EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Mildura — 1 May 2013

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Ms I. Seiffert, Performing Arts Teacher, Mildura Primary School;
Ms T. Clark, Performing Arts Teacher, Ranfurly Primary School;
Ms Y. Madden, Principal, Irymple Primary School; and
Ms J. McQuinn, Principal, Nichols Point Primary School.
The CHAIR — Thank you, everybody, for coming along this morning and having us in sunny Mildura. Peter obviously knows what it is like being here, but the rest of us are visitors. You all know that we are here today to investigate programs that are currently existing in some of the schools and what is happening in those schools and also to try to get an understanding as to why some schools are not running music programs. There are a few things I need to do first. I will introduce my colleagues and myself. We will be recording the evidence you give today, and you will have the opportunity to review that. If there are any typographical errors that need to be corrected, we will have those fixed for you. This all sounds very formal, but relax, okay?

The other thing I have to point out is that as part of the discussion today the information you give is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. That means you can speak freely without thinking that anything you say is going to be held against you or used against you. But that applies only to the hearing proper, not to anything that is said outside of the hearing.

As I said, it is really important for us to find out more about what you are doing, how you are doing it and how we can improve things, so we really want to encourage discussion. We will ask some questions; we have all got questions for you. If you feel you want to contribute to the answer, just chip in. Do not feel you have to answer every question. We will get through as many questions as we possibly can in the time we have.

I am going to kick it off. This particular question applies to all of you. Could you provide an overview of how music is delivered as part of the curriculum at your school? What is currently happening at your school? Are instrumental music lessons offered at your school? If so, is this on a user-pays basis? What other type of extracurricular music activities does your school offer? Just a little bit of background of what is currently happening in terms of music at your school. Who would like to kick it off?

Ms CLARK — I am the performing arts teacher at Ranfurly Primary School. I was at Ranfurly Primary School several years ago, going back about 10 years, doing prep to Year 6 performing arts across the whole school. I have also taught in a couple of other locations in between time as well. Now I am back at Ranfurly on a part-time basis. So I have seen a bit across the community in terms of what is happening in schools. I like to deliver a whole-school approach. We try to deliver a very interactive, safe, engaging and enjoyable learning program which incorporates whole-school events as well as bringing the community in. We are very big on the KidsMatter programs and things like that at the moment. We are looking at ways it can all connect together to form a really good program.

I do a mixture of music, dance and drama from Years 3 to 6 because I am part-time. I am also currently in a role that is supporting literacy intervention and reading programs in the school. That might come into it a bit later on when we are talking about barriers and other things. Obviously we like to have just a really good learning program and cover the whole spectrum. We do have the visual arts program too, so that is interconnected as well. I use a range of different programs that are supported by digital learning experiences and resources, and there is a big push for the ICT Ultranet use and things like that as well. That has been a big part of my program over the last couple of years with the priorities of the school. There is also a literacy-based focus too, so there are digital learning resources, including using the interactive whiteboards and netbooks so that students are recording the work they do. It involves quite a bit, not just playing the instruments.

I use a hands-on instrument approach. There are the cooperative learning-style activities I do that encourage teamwork and the collaborative learning side of things as well. I run a choir program for Years 3 to 6, where we are actively involved in the community, including in things like the eisteddfod, combined schools performance, The Beat and also end-of-year events like carols by candlelight, where thousands of people go down to be involved. It means a lot of extra time in recess, lunchtimes and out-of-school times as well for those sorts of things, which form a big part of the program at Ranfurly Primary School.

The CHAIR — Is there a user-pays component of anything at the school?

Ms CLARK — A couple of years ago we did have a person employed to come in of a lunchtime to provide guitar tuition. That was user pay. I do get some assistance with another choir tutor coming in, given that I am part-time, building up the numbers of students involved and the amount of time we are out in the community. That is that extra support for me, but sometimes it does come back to availability as well. We have not got any other user-pays programs at the moment. I am still considering getting more in. There is lots of feedback from kids and parents that they would like to have that sort of thing available to them readily at school, but it comes back to resources, people available, the timetable structure, priorities of the school and what is coming from the education department and government.
The CHAIR — Do all kids have the opportunity to study music?

Ms CLARK — At our school we have Years 3 to 6 in my program. I support the other teachers to integrate it through their programs in the classroom as well, but there is that opportunity for them to come and use the space that I use as well.

Ms McQUINN — Ours is whole school, from prep through to Year 6, but it is a bit like Trudie’s in that it is performing arts, not just music. That is because that is how we report. We have tried user-pays for instrumental music. Initially we employed our own teacher who was able to do that, then he left, so we had a lady come in and kids paid until she finished up. This year we tried again with a singing teacher who approached us and wanted to come in and teach children. I think it is $25 a lesson. She would organise it all. We put that out there, but we had no-one interested. A lot of our children who are really keen on a specific instrument or singing have private lessons anyway.

The CHAIR — Outside of school.

Ms McQUINN — Outside of school, and the parents are more than happy to continue that arrangement. A bit like Trudie, we have our choir from Years 1 to 6, which is interesting. We probably do not get them out as much as Trudie does, but we do get them out in the community and to aged-care facilities. They perform every week at assembly. They are in The Beat — often for us The Beat is more about the dance than the singing component of it — and the eisteddfod. We try choir, but we also do the dance component of it.

The CHAIR — Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing that it is encompassed in the performing arts area as opposed to being on its own?

Ms McQUINN — I think it is a good thing because I do not think there are enough hours in the day as it is. Our children now from prep to Year 4 do performing arts for an hour. The children in Year 5 and 6 at our school have choices around what they do in specialist areas. It is called a specialist subject in education. They have a choice around that. Some kids in Years 5 and 6 may choose not to do that; some might choose to do it all year, so we try and cater for those kids’ needs for lots of reasons. It certainly helps around behaviour management, because they are doing what they really want to do.

The other thing that we do is we use the sound shell at Nowingi Place every year, and we have our huge whole-school concert down there and there is an expectation that every child gets up on that stage and performs. We have probably 3000 people at that concert. That is probably our really big one.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Jo. Yvonne?

Ms MADDEN — We have 327 students, so we are one of the middle-to-larger schools in Mildura. I would consider our music program, compared to a lot of other schools, is fairly minimal. We have it as a part of our specialist program, but we have a fully qualified and trained art teacher. She does not have any musical background but she does teach music from prep to Year 2 and a lot of it relies on digital resources. In the past we had a teacher that was big on percussion instruments, so we have xylophones, triangles and about 500 recorders which we sold to the kids last year and kept a full set. So music has not been all that strong but, while I say that, we have a choir that is really popular and that has two meetings each week. The choir goes to aged-care facilities, much the same as Jo mentioned. They have a pivotal role in our Anzac ceremony and that sort of thing. It is ongoing all year, and that is the Year 3 to 6 group that is involved in that. We have also got children that are involved in The Beat, which is the major production each year, but that presentation takes a short time to get ready and then finishes.

We have lunchtime sessions provided by the teacher, who is not musically trained but is really keen to provide more music to the children. We have lessons in xylophone and recorder that happen on a rotational basis throughout the year. In the past we have had guitar teachers coming in on a user-pays basis — as well as classes in keyboard skills — which in itself creates some initial problems because people want to do it during class time, otherwise it is straight after school, and whilst I might be involved in three meetings straight after school we have to provide staff supervision even though it is an independent person on a user-pays basis within the school. But we do do that, given the police checks and everything that goes with that.

We have a whole of school concert that is a major thing that the children work towards in term 3. Every class is involved in a major musical dance presentation, and we get about 2000 people attending that, so that is something we work towards each year. We do not have a lot of instruments in storage, so over time as a school it has very much focused on the Arts, doing art and drama, rather than the music component of it.
Prep to Year 2s get a fairly even amount of music, drama and art in their program and they really love it, but certainly in Years 3 to 6 it is minimal unless students are a part of those special groups.

The CHAIR — Is that because of teacher resources?

Ms MADDEN — Absolutely. When we did the application for this position, for example, we had an art-trained teacher leaving, and we put it out as ‘the Arts teachers’, so we were happy to have someone with strong music skills or visual art or drama or all of the above if we could have found someone like that. But we only got art, particularly specialist people, and looking at the curriculum of the Arts where it has got music, drama and visual art itself, she tries to give a really balanced program while not having any formal training in that area. So whilst we are not ignoring it, we are doing the best we can with the teacher resources.

The CHAIR — Would others agree with that, in terms of specialist teachers and having a lack of music specialist teachers?

Ms MADDEN — Yes, and they are not very thick on the ground in Mildura.

Ms SEIFFERT — We are a rare species.

The CHAIR — I am coming to you in a minute, Ingrid.

Ms MADDEN — Our music teachers, that is their career and they do it, but they are not also teacher trained. So you have that difficulty. It is very difficult to get a very good musician. Mildura South is probably in a great position, because they have a person who plays in a band and plays multiple instruments who is the music teacher, and they are teacher trained. That is the ideal person, and as you can imagine, they are not easy to come across. When you do you want to keep them, but it is very difficult to get someone like that. And you have to attract someone like that to a school that has instruments and a specialist room where they feel that they are at home. Whereas if they came to my school they could not find a room that even looked like a music room at this stage. I do not have a spare classroom that I could convert either, because the art room is so big and has so many resources in it — things for pottery and all the rest of it. It is a real dilemma. I love music, I play the piano and all sorts of keyboard instruments myself, but there is just not the staffing that is available to furnish schools that have really good music backgrounds.

Ms McQUINN — What you tend to do is, when you get somebody who is really into music you tend to try — if you do not have someone like Ingrid or Trudie — to slot them in where you can. I am in probably a little bit better situation than them because my school is a bit bigger so I can offer art, as in visual art, and then performing arts, and my art teacher is a different teacher to my performing arts teacher. She does the music component of it, but that is not her thing. Her thing is dance, she is a dance teacher, so obviously the kids are going to get a little bit more dance than they are music or drama. It is just the nature of the beast.

The CHAIR — Ingrid, tell us about you.

Ms SEIFFERT — A lot of what Trudie said applies to me. I do music from prep to 6, they get one hour a week, and I cover dance, drama and music. Within music I try to squeeze in the theory, the appreciation, the creating and the making. With dance it is not so much creating dance but learning dance — whether it is old-time dances, bush dances, whatever. With drama, I majored in drama so that is always a component. Every lesson has these things squashed into it, so it is jam packed. From the time they walk in the door to the time they go out, it is much as Trudie said — it is go, go, trying to cover as much as I can. I support the other teachers, but with all the government stuff that they are under pressure for, for data and all the rest, music seems to go out the door. Even though you tell them, ‘Just press the CD player and do a song in between’, often the only time they do singing or whatever is when they come to me.

I run choirs for ones and twos, threes and fours, fives and sixes. I run poetry choirs for ones and twos, threes and fours, fives and sixes. I have a Koori dance group and I have an Islander dance group. I teach guitar as part of the five and six elective program, and then they practise with me at an extra time, at a lunchtime. No, they do not take their instruments home, which is very sad, but given the nature of the families that a lot of our children come from, these instruments would get wrecked, not returned, or sold, abused, broken, or whatever, so I cannot afford to send them home.

We have 360 students, and one-third of them are Koori; that means about 120 children are Koori. We have 30, 40 children who are Islander, and on top of that we have Turkish kids, we have Sudanese and we have a mixture of others — from Iran, Iraq or whatever. Ninety to 95 per cent of our kids are on government assistance, EMA. That kind of puts us outside trying
to offer paid music programs, or instrumental. I tried it about five years ago. I had someone come in teaching keyboard and guitar because I was back in the classroom as a teacher. To get money out of the parents, even though he was only charging something like $10 a lesson or whatever, became a nightmare. If we had funding, that is one of the areas where I know our school would be interested in trying to go because, to me, music is such an outlet for emotional problems or whatever. I do not know if you were all musical, but at some stage if you were feeling really depressed or really happy — I used to go into my room with my guitar and lock myself in and write these terribly depressive songs and all the rest of it. So it was an outlet.

What else can I say? We do all those things, too, outside of school. We have major events at our school. We sing at the RSL Anzac Day ceremony every year. We are involved in all these other things — in The Beat Mildura event and the eisteddfod. I just think music is so important. I am lucky that my principal agrees and thinks the same, because after being put into a situation where he had to put me back in the classroom because of staffing issues, after four years in there and me reminding him every year that this was only a temporary placement, he pulled me back out because for our kids this sometimes is the only avenue for them to get out on stage, get in front of people, perform and have success — to go to the eisteddfod and win or even come second or whatever. This is a big deal for them. To me, if nothing else, that is the value of the program.

Ms CLARK — Can I just chip in a little bit there? Just when you are saying all that about the success side, I think also in our community for some of these students it is that safe, ‘belonging’ feeling in a team where —

Ms SEIFFERT — Yes, being in a group.

Ms CLARK — you are in a common group with common interests — special interests — and passionate about something, having that safe place to be and that opportunity to all be equal and share experiences that are rewarding, fun, enjoyable, engaging but also successful.

Ms SEIFFERT — I was talking to David before. He was talking about the Koori — whether or not we do something special for our Aboriginal kids. Having this dance group specifically for Koori kids, because they are the only ones who are allowed to do certain moves — I was saying that because some kids come from different tribes because they have come from different parts of Australia — we have to pick moves that are generic. We have to be careful, and we are lucky that we have the Koori liaison person, so I can always defer to her as to which moves we can do and cannot do. But as a white person trying to teach them it is very difficult, as you can imagine. I can be a great kangaroo and all the rest of it, but it is not the same as someone coming in. So we are lucky enough this year to have Barkindji as our LOTE language, and that person and another person, Peter Peterson, who is arty — he comes in, and he is helping to run those dance groups as well, which form a major part of our social events at the school. There is always the welcome dance. They have been used at other schools and other events, and these Koori kids, who are very shy about their heritage in a lot of cases, are starting to become proud of who they are. It is an avenue for them.

The CHAIR — Just before Liz asks a question, just on what particularly Trudie and Ingrid just mentioned about the ‘belonging’ element, do you think having those programs assists with reducing absenteeism in schools or retention of kids? Do you care to comment in any view on that?

Ms SEIFFERT — For me I think it helps. I always have a standing joke that if they are away on the day I have them and I find out that it is only on my day and that they have developed Seiffertitis, or musictitis, then it is a very serious disease, and we chase it up and try to find some medicine for it. I say to them, because we do xylophones and metallophones and all these other instruments and whatever, that if they miss out on it, that is what they have missed out on, and the other kids tell them. So they tend not to be away. Same for choir — if you have three or four absences and you are desperate to be in the choir, then you know that you are jeopardising your position in the choir. So it helps us.

Ms CLARK — And from the other side, I have found too of some of the students ask, ‘Ms C, what day is choir? What day is our music class day?’. They want to be here. They have that sense of pride and achievement and success when they are coming along and it is that safe place. So they are striving to be here on those days to be a part of it. I have grown numbers for the eisteddfod. We have over 70 students between the Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 choirs. A few years ago it was down to 11 per choir, so we have increased by over 50 students all up in a couple of years, which has been a big goal of mine to do because it is such a big part of our school community and also, you know, the whole community here in Mildura.

Yes, I think that is just such a powerful way to teach leadership and skills and, as I say, getting along. Also there are all the other across-the-curriculum skills that can be beneficial, using the left and the right-hand side of the brain, through
instrument playing. I do both keyboard and piano/guitar sessions myself. The kids are always asking me, once again, ‘When are we doing that?’ I normally leave it to later in the year, but all throughout the first semester they are requesting to use those sorts of instruments. We have the djembe drums — African drumming — as well that we do.

Ms SEIFFERT — They love the drumming.

Ms CLARK — That gives a chance for every student to build skills — also from the performance level as well — and then to tie it over to other curriculum areas, like numeracy and counting and keeping in time and all those sorts of things. Then there is the brain development and the benefits of all the different types of music and whatnot; using programs like Brain Gym, which we have introduced back in the cross-house school, to get that healthy mind/body spirit going and a good start for the day; and the brain breaks and things too. I think someone else mentioned just how powerful music is and how it connects with each and every one of us — and on a level to celebrate our Anzac Day ceremonies and things like that and NAIDOC Day, where we have the kids involved and things.

Ms SEIFFERT — Harmony Day.

Ms CLARK — It is with us all the time.

Ms MILLER — With the schools that are having difficulty providing a music program, what additional support or resources would you need to be able to offer a strong music program?

Ms MADDEN — For us it would be a qualified teacher and a room that is suitable to house and keep music instruments safe so that if that room needs to be used for other things, you have it in safely. I do not mean locked in cupboards, because that does not make it easy to access, but having sort of a partition behind which musical instruments and things can be stored.

We will probably get to the other point about — there are two aspects to music. A lot of it is at lunchtime, in teachers’ own time — and they are volunteering that time — or if we can offer it through instead of as a lunchtime duty. Providing it as part of the curriculum is pivotal on having a qualified teacher who is musically able to teach the curriculum, because you can have the best room in the world and the best equipment, but if they cannot read a note of music, you are in a fairly poor spot other than using just your digital resources for music.

So it is about even getting to the universities, I think, where people are graduating in music and to give them the offer of, ‘Have you thought about teaching music and doing that Bachelor of Education on the end of a singing degree or a music degree?’. I think that is where the link is. Until we have a bank of music teachers there, wanting to teach children, it is really going to be just throwing money at schools. While they have a teacher they will have all the equipment, and when that teacher leaves, all that equipment will sit idle until someone comes along to be able to use it.

Ms SEIFFERT — If you do not mind me butting in, I think you have to be careful in saying ‘someone who is a trained music teacher’. I have no long-term formal training in music. Yes, I have done voice training, as in singing, and I have done guitar or whatever, but I do not have any AMEB certificates, which is a music certificate.

Ms MADDEN — But you can read music and understand music.

Ms SEIFFERT — I can read music. I can pick a tune or whatever. I can read music. I know what all the terms mean simply because of my love of music. I have picked this up over time, and I think a lot of classroom teachers shy away from it because they think they need to have these formal qualifications.

For me, when I teach my music lessons it is my enthusiasm and my love of music that comes across to the kids rather than my theoretical knowledge. I really do not concentrate on a lot of theory with my kids except maybe up at the Year 4, 5 and 6 level, when I am getting them ready for high school, because I know there is that expectation that they know some notation and all the rest of it. It really is exposure to as much as I can, and it is incidental theory — so, when we are looking at music, what do these little symbols mean? — but there are no formal tests.

I do not have any desks in my room; I have a floor. Actually, my space is not really that conducive to music because it is in fact the entrance to our gym. I have a wall of windows. Then I have a folding door that goes into the gym, but it is not built up so that I could use the gym and my room as a stage area. I would go with Yvonne in saying, if you are going to run really good programs or help teachers run programs in schools, we need good spaces that are soundproof and to have the ability to
move. When I have 27 Year 6 students in my space and we are trying to do dance or even put out all the xylophones and
glockenspiels, it is crowded and I do not have any furniture other than a piano, my chair and a desk — that is it.

**Ms CLARK** — My spaces have changed over time. I was in a shared multipurpose room with a tiny little storeroom
which I was pulling things in and out of because we had before-school care, breakfast club and after-school care, and if
anyone needed to use that space, then I needed to take my classes into the classroom. That was a case of off I go either
taking the trolley full of instruments and things or adapting my lessons as needs be. I negotiated over time and have got my
own space now.

A couple of years ago it was two adjoining classrooms with an office and storeroom in between, which was great for
storage because of OH and S and everything else. Now the department that has taken over for our e-case’s learning centre is
using one of those rooms as a computer room, so now I am back to one small space which once again provides lots of
movement restrictions for me. If I need to do a dance session that is quite often incorporated in the music, drama and dance,
I am really restricted in what I can do. I need to take instruments into that multipurpose room space, which means we have
to walk to another location in the school or just put things in place to do that. If I had the right music space, like at Mildura
Primary School, which has been able to build a space with the correct set-up over time —

**Ms SEIFFERT** — That is what I am saying. It was tagged a music room, but it is literally the entrance to the gym. It is
not a music room.

**Ms CLARK** — That is a big part of it, and I think if the funding was there and available for those spaces, that could
make a big difference to attracting the right people. Once again, I am not trained right through music. I was in Mildura
Brass Band for many years growing up and in my high school band out at Coomealla High School I learnt lots of different
instruments. I did the AMEB testing through Mildura District Brass Band when I was in primary school and high school,
but then when it came to going to university I did the music program that was provided through La Trobe University. I did
extra study with music while I was in Bendigo. Because I came back here to do my Bachelor of Education course here and
they did not provide that extra music at La Trobe University, I picked up extra study on top of what I was doing in order to
do that before I came home to be a qualified teacher. That was another restriction at that time, but I put that in place
knowing that I wanted to secure a performing arts position.

**Ms McQUINN** — I also would agree with these ladies a bit, too. You can employ someone to come in who is musical
and a fully qualified music person or singing teacher, but they are not actually a registered Victorian teacher, which causes
issues because then you have to have supervision if they are taking a group of kids and you are looking at their competence
and around issues of student management. Therefore you are freeing up, but it has cost you double basically. You are
paying for them to come in, and then you are paying for a teacher to supervise them, so you have got a double cost.

I agree with Ingrid that the best situation would be to have people who love music and who live and breathe it, but I can see
where Dennis, her Principal, has come from. There are times where you know those people are in your school and you are
lucky to have them, but they are also really good classroom teachers, and we have the pressure of NAPLAN coming up and
My School websites. The pressure is on so you need your best core curriculum teachers, which is literacy and numeracy,
because that is all we are judged on by the government in those classes. It is difficult and a real balancing act to get it right,
and as schools we all tend to have some area other than literacy and numeracy that we tend to focus on.

**Mr CRISP** — I think Yvonne and Jo have just about covered my area, so I am just going to recap to make sure we have
got the evidence right. What we are looking at is the decisions that are made about whether you should have a specialist
music teacher at primary school level. Also, with the principals, we look at how you make your decisions around the
feasibility of allocations for your school with the current student resource package, such as whether to do music or, as Jo
just talked about, to concentrate on other things. It is a matter of whether you want to add any more on that area we are
interested in and on the way you go about those decisions.

**Ms CLARK** — Can I elaborate on what Ms McQuinn has just said? In my role at the moment I am spending two hours
a week in my intervention and literacy support position, so at the moment that is two hours extra that I am working with
Year 3 students to assist them with their comprehension skills. That is from the huge push of the NAPLAN literacy and
numeracy results. So part of my program is running that with these students, but that means it is two hours when I am not
teaching my music program. Our computer teacher, who has no music base or background, is taking two sessions of music
with ICT, and I am trying to support her as well on top of doing the intervention literacy support role and not having all of
the students.
We have done some of these grades on a rotational basis, so some of the students come and get to have my interactive music sessions, otherwise they would not see me because I am supporting the push on numeracy and NAPLAN results and holding schools accountable for that. That is where timetabling and what teacher resources are available come in. I have been put into that role and taken out of my music role, and somebody else is having to pick up that part where I am still supporting them. That has been a real barrier and complication for me in trying to deliver my program consistently. That is going on from what you have said, Ms McQuinn.

Ms MADDEN — For Jo and me to answer your question, we are in a different situation to Mildura Primary, because it is attracting funding because of its high Aboriginal population and can redirect funds to specialist programs, which is terrific. But I have got 12 Aboriginal students, so I do not attract additional money through any other avenues than my student resource package, which is pretty similar to Jo’s situation. I operate a budget that spends every cent. Some schools accumulate funds or whatever, while we try to keep an amount so that, if there were some disaster, we would have $50 000 to $100 000 sitting there to use, but we never let it get any bigger than that.

To have a music teacher and an art teacher with on-costs adds probably $100 000 to the SRP to provide a music-trained teacher. Then you might put the equipment and a space with it, and you are looking in the hundreds of thousands to set up a school with a space, equipment and a qualified music teacher — someone you can attract with normal teacher wages. At the moment I run on a deficit because I want to offer the Arts — music, drama and art — and I have an ICT specialist because that is a really big focus across all education, and I have also got a PE specialist because we are trying to build up the fitness of all our students across the school. So really I spend every cent to provide those three avenues, and that has not even looked at a full-time music person.

I have brought in some examples of weekly planners of teachers, and my second step would be: what do I take out to provide a full music program when I have only got so many hours and if we are to follow the directions that we have got very strongly and which I guarantee to the parents at my school — that is, to do two hours of literacy and an hour and a half of maths every day?

Ms McQUINN — Plus sport, which we have got a directive for.

Ms MADDEN — Plus compulsory sport, then I have only got so many hours left; and what do I give up next year, when in 2014 it is compulsory to do LOTE? My school council and everyone says, ‘Yvonne, why do we have to teach LOTE? We are struggling to teach a big proportion of students the English language and to get our literacy levels up, and we are being told that we have to provide a certain proportion of LOTE’. I actually would prefer to provide my cohort of students with music, because it is a lifelong thing that they will take with them.

The students who pursue careers in LOTE are already kids from high socioeconomic backgrounds with parents who will encourage them to pick up a language through their university and secondary school studies and whatever. The second layer on it is to have an Asian language, and I can see the thinking behind that but it is a challenge to maintain a person who will teach the same language for seven years of a child’s time at school; it has been proven time and time again at Sunraysia to be absolutely impossible.

You can get someone for two years, then a better job comes up in metropolitan areas, so we have now got until next year some time to fit in LOTE as well, and I can see poor old music actually having less time.

Ms McQUINN — That is a really key point. Every time the media hits us with the thinking that obesity is the biggest problem in Victoria, we get directions that we have to get kids active. We have our community health promotion program, where funding is reliant on schools doing that and introducing that, so all of a sudden you have got that. You have got your music group wanting finance, so you have got that too. We have LOTE coming in. All of a sudden primary schools now have the new AusVELS, including history and science which have become really big pressures. There are still only five hours of teaching time in a school day; I do not know who adds up the numbers, but clearly — —

Ms MADDEN — They do not add up.

Ms McQUINN — They do not add up. There are the numbers of hours in the day, but there are also your numbers. I am like everyone in that I run in the red every year because I cannot do it any other way to provide my kids with what we provide them. It is a tricky sort of scenario. Everybody wants a piece of the schools — all these people — but they are not really giving us any way of doing that.
Ms SEIFFERT — I know I became frustrated when I went back into the classroom for four years after having been in performing arts for seven. In going back into Year 6, I was very reluctant to give up my music, so I found ways of integrating music into my maths and my writing. That is okay for me because of my passion. I find it very difficult to give people the licence or the permission to say, ‘Listen, it’s okay to read poetry and that’s your reading for the day. It’s okay to write lyric songs or look at lyrics and do Socratic circles or whatever to do with songs’. They feel under the pump and they cannot see how you can integrate music. They do not have the confidence, and that is the biggest thing. Even from prep the teachers think, ‘I don’t have time’.

Ms McQUINN — Remember when they used to sing songs? When I went to school we used to sing songs. With prep teachers now, the kids do not sing. I have got a real musician who teaches prep, but the kids do not sing because they are too busy.

Ms CLARK — I think a big part of that is the professional development lack of availability to come this way or lack of funds for us to go to the city or the areas where it is provided and that could assist generalist classroom teachers in order to build these skills or for us to further develop our skills to continue to provide what is expected of a high-quality music performing arts classroom.

Ms SEIFFERT — Just to cap on what Trudie said, I was all set to host a professional development that was to be held on Saturday last weekend at our school. It was by Phil and Susie Splitter, who are internationally renowned and go travelling overseas and whatever. They have got lots of resources.

Ms CLARK — Involved with Orff.

Ms SEIFFERT — I use them all the time. The emails went out to all the schools and the preschools, and they could not get 20 people to come, possibly because it was on a Saturday. I was definitely going. I think it was about $100 registration for the day, but they had to cancel because there were not enough participants. The last time they were here was six or seven years ago. I have been to ones in Melbourne, but I have paid for airfares. The boss replaced me. It had been over a weekend, but he had given me the extra day in lieu. I had paid for accommodation and he paid for the registration. It is not just going to the PDs; it is the travelling and the accommodation when you get down there.

Ms CLARK — I also think it is the funding too. When there is such a push on literacy and numeracy results and holding the schools accountable, at the moment too there is a lot of professional development out on the Calmer Classrooms and classroom behaviour management. A lot of the staff are choosing to go that way rather than supporting something that comes this way in music, whether it is funding or the priority is in those other areas because of the huge push in accountability back onto schools.

Mr ELASMAR — What is your overall assessment of the quality and provision of music education in rural and regional schools?

Ms SEIFFERT — At our school it is fantastic; I do not know about yours, Trudie. Generally speaking I think it is because of the lack of music teachers. Whether they are theoretically trained or passionate, there just are not enough because of a general government push on numeracy and literacy and teachers not having the permission and the confidence to incorporate more music in their daily classes.

Ms CLARK — For the first time, this year on a trial basis I have been allocated a one-hour session per week for my choirs for extra singing experiences; otherwise it has all been in my own time during recess and lunchtimes. I also have other yard duties and commitments, so this is all on top of the time that I give. If I do not give that, then the students do not receive those programs. They have taken that on board. I did request at the end of the year that it be timetabled into our program when students are out of the classroom and come out to the choir program. I do it on an alternate rotational basis, so every second week Years 3 and 4 and then Years 5 and 6 come to see me for that session. That has been beneficial, but that is only from the support of the principal and leadership and the rest of the school, because we have such a big emphasis and passion for music and can see the benefits that it does have.

Ms SEIFFERT — I am lucky. I get allocated two hours — two last sessions — plus I squeeze some in in my personal planning time and lunchtimes, but my boss recognises the importance. I squeeze six choirs into those two hours, so it is go go.

The CHAIR — I know we spoke briefly, particularly with Ingrid, about the Indigenous programs and support. Can you elaborate on those programs that have Indigenous kids at the school? What specific programs are there to support those
kids? The flip side is: are those programs around music and performing arts and cultural programming supported to teach non-Indigenous kids some of the culture at the other end?

**Ms McQUINN** — In our school we have 420 kids and 20 of them are Indigenous. Out of the 20 who are Indigenous, some are teachers’ kids — that is, I employ their parents. Of disadvantaged Indigenous kids, we have probably about eight, compared to probably Ingrid’s 120; probably all of hers are disadvantaged. We do cultural programs for those kids using the HOPE project. That is only for the Years 5 and 6 kids, where the bulk of our disadvantaged Indigenous kids are. We do a lot of our work with our kids to engage them through sport. They are very good at sports and they are very good at ICT, so we engage them that way rather than music, because they are boys and that is not their thing. We tend to put our goodwill as staff — because it all goes on goodwill — into sport. We have a staff roster where we take those three boys to football every Sunday. A staff member gives up their Sunday morning to go and pick these boys up, take them to football, take them to Macca’s, bring them home from football, wash their football gear, because if it went home it would not come back for the next week, and I personally pay for that out of my money for those kids to go. I guess it depends on your kids. For them music will not cut it. When we have our whole-school concert, they will not turn up because it is around embarrassment and shame. They do participate in classes and all those sorts of things at school and do that really well, but when it comes to the big thing, it is not going to happen.

**The CHAIR** — Trudie, what about you?

**Ms CLARK** — At Ranfurly we have over 400 students at our school, and we are just short of 80 Indigenous students, also a lot of ESL-based students as well. It is an area that has been in my planning to build up more community members coming into the school to get more of the Koori Indigenous people in. We do have the HOPE project running. Another staff member has been doing that.

We do celebrate the NAIDOC activities, and that is where the dance and things come on. External people come in and do that. In my time I suppose I pack in as much as I can do when a lot of my time is with the whole-school choir, which is inclusive; it is for anybody and everybody. It is something that I do want more assistance with, whether it is support of people in the community and the school or funding. I have not had any funding coming to build that up in my music program. Whether it goes towards the other priorities, like our literacy and reading support groups and things like that — —

**Ms McQUINN** — It tends to.

**Ms CLARK** — That is it. It goes elsewhere.

**Ms McQUINN** — Because these kids come in with very poor literacy and numeracy and every term their data needs to be sent away to whoever, so the priority is to improve that.

**Ms SEIFFERT** — The pressure is on.

**Ms McQUINN** — But to improve it you have got to do it through engagement, through these kids being connected with the school and coming to school, whether that is through music, sport or arts. You have got to sort of pick your kids a bit. It is tricky.

**Ms CLARK** — It is. Through my performing arts program I do the appreciation of other cultures through music, dance and drama, so there is a part focused purely on Aboriginal culture and Koori dance and whatnot. But it also then has appreciation of all the other cultures too, because we have such diversity across our school. Like I say, it is an area that has been in my own individual plan to pursue and to flag as an important thing and a role of the school, but once again I think it comes back to the people who are available, the funding and where it is going and that support, because I am only there on a part-time basis.

**The CHAIR** — Yvonne, you do not have many Indigenous kids?

**Ms MADDEN** — No. I have got two leaving, so I will be down to 14. But in the past we have had more, and we have not had a lot of success with Indigenous families coming in for cultural events full stop. They will say that they will come, but you have all the kids ready and they do not come. There are a very small number who play instruments or are involved in dance due to their life circumstances. You have got a few who can play the didgeridoo and a few who are involved in dance, and you will see the same dancers over and over again. So really the Aboriginal culture, even though there is chanting and the use of a small number of instruments, does not have a lot to teach the wider population, given that there are not many people even able to pass that information on.
Ms SEIFFERT — And you have got to be careful.

Ms MADDEN — Yes, then you are told that you cannot do this and you cannot do that. After a while you actually do not know what you can do, so you choose not to do it at all. But funding comes for a lot of Aboriginal literacy programs. We are swamped with money for literacy and numeracy, and I am not sure that that part of it is an issue. I think that music and funding is a whole-school issue for all children in schools. I would hate to see special funding coming for music for Aboriginal children. I have got some really terrific students in my school who are from very low socioeconomic backgrounds. Regardless of the colour of their skin they are very, very poor and could also benefit from it. I have got parents begging me. I have about $55 000 that I have been given for specialist Aboriginal literacy programs, and I have got poor white children whose parents have said, ‘Yvonne, can my child at least join in the group?’. So that is the dilemma that you have got. To target money for that specialist group I think goes against trying to teach inclusion and understanding each other. I think it would be just another thing to promote difference.

Ms MILLER — In regard to information on whether the school partners with any community organisations in order to deliver music education and the benefits of these partnerships, do you see that as being something to look at for the future?

Ms MADDEN — I personally do not. I know Jo and I — I am not sure about Mildura Primary — are involved with health partnerships, employment partnerships and transition partnerships. It sounds really good on paper, having access to good partnerships. But it is very difficult to create the time to meet with people outside the school system and set up partnerships of mutual benefit, because we end up doing the majority of the work at a school level, organising timetables, meetings and all sorts of things. Our health partnership is a joint project and is wonderful, but we have got people coming into the school telling us what to do, and we are doing the lot. We are providing all the time and no money has come with it. So partnerships are great, but they also come at a cost to school time. Music partnerships around here would probably be restricted to local bands, who are all volunteers, and often retired people as well. Whereas in the city you would perhaps have access to conservatoriums of music. You would have specialist training places. You have got singing teachers, dance teachers and all sorts of other people you could outsource, so it would be a huge advantage. But in our isolated area I cannot see that being an option.

Ms SEIFFERT — It is the cost factor too. We will often get performers that come up here — a limited number — but it is very expensive. So our children are not even able to be exposed to a range of different musical opportunities, or drama, dance or whatever, because of the cost factor. To get even $5 out of my kids — and that is before you put $2 bus money on top of it — you are asking a lot.

Ms MILLER — Just using the technology — the ICT, teleconferencing and things like that — is that an option for you?

Ms MADDEN — We do not have a facility in our school, but some of the schools do. That would be ideal if we had those teleconferencing facilities in all schools, even for the professional learning contact with other music providers, but funding went to a small number of schools — —

Ms MILLER — For that technology?

Ms MADDEN — Yes, and the rest do not have any facilities.

Ms SEIFFERT — Generally it was not primary schools either.

Ms McQUINN — We got one. I do not know how we got it, but we got one. The difficulty with what we got is that you need people on the other end to have the same equipment. When we try to communicate with a lot of people overseas, they do not have the same equipment so we go back to Skype. Skype tends to be your best option. We have used it in sport where we have a bit of a partnership with a mob in Geelong — athletes in Geelong — and we use it there. We do a bit of our professional development on it. But you can do that professional development on Skype just the same. I guess the barrier around it is that these things are offered — and you can get around the technologies; you do not have to necessarily have specific technology — in teaching time, so therefore there is a cost because you have got to replace the teacher. You need people in front of kids. You cannot have kids unsupervised. Therefore it is over $300 a day to replace the teacher, and you have to employ that replacement person for at least three hours or you cannot do it. It is all about money. A lot of it is around money.

Ms SEIFFERT — With partnerships I have been lucky enough — and I think it was only my school, and I do not know how we got it — to have the Short Black Opera Company work with my school and also the HOPE Project, so it was with specifically Koori kids that were involved in part of the program, but I said to the organisers, ‘No, we are a totally inclusive
school. If you want to work at our school, you have to include everybody’. So they worked with all my choirs, and they presented something. They did a whole two-day workshop at my school. A couple of years before that I had the Australian Ballet company come up and do workshops with my kids for a whole day, maybe two days. They had the whole costume bit; they did the whole thing with the kids. That was great, but it is so rare.

Ms McQUINN — I think most schools probably try and have some sort of budget for some cultural-type experience per year.

Ms SEIFFERT — Yes, but I did not have to pay for either of them. I was very lucky.

Ms McQUINN — You were lucky. Ours in the past has been more around music and dance. This year because the big push from the department is science we had Deane Hutton yesterday at a cost of $7 or something per student, which we fund ourselves. We are not going to do a music and dance one this year, because we cannot afford it. Our priorities change each year depending on what we are getting from above telling us what to do, basically.

Mr CRISP — I want to explore the technology options a little more for music education, particularly those in rural and regional areas. Software programs with GarageBand and so on, have you tried them? You said you went back to Skype. I would like to flesh that out a bit.

Ms McQUINN — Yes, we use GarageBand, which is different to what I was talking about before. The Polycom system that everyone was talking about is a videoconferencing system. GarageBand is making music, basically.

Ms SEIFFERT — Individual programs.

Ms McQUINN — It is just a software program. We do use that with our students. We do a lot of videoing, so a lot of recording and making movies. We do radio station-type stuff, just locally in our school. We use the technology that way.

Mr CRISP — Is it an effective tool?

Ms McQUINN — It is fantastic.

Ms CLARK — We used that last term, GarageBand. As I said before, I have a computer teacher who is assisting to catch up because I am in the literacy role there. We have been using GarageBand to provide evidence of work that the children have done. They have recorded their work, and they are making loops and arrangements. That is evidence for parents and also for reporting purposes. It has been really powerful.

Ms McQUINN — Audacity is another good one for music making. Audacity is where they combine songs, a bit like what the DJs do, I guess.

Ms CLARK — It also comes back to the fact that GarageBand is on the back computer, whereas the netbooks that the students have in the classroom only have Audacity. They do not have GarageBand, which does not have the same sound effects and program components. So you are restricted in some ways, but that is where you just have to juggle it as a teacher and be clever with the resources you have.

The CHAIR — Can I come back to an earlier comment that some of you have made when talking about specialist teachers and generalist teachers. I think the view we had was that because of limited resources it somehow is a good thing in a rural area to have a generalist teacher who can teach in a specialist way or have some skills to teach music as opposed to having resources of two people in a room and all the rest of it. What are your views about how we can encourage more of those teachers in rural and regional areas to take up more of the sorts of things that Ingrid has done? You had a bit more of the training in that area at uni, but you had to go and search for it. What can we do to empower and skill the generalist teachers to have those skills and confidence to teach music?

Ms SEIFFERT — I was in a classroom for years and years, then I went into specialist, then I was thrown back into the classroom. After the seven years I was out of the classroom it nearly killed me to go back into the classroom because of all the changes that had happened. Younger teachers are scared of going into a specialist role because they get left behind and because there is so much happening as far as paperwork and all the rest of that goes.

Ms CLARK — Like with AusVELS: now they are changing it again.
Ms SEIFFERT — Absolutely. That is the scary part; even 12 months in a specialist role really puts you behind the eight ball. You can go to every staff meeting and every PD that the rest of your classroom teachers are doing, but if you are not having to do things like ILPs and all the rest of it, you are out of the loop and it is scary. It is okay for an older person like me. I have told my boss, ‘You put me back into performing arts and I die there, because I cannot go back’.

The CHAIR — What is the solution around that?

Ms SEIFFERT — You cannot combine classroom teaching and being a specialist teacher, because you cannot be a classroom teacher until 12 o’clock and then do specialist. Your head cannot do it.

Ms CLARK — I am going like this, zoom, zoom, zoom around the school between the computer lab, performing arts —

Ms MADDEN — It just decreases the effectiveness overall. I know you are great at what you do, but just imagine if you could concentrate on music.

Ms CLARK — It would be amazing.

Ms MADDEN — Because that is your headspace and your planning space.

Ms SEIFFERT — I am only one hour a week out doing coaching release time to support the literacy program that our school is doing, but the rest of my time is totally music, and it is great because that is all I really have to concentrate on.

Ms MADDEN — It is very effective. We do it with our PE and our ICT. If you have someone who has their joggers on, they think PE and sport all day. They do a much better job than someone who is teaching till 11 a.m. and then has to run around the oval. A specialist person is there, and they are in that role. When you do the juggles, Trudie would spend, I would say, having taught in lots of different schools before my current role, probably many more hours than the classroom teacher just to survive in her role because she has to liaise with all the other teachers. She has to liaise about times when she can have the children for their rotations. She has to have everybody’s timetable. She has to have the specialist timetable and the students with support timetable.

Ms CLARK — I have to keep everyone informed of where I am, and then my recesses and lunchtimes are spent doing extra rehearsals.

The CHAIR — Do you think there is an opportunity to try and attract more of the Trudies and the Ingrids who are currently teaching — to incentivise those have the generalist knowledge to then specialise? I think some of you said earlier that advertising or trying to recruit somebody in a rural area is very, very difficult because you cannot find people with that experience.

Ms MADDEN — If we had local training, I think it would be something that might work. The biggest challenge is for people who have got two children or partners here to pick up and go for a week or two or three to Melbourne. People say, ‘I would love to do that, but it is in Melbourne’. All our professional learning virtually — and we are fighting desperately to get more to come here — is in Bendigo and Melbourne. Bendigo is considered rural and regional, and for us it is a four-hour car drive to Bendigo. It is actually quicker for us to get to Melbourne, to go that way, by plane.

Ms McQUINN — Another thing around it too is that a lot of women who go on maternity leave and then have seven-year family leave want to come back during that seven years, but they just want to come back a couple of days a week because their circumstances have changed and they do not want to work full time. It is very difficult to put those people in a classroom as a generalist teacher because then you are job sharing. That is something parents hate. So you tend to put them into the specialist role, and it devalues the specialist role sometimes, depending on who the person is, because for the whole scheme of the school that is a better option. If you can get those part-timers who are passionate about music, science or whatever it is, it is a lot easier to manage.

Ms MILLER — Just on that, a point that was made earlier was: would it be an idea to encourage students who are learning teaching to do a double degree? A lot of students and young people are doing double degrees in law and science and all the rest of it. If there was a push, if you like, to encourage the students to do a teaching stream and a music stream — the double degree — then obviously there would have to be some incentive to attract them to the remote communities.
Ms McQUINN — That would be great for secondary school teachers, Elizabeth. That sort of already happens a bit now with secondaries in that you are into history, so you have done history and then you do your education after. That is not common in primary, but it certainly might be something that is worth looking at.

Ms SEIFFERT — I have found that having been a classroom teacher for so long, and I have I taught every year level, you have that background knowledge of where kids are at at different ages, different levels, and you have the knowledge to incorporate and you know where the classroom teachers are coming from. You do not have this tunnel vision of just music, like some people do in certain specialist areas. You can broaden your outlook. To just get a person who has done music training — and, yes, they have added their degree — to me you are still giving them tunnel vision. They need to have taught in classes first.

Ms CLARK — Yes, they need that experience because it is not just having a music knowledge, it is having good behaviour management skills and being up to engaging the students in a broad education program so that they are going to be able to have every chance of success. That means giving the kids the skills not only to play music but to work cooperatively and collaboratively in a team environment, individually and in pairs and so forth, so it is the whole picture.

Ms SEIFFERT — That only comes with experience in classrooms. It does not come just because you have done a degree in teaching.

Ms CLARK — You might have someone who is trained in music and they are brilliant in what they do, but if they do not have the skills in order to manage 25-plus students in one spot a time — —

Ms McQUINN — And engage those students

Ms CLARK — And engage them and to work in an effective environment that is safe for those kids, that brings in other things as well. That comes back to providing the training that is needed, the funds and the experiences for them to come into the classrooms, to see what is going on and how to run an effective music program.

The CHAIR — I have two very quick ones to finish off with. Having resources shared across the schools, like specialists who can teach in the different schools — has that been done before in any for schools? What are your thoughts on that, just very quickly?

Ms McQUINN — I have no opposition to it. I think it has sort of been done here with rural schools like with the MARC van. It is really only one person going around to other schools, small rural schools, to provide the service.

Ms CLARK — You could have a singing teacher at the moment who is across five schools and also secondaries. But as far as coming across instrumental and across primary, I think we need a timetabling and a whole-school approach. Yvonne mentioned before about the communication that is needed. Ingrid’s point was not having that tunnel vision — of having a whole understanding and having thought processes about how it all works.

Ms SEIFFERT — You have to build a relationship with the children. If you are only there one or two days a week, you are seen as the person who comes in and then goes out, and it does not matter what you do in that lesson, whereas if they know you are there all the time — —

As much as I know I would love to go out there and help them with music and whatever, I would hate to lose my time at my school.

The CHAIR — The flip side of that is some of the programs that come from outside, like Music Futures, Musica Viva and The Song Room; do you have any comment about those?

Ms SEIFFERT — It is expensive for my population, for my cohorts. I used to do Musica Viva, and I did it for about 10 years in a row. I love it, the kids got a lot out of it, but it was getting harder and harder to fund.

Ms McQUINN — In term 3 I have put in to attend the professional development. They also say they are providing the digital learning resources, which I will encourage the other staff in the lower areas of our school to use as well. But I will be there to support them to do that to prepare them to be ready for the visiting performers. But once again, they visit and then they are gone again. So we are looking to really build the self-esteem of the children, and the relationship and rapport that we have in an ongoing connection with the kids, the school community and the wider community. If we are going from school to school, I do not think that would be as effective as being in the one location in order to enact the purpose that we
are there for, which is to build those lifelong skills that they can carry throughout life and possibly pursue for an effective, successful career.

The CHAIR — Excellent. We have come to the end of our questions. I want to take the opportunity to thank you all for coming and appearing before us today. It has been very fruitful from our perspective in terms of the information that you provided, and it is a great way to kick off our visit to Mildura. Thank you for coming today and your enthusiasm. Keep up the great work. Before we conclude, Trudie, could you briefly tell us about the importance of community engagement and maybe relate a story in regard to your kids preparing for something and the importance of having community engagement around that?

Ms CLARK — I am always looking for opportunities for students to perform and shine, not only at the school level or local community level, such as performing at nursing homes, but also at the wider community level or on the national stage. A couple of years ago, David De Vito, who was on a reality TV show like Australian Idol, was doing a nationwide tour, and our school was contacted by email and telephone to ask if we would like to have our choirs involved in the performance that he was doing in Mildura. Other schools were contacted; I was the first to respond, so they gave us all the supporting information and backing tracks for us to work with our choir to then perform onstage at a local location with David De Vito.

I think he did about a dozen shows across Australia, which is fantastic. He is based in Queensland. It had our school community buzzing; we were trying to promote it quite a bit too. He finished his show in Adelaide and was due to come to Mildura. Due to lack of ticket sales in the local community — I think the tickets were around $50 or $60 each — the concert was cancelled the day before. So we had had the students rehearsing for weeks, we had invested time, effort and money. I actually purchased T-shirts and clothing so the students would match in order to look the part onstage for this big community performance. Due to lack of community support in ticket sales, the whole concert was cancelled. That was a real let-down for the children, although we focused on their resilience and the fact that sometimes things do not go our way and they are out of our control. But it would be great if the community could show that support in that way, because it would be a chance of a lifetime for our students, parents and local community.

The CHAIR — Great, thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.