGE
Maddie, Year 12 student
Cindy Year 12 student
Nick, Year 9 student
Eleanor, Year 9 student
The CHAIR — All right, well welcome to our web conference, and we’d like to firstly thank you all for attending the Education and Training Committee hearing looking at music education in schools. I’d like to say right at the outset that I’m guilty of this particular activity this afternoon in terms of using this technology. I was very keen for us to organise and utilise technology which is currently being used in schools for us to see how it would work with the committee. It’s important not only just in terms of hearing your evidence and what’s happening as far as music in your schools today, but also in how we can be utilising technology better in schools, and particularly when it comes to programs like music.

So, firstly, if I could just give you a couple of hints in terms of how we’re going to work this afternoon. We will have a number of questions to ask you, and with me today we have Gayle Tierney, who is the Deputy Chair and Nazih Elasmar and Elizabeth Miller. So, as a committee we will have a number of questions to ask you, and you will have the opportunity to answer those. You don’t have to answer every one of those questions that we ask, but you will see there is an opportunity if you want to answer something, to raise your hand. I assume they do that by clicking a button in terms of raising their hands. Yes. You will have the opportunity to raise your hands, click the button, and then I will identify who is speaking. At that point, if you could unclick the button so we are able to move on to the next question after you’ve spoken.

I also need to point out in terms of the committee and the process today, we actually record all the information via what we call Hansard. So, you will have the opportunity to review that. And, the other thing is that the information you give us is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, and that means that it’s a bit like Members of Parliament in that in Parliament itself what you say is covered by this privilege and it means that, effectively, you won’t be sued for what is being said, so you can relax with that. But, this is really an informal chat to all of you, to find out what is happening in terms of music within your schools, what programs you’re currently involved in, and what you would like to see in terms of improvement in terms of music in your schools.

So, what I would like to do is kick it off with the first question. Sorry, another thing before we start: I know this might be a bit tedious, but every time you have an opportunity to speak, before you actually speak could you please just give us your first name, so then we can have that identified as part of our transcript today. And, as I said, click the button to raise your hand and I will identify you to speak.

So, the first question I’m going to ask — and I will give everybody the opportunity to answer this one — if you can give us a little bit of background as to what you’re currently doing with your music program, what instrument you are currently learning, why did you choose that instrument, and what do you think are the benefits of learning a musical instrument. So, who would like to raise their hands first? There we go. We’re off and racing. I would like to hand over to you.

BEC — I'm from Leongatha Secondary College. I play bass guitar and I sing. I've been singing since I can remember and I picked up bass so I could join the school band.

JAKE — I play guitar, piano, but primarily sing. I have been singing since I was very little, and in year 10 started VCE music where I started performing not just for the school band, but also for the SGSMP, which I find incredibly enjoyable.

SARAH — I'm Sarah and I'm from Leongatha Secondary College. I play the piano and the saxophone. I began playing the piano in Year 2 and the saxophone in Year 6. I began to play because I enjoyed music and I thought it was something a little bit out there. Being in the program has given me the opportunity to associate with other people who enjoy music and it gives me a sense of community.

LEUCA — I’m on the bass guitar and the flute. I see some of the benefits of learning the bass guitar would be you get a very good sense of timing. With the flute you get to play melodies and it gives you
an idea of the type of music.

**TYLER** — I play the guitar and the percussion. And, I think with percussion, you learn a lot of very rhythmical, like timing. I think guitar would be great because you learn — well, I think you just learn a lot of things with guitar. You learn a bit of everything, a bit of like an all-rounder thing.

**The CHAIR** — If you could just told for one tick. Who did we have just speaking then?

**TYLER** — Leuca and Tyler from South Gippsland Secondary College.

**LEUCA** — Leuca spoke first, and Tyler spoke second.

**The CHAIR** — We will need you to speak louder into the microphone, if you could. And sorry, because it was just the beginning, we might actually ask Leuca to go first and just give that information again, and then were will follow with Tyler. So, Leuca first and then Tyler.

**LEUCA** — Okay, well, I’m Leuca, and I play the bass guitar and the flute. I think the bass guitar is great because you get a good sense of timing and I think the flute is also great because you get to sort of feel how the instruments fit in with each other because you get to play a lot of melodies.

**TYLER** — I play the guitar and the percussion. And, I think some of the best benefits would be that you are — you get a good sense of timing and rhythm with percussion and you get a little bit of everything with guitar.

**The CHAIR** — Tyler, what made you choose the guitar in the first place and the percussion?

**TYLER** — I first played guitar first before percussion because, well, we just had a little bit of acoustics and I was just fiddling around on that, and then I was started getting lessons and then, well, just gravitated from there. And, I learnt percussion because, well, some of my family play the percussion and it’s just like a family thing so, you’re not one of the family if you don’t play the percussion.

**RYAN** — I learn guitar and piano and I learnt to play guitar first.

**The CHAIR** — Why?

**RYAN** — I chose the guitar first because I saw people playing guitar and I thought ‘Oh, I want to be able to do that. That’s really cool. I want to do that’. So, I started playing and I haven’t stopped since, and then I started playing piano because, well, I loved playing guitar so much I just wanted to play other instruments as well.

**SHANE** — I grew up listening to classical music from my parents. I started on the piano when I was in prep, but then as I became a teenager I picked up the guitar because I thought I would like to be a guitar player and then, a little bit after that, I managed to pick up the drums. It was a very long time where I didn’t get lessons on the guitar or the drums but, basically spent most of my primary school life learning the piano at primary school. But, basically what Ryan said, I managed to pick up the guitar and the drums. Basically, I have a love for watching bands playing and stuff. My dad plays in a wedding band and things like that, so I just wanted to do what they do, you know, sort of watch the rock stars and stuff like that.

**RONA** — I started playing piano when I was in year 1 and I just started violin and then I started flute, and then in Year 8 I started learning piano because I wanted to start learning an instrument and my parents thought piano was a good option and I thought so, too. Yeah. I started violin because I really liked the sound that it makes, and I like throat instruments, too, and I first started flute because I wanted to play instruments in a band.

**The CHAIR** — Can you tell me did your parents have any influence in you choosing those
instruments?

RONA — Well, I first wanted to start learning the violin but my parents asked me to do the piano before the violin, so I suppose that’s a pretty big influence, yes.

The CHAIR — Okay, thanks. Who would like to go next?

JETT — I play the bass clarinet, and my friend Brittany, she plays the clarinet, and I just played it because I liked the sound. It’s deeper and unusual, you could say. And, I played it because I can play in an orchestra, concert band, a jazz band, even a pop band and it opens a lot of opportunities for my future. I think that the benefit of learning an instrument is you get to associate with a completely different group of people, that I would not have known or gotten to know had I not chosen to play this. I learnt to work with others like in the school band because we had to listen to each other so we can get the music style. It gives you a certain amount of discipline to continue your playing, because I have to practice regularly so I can continue to go forward with it. I think that’s it for me.

The CHAIR — Is that everybody? Has anybody not had the opportunity to answer that question?

NICK — I play the percussion. What got me into the percussion was like it was in Year 3, and I said to my mum’s friend ‘How great it would be to do the percussion’ and then in Year 3 I thought ‘Yeah, that’s a good idea’. So, I got into it.

ELEANOR — I play the trombone. I started in Year 7 and I think it’s really good to be able to play the trombone because it’s an instrument that not a lot of people maybe choose to play and you get to associate with lots of people who enjoy playing music.

CINDY — I decided to learn the tuba in Year 2. I wanted to learn something that you could like play in a band. Also, because it was a very popular instrument. I’ve wanted to play different parts of music with it like being in a jazz band and concert band, which is really fun, and being in the music program has been really good because you meet lots of people and it’s also a challenge.

MADDIE — I play the flute. I started learning when I was in primary school, and I just followed on learn it. And, yeah, I really enjoy it and the fact that you get to play in a band and it makes it seem really relevant and interesting, and you get to talk to new people and stuff. It’s really good.

The CHAIR — We’re going to try something else. Just before you speak, could you type into the box just your name for us because we’re finding it hard to pick up who is speaking. And also, what school was the last group of students from?

NICK — We are from Korumburra Secondary College.

The CHAIR — Excellent, thank you. I’m going to hand over to Gayle to ask the next question. And, just before you speak, if you could as I say, just type in the box your name for us.

Ms TIERNEY — Hi everyone. My name is Gayle. And, I would like to know whether you actually study music as a subject at your school, and what do you enjoy about the subject?

SHANE — We all study music. Me and Ryan, we both study guitar locally from a teacher. But, we also do a class at school, which is quite productive.

RONA — I had a music concert in Year 7, but not in Year 8.

RYAN — I started in Year 7. There was a Year 7 class that nobody really paid attention in except me. I also had this year a VCE class which I found really, really fun and you get a lot done.

SHANE — At the school, most of us, we did — do — a music class in Year 7. A lot of the interest doesn’t seem to take off. There’s only a tiny handful of students that want to pursue music after that
The CHAIR — Excellent. That was Mirboo. Any other schools?

BRITTNEY — Our school offers music right through from Year 7 to Year 12, and we also offer — we offer just a couple of different like types of classes. It’s also extremely good for the music students, and also especially in Year 7 for the students because it’s like a requirement so everyone has to have a taste of it to see whether they actually like it or not.

JETT — I really like the class because we’re learning about all the different styles of music and theory and stuff, and we’re also learning the theory from the start, from Grade 1 to I think it is Grade 5 maybe which we will need for exams. I really enjoy it because we study music from the Bach period, romantic and all the different periods. So, we not only get a taste of modern music but we get a taste of the history of music, and we will be able to do it right through until Year 12.

BEC — LSC does classroom music from Year 7 upwards. Jake and I are doing unit 3 and 4 music performance and Sarah is doing Year 8 music. We also have Year 6 students from the primary school next to us learning instruments and participating in our junior band.

LUECA — Well, we study music and we also have lessons once a week. Plus, the class that we are offered has quite a bit of musical theory, and I think it is quite good because we learn about all of the different ways of reading music, writing music, scales, and all the important stuff that you need to know but might not necessarily be covered in your lessons because it’s not necessarily to do with playing an instrument.

SHANE — The subjects we cover in class, they’re usually pretty good because it’s where the theory based stuff sets us up for life in a sense, like even after school or outside of school, we play music. So, here at Mirboo North, me and Ryan, we played in bands before and that’s an outside of school thing, but because we study music in school and learn all the theory and techniques and stuff, we’re able to take all the stuff that we need outside of school and are able to use it while we’re playing, while we practice and while we perform.

RYAN — Yes, the techniques we learn in class can really make it easier to learn any songs at all that you want to take on, and you can have a much deeper understanding about that song and how it works and everything. With the stuff that you learn you can really make your own stuff really quickly as well. You can use all the techniques and make, I don’t know, what you want to do in that sense.

SHANE — But it’s also like it’s a growing foundation. It’s like, you know, a base where we begin to learn about many different things.

MADDIE — Last year I was studying music performance but our school couldn’t offer it because of lack of numbers, therefore we combined with Leongatha via Polycom. It was very beneficial.

The CHAIR — Okay, thank you.

Mr ELASMAR — Good afternoon. How are you? I’m going to put a question to you if any of you participate in any bands or orchestras, and how much time you spend practising and rehearsing.

LEUCA — I’m in two bands. I spent two hourly rehearsals a week at bands and I do maybe 20 minutes a day practising my instruments.

TYLER — I get lessons outside of school. I’m in three bands at the moment at school — we get an hour for the concert band and about half an hour for the other two.

SHANE — I play in a few bands outside of school, so basically all my weekends are filled up with, you know, gigging around the local area with bands. There’s a lot of pubs that have heard of us, that have heard of my band, and like I said before with a great foundation and like being able to take what
we learn at school out there, we can — I’ve actually played in a musical, and like that’s totally not school-related, and because it was, I was able to take what I learnt from school and put it into a type of workforce.

RONA — I’m in an orchestra since when I started at high school, and we meet once a week.

RYAN — I used to be in tons of bands back in Year 7 when I was learning, but now, I’m not so much in a band. I’m in the school band now. I’m really dedicated. I probably practice maybe two hours a day would be a minimum would be my practice regime.

Mr ELASMAR — Okay. My last part of the question: what do you enjoy about performing as a group and what are some events that you have performed at?

JETT — Okay, so some of the performances that we have played at is at school concerts and then so we will perform at a few concerts and our bands have been practising for an hour a week since the start of the year. And then there are also — there’s the Big Band Blowup, which is when all the bands come together and we perform, the people who are invited. And there’s also at the Yarram Festival and we go to it annually and so we also perform there, and each year there is an artist that comes down and works with our school band, so there’s also a performance with them. And, there’s also an end of year presentations.

MADDE — I like it that we’re able to show people what we’ve been working on through the whole year when we are performing. And, it’s really good to see that my parents are proud of me because I’m part of this group and, yeah.

BRITTNEY — I play in the senior band and right now we’re doing a collaborative thing where we are actually going to Tasmania, so that’s our main gig this year. We’ve done a couple fundraisers to support that. So, fundraisers throughout the school.

LEUCA — Well, at our school we are basically being in ensembles like everyone can just see what you’re doing and just do a couple of performances just to show people what we’ve been working on and stuff like that. It’s really good just to go out there and do what you want to do with your musical instrument and be acknowledged for it.

BEC — We have several bands; junior, intermediate, senior/concert bands as well as junior and senior rock bands. The bands rehearse every week for at least an hour. I have singing lessons with school and outside of school and practise about an hour every night. I am also part of the senior rock band for singing and senior band for bass

JAKE — I usually spend at least an hour a night learning new songs and playing guitar and singing.

SARAH — I practi se an hour of piano, in the morning and an hour of saxophone, in the afternoon each day. Every Friday morning our intermediate band practises for an hour.

Ms MILLER — Good afternoon, students. My name is Elizabeth Miller, and I have a couple of questions.

My first question to you all is what did your primary school offer in terms of music education, and if you could indicate at what year that was.

BRITTNEY — My primary school actually didn’t offer anything. We had one music teacher that covered every single instrument and they were also extremely expensive. Music lessons were extremely hard to afford so not many people could actually learn an instrument until secondary school.

LEUCA — At my old primary school we had a very good music program. The kids were from prep to Year 4 and were encouraged to do violin and then at five and six being in an ensemble was
compulsory, so it was amazingly good for the music program, but also when we made them do the ensemble in years five and six, it sort of toned down the musical instruments a bit after that because there were kids who just didn’t want to have anything to do with the music program after that.

**NICK** — Well, at the primary school that I went to, the music program was not as good as at the high school that we have now. This year they stopped doing the music program altogether. They don’t teach music at that school any more, but, I really hope that they get to do it again because what they did have was great and it got me really into music and I loved doing it and that’s why I continued doing it at high school.

**BEC** — Our local primary school — which we all went to — has classroom music lessons every week and has choirs, and offers lessons for just about every instrument.

**Ms MILLER** — I’ve got another question. Do any of you think you might pursue a career related to music and if so, what would you like to do?

**SHANE** — In a career related to music, I would like to be probably a sound technician or something that I could monitor the beats of a lot of people or maybe like a disco or something along those lines. Ideally, I would prefer to be a kind of rock legend but the likelihood of that happening is not in my favour.

**RYAN** — I probably would like to become a rock star, to become famous a little bit. That’s my dream. But, you know, that’s the thing that I have to like work on a foundation myself like, you know, probably join a band and work together to make that all happen. But, possibly a studio technician would not be too bad or even play for musicals that I can tour around the country. That wouldn’t be too bad.

**TYLER** — Yes, let’s admit it, everyone wants to rule the world, so I would love to have my hand over the world by playing and having my own personal army. That’s not going to happen. I realise that, but I could still try. That’s uplifting because I’ve never said that before!

**SHANE** — Well, yeah, I would have to agree with the people from Mirboo North there. I really want to play in a band when I’m older and go touring and what not. Of course, everything takes hard work and dedication so, yeah, but, you know, I just really want to get out there and play guitar for people.

**LEUCA** — I just really want to be in a band. I don’t necessarily want to be ultra famous, rule the world and everything. That would be cool but I just prefer to be like oh, yeah, have you heard of these people? They’re really good. I’d just like to be that sort of musician.

**BEC** — I would love to have a career in singing but it would more likely be a hobby or side job type thing.

**JAKE** — Next year I plan to continue my studies of music at university in Melbourne. I definitely wish to pursue a career in music.

**SARAH** — I don’t really have a ‘set ambition’ but I do enjoy other subjects, which I might like to study although teaching and sharing with others my knowledge of music does interest me to a certain extent.

**The CHAIR** — All right. Thank you, everybody. I think it’s going well. We’ve got a few more questions still to ask.

If I could just again —I’m glad everybody is typing and giving us their names before they’re speaking, but also as you type your name, if you could also mention it before you speak. That will just 100% make sure we get the information down alongside your name. So, as you speak type your name and say Bec, what school you are from. Well, it’s not Bec’s typing anyway. We can’t hear her but if it was say Tyler, then give us your name and what school you are from and then away we go.
So, my next question is in regards to how we can — how you might have some ideas how we can encourage more students to participate in music education so you might get more people involved like yourselves into music, and ideally into music early.

SHANE — That is an excellent question. I don’t know. It would need to take some very, very tough playing — no, you would need to do some planning. I don’t have a solution myself. But, perhaps — no, it would be a hard solution to come to. You know, you would have to talk it out, everyone together, and come up with a solution. You may need to do some research as well as to what intrigues children.

RYAN — I think the best way of making, you know, kids see the awesome side of music like I have and everyone else here has, you’ve got to start them early and get them into, like a groove of ‘I want to play something, I want to do something, I want people to hear me playing’. I can remember back in primary school, this is probably one of the things that got me into music. We did kind of like a drumming, a guy who came around and gave everyone a drum and taught us how to do something, and we did it, and we felt really, really inspired to keep going and do more things. So, more things like that, like getting local musicians to interact with the school and getting the school people into start playing things and stuff, that would definitely help.

SHANE — I think a lot of music, it becomes inspired from other people, you know, famous figures. Like Ryan said, it was just a local percussionist that was doing a workshop, but there’s usually a lot of other people that have to get involved, a lot of other skilled people getting people who don’t know that much about music involved.

LEUCA — Well, I think that younger people need exposure to instruments and to what playing music can do because I play a musical instrument that not many people know which is the bass clarinet. So, I’ll tell my little sibling friends that oh, I play the bass clarinet and they’re like, ‘What’s a clarinet?’ So, they just need the exposure to know what they can do if they start early.

JETT — I think it’s where once you get more people involved in the music, or the foundation things, we should be able to make sure that they all know the positives about learning an instrument and that they all get the chance to have a go.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. I’ve got two questions and I’m going to ask them one after the other. And, I’m going to do this little bit differently. I’ll get those that have the answer to actually type out the answer, put their name next to it and type out the answer and while you’re typing, so we can give everybody the opportunity to type up their answer to the questions and while that is happening, if somebody wants to respond verbally we can do that as well.

So, the first question is if any of your parents actually played a musical instrument.

NICK — My mother played the clarinet but quit at a young age and my younger sister is currently doing piano.

LEUCA — Both of my parents play or have played instruments. My mum played saxophone and clarinet and toured the world with an orchestra doing that and my dad did drums when he was younger.

ELEANOR — My mum plays the flute and teaches at Newhaven College.

CHERYL — My family plays percussion except my mother who didn’t play anything, but my sister is a very good drummer.

SHANE — My dad plays guitar in a local folk band and plays in a wedding/function band. It’s a part of his second job. My mother, however, doesn’t play any instrument. My parents met because of a shared love for music, like Queen, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin.
JETT — My mother played the piano at a young age. And, my grandmother also played piano for most of her life. Most of my aunties and uncles learned to play guitar and it’s great to see them pick up a guitar after years of not playing an instrument, something they learnt in their teens.

CINDY — My dad plays piano and trumpet. He encouraged all of us to learn piano as a starting instrument and then encouraged us to choose another instrument.

RONA — Most of my family started learning an instrument, but all gave up.

BEC — My whole family is musical in one way or another, but it was never forced on me or anything.

JAKE — My mum played piano for many years as a child. My aunt studied music at uni and is a piano teacher. But, they didn’t really encourage me to pursue music, it’s more my own ambitions.

SARAH — My mum used to play the piano and my dad the guitar. I would say my family has a general interest in music.

The CHAIR — And, the second question is do you think there is enough opportunity for young people in your region to attend quality musical performances, and if not, what opportunities would you like to see to attend musical performances. So, I will hand it over to you. As I said, please feel free to type at your answers with your name next to it and those who want to answer it verbally can do so as well.

RYAN — My whole family, my dad, to my aunty or to my aunties, they all played an instrument at birth and they must have realised oh, music, you can’t make as much money as you can now, nowadays anyway, but yeah, they gave up pretty much and they all learned played piano which was the general interest to play back then in the ‘40s. I am probably the only person in my family that has actually stuck to the music side of playing in bands. I’ve not given up on it and I probably never will.

JETT — No, there is definitely not enough quality performances in our area, and there definitely needs to be more.

The CHAIR — All right, just to conclude, I wanted to just in terms of technology, firstly, do you use technology much as part of your music programs in schools, and secondly, with the technology we’ve just used today have you used it before and if so, tell us a little bit more about that. If this is the first time, what was your feeling in terms of how this has worked today?

BRITTNEY — This is the first time we’ve actually used this program, and it was really, really hard to get on to. We had to see out techs about, I don’t know, three times because first, we couldn’t load the program, and then the microphones wouldn’t work and then we couldn’t be heard. So, yeah, it was extremely difficult to use.

The CHAIR — What about the end? How did you find it at the end?

RYAN — We were extremely disappointed we could not use the Polycom. I mean, even the teacher was just like, ‘Oh, no.’ I thought the Polycom would be a great idea because we could see everyone and be easier to communicate. But, yeah, I felt that this program, it worked, I mean, you got your answers and everything and it worked but it could have worked much better, I think. The music technology in our school, we’ve actually got Garage Band on the iPad and yeah, we might need a grant or something to get us some money quickly. Anyway, yeah, that’s it.

LEUCA — There is a bit of technology in the music program and the rest of the school we had never seen this program before and we had the school tech here helping us figure it out.

The CHAIR — Okay, that concludes our session today. Firstly, I wanted to thank you all for coming
along and taking part in the session. I wanted to apologise that we couldn’t get the technology quite
the way we wanted to, but we’re learning as well and I think from the takeaway from the session it
gives us the opportunity to improve things moving into the future. So, having said that, you’ve already
provided us with some really worthwhile information for us. But, you’ve all been the first ones to take
part in this so congratulations to being the first ones who have participated in this program. We are
giving you some applause hear from our end.

I wanted to particularly thank Bec and the team from Leongatha. Unfortunately, we couldn’t get your
microphones up and running, but the information that you were typing along we will be able to utilise
and incorporate as part of the information today. So, thanks for taking part and being involved in that.
And then, finally, I just wanted on behalf the committee, to wish you all well in your music careers
into the future. We look forward to seeing you bigger and better and brighter somewhere out
performing and doing what you love and enjoying your passions. So, congratulations, and thank you
for being involved with us today.

Witnesses withdrew.