EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Mildura — 1 May 2013

Members
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Mr N. Elasmar  Ms G. Tierney
Ms E. Miller

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Witnesses
Mr A. Leske, Principal, and
Ms T. Schache, Music Teacher and Performing Arts Coordinator, Trinity Lutheran College.
The CHAIR — Thank you for joining the committee this afternoon and for welcoming us to Mildura. We have a number of questions for you; we will ask those shortly. I just need to point out a couple of things in relation to the committee process. Firstly, these microphones are for Hansard to record the proceedings. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript and suggest changes to any typographical errors that may have been made. I also need to point out that the evidence you give is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege that is afforded to members of Parliament. It applies to the hearing proper, not to any press conference you might give across the road afterwards where you talk about how great we are.

Mr LESKE — I have already had the press conference.

The CHAIR — Apparently you have already had the ABC interview. That was done before the swearing in, so that is okay. Thanks again. You know why we are here. We are really keen to hear about some of the great stuff you are doing and about ideas that you might have in furthering music in our school programs. I might kick it off by asking if you could provide an overview of how music is delivered in the college as part of the curriculum. What other types of extracurricular activity are offered at the college in terms of music?

Ms SCHACHE — I am the Performing Arts teacher at Trinity, and I basically oversee the music program. We have a prep to year 8 classroom music program. I deliver classroom music lessons to all the children in prep to year 8, and then in years 9 and 10 it is an elective, so the children can choose that as an elective from a range of electives that are offered at that level. As such, in the past few years that I have been at the school it has not been taken up as a subject. We have not had enough students to run that as a subject, but it is offered. A lot of our students, I believe, also go on to senior and do some further music studies there.

In terms of extracurricular activities, at lunchtimes I try to offer as many different opportunities as I can for children to be involved in music. It might range from percussion ensemble to recorder club to choirs. I have tried a number of different things to try to gauge children’s interest. I even tried to start up a DJ radio station this last term, but it did not quite take off. I offer a lot of things, a lot of ways to be involved with music and music making. For lunchtimes it is a drop-in thing: if you want to come along, you can come along.

We are involved in the eisteddfod every year, and we enter our choirs, which are often right across the range from prep to 2 as a choir, 3–4 as a choir and 5–6. This year I am trying to encourage those older students to get back involved in singing. It is a bit of a challenge, but I will do my best to encourage them to keep singing and to be involved in that for this year.

We also have a large instrumental program at our school, with instruments ranging from piano to violin, cello, drums, guitar and voice. Children can take these half-hour lessons throughout the school day, and we have a range of instrumental tutors who come into our school to deliver those lessons. As a result of that we encourage those students to take part in things like the eisteddfod, which is coming up quite soon.

We do school performances every year. We have a junior school performance one year and a senior school performance or a production in alternating years. Last year we had a prep nativity that we do at the end of the year, a Year 1–2 concert, which had an Olympic Games theme, and a 3–4 concert, which was a mini-musical called Daniel (A Hard Act to Swallow). It was a little humorous, so it was kind of fun.

This year we have the senior production, and we are planning to put on Honk! Junior, the musical. We are in the audition process at the moment, and we will start rehearsing that very soon.

Mr LESKE — Certainly it has been our aim — and I say ‘our’ because it is not just mine, it has been part of the school since it began 30 years ago — that music would be offered as a specialist subject, so there has always been a tradition of music, but then there is also that second part, which is the instrumental program. So those students who have an aptitude are able to choose an instrument of their choice, and with Tracy’s support are able to access that. But also she has a music assistant who makes sure that the kids get
to their classes. We check out any problems that might occur with the tutors, make sure that the tutors are suitable and providing a good service.

The CHAIR — Have the numbers been pretty consistent in both of those areas over the years?

Mr LESKE — They have. They go up and down, but they have been fairly constant. We would have a range of between 80 and 120 students taking the instrumental program in the school, which currently has about 480 students. Taking out the Year 9s and 10s, there are about 400 students who are participating in music across the school in a general music class.

The CHAIR — I will ask Ms Miller to ask her fifth question first, and then we will go back to that, because it links to that last bit.

Ms MILLER — My question is in two parts, and I will ask it one part at a time to keep it simple. In terms of instrumental music lessons, on average what is the cost of instrumental music lessons for students, and are they subsidised by the school?

Mr LESKE — No, the parents pay, and I believe the cost for a half-hour lesson is about $25.

Ms SCHACHE — No, it is $28.

Mr LESKE — It is $28. And part of that — is it subsidised? I think it is $28 and the tutors get $25, so there is an administrative cost to cover the secretary. It is roughly around about that.

Ms MILLER — The second part to the question is: how do you ensure that the cost of the lessons does not act as a barrier to participation for the students?

Mr LESKE — We would endeavour to keep them at a value-for-money level, so that it is something that the parents can afford. We do have a number of scholarships, and we encourage new students to take up music. We have had in the order of, I think, six singing scholarships and up to the same number in instrumental music, although they are not always taken up. We have actually had scholarships available which have not been taken up, so we believe parents have had that capacity to pay to be able to afford it, and it is for those who really do want music.

Ms MILLER — How many students do you have?

Mr LESKE — We have 480 students.

Ms MILLER — And of that 480, how many are in music right now?

Mr LESKE — Of those in prep to Year 8 there about 400. A quarter would be taking instrumental music.

Ms MILLER — Given that they are not accessing the scholarships as well, that is very good.

Mr LESKE — Yes. It is 80 to 100 students — sometimes 120 — in a year. And as I said, there are 8 to 12 scholarships maybe, depending on the year.

Ms MILLER — And the school funds those?

Mr LESKE — Yes. As I said, they are provided by the school in recognition of a previous principal, a deputy principal and a chair who had a very strong interest in music. They are named scholarships, but it is the school that actually provides them. We are recognising their input — we have named the scholarships after them — but they do not contribute or put any money towards it.

Ms MILLER — Just following on from that, in terms of the challenges that are faced by rural and regional schools, what are the difficulties or barriers that rural and regional schools face in trying to deliver music education?
Mr LESKE — It is a general one in always getting good staff and people who are prepared to move to the country. Tracy has been really good. She is a country girl from South Australia, from Murray Bridge way, so she has been prepared to move here. At times we have difficulty finding good tutors. We had a very good brass teacher, but he has retired, and we are trying to find a replacement. It has been difficult for us to find someone for drums and percussion. Piano seems pretty right and voice.

Ms SCHACHE — Flute is a bit of a challenge at the moment as well.

Mr LESKE — Finding musicians who are teachers in regional areas is quite difficult.

Ms MILLER — We heard earlier today that a lot of the recruitment, if you will, has come from South Australia because of the geographical location. Previously have there been teachers from Melbourne come up to the district?

Mr LESKE — Tutors or music teachers?

Ms MILLER — Either/or.

Mr LESKE — Actually I am just trying to go back. Of the four music teachers, like Tracy, three have been from South Australia, and one was a Victorian boy. As for the music tutors, I do not think we have actually had any who have come from South Australia. They are locals, and they have moved here. I do not really know what their background is. A lot of them have been here, have settled in the region and are well known in the district.

Ms MILLER — What support or policies do you think you could put in place to improve the provision of music education in rural and regional Victoria?

Mr LESKE — The policies that we could?

Ms MILLER — Yes.

The CHAIR — Or that we could.

Ms MILLER — I mean, ideally you would probably want the school to try to have a go first, because you would have a greater understanding of your local community, and then from a wider community aspect that is when government could come in.

Mr LESKE — I believe we are doing a good job at the moment. We have a general music program for everybody, and then from that they can move onto wherever they want to go.

I know with government policy, particularly with LOTE and Asian languages, having a policy does not always bring about the desired effect. I think what we are providing is what the community is looking for in our community. Certainly there is always — and I might ask Tracy to talk about the time that is given to the specialist subjects — a conflicting view about the 3 hours literacy and maths, or whether we should be spending some more time in music or in the Arts, whether that be the fine arts or performing arts.

Ms MILLER — Are a lot of your students multicultural, or are they more locally born and bred?

Mr LESKE — There is a United Nations, and we have a number of students whose parents would be migrants. Some of them are born here but their parents have migrated here. There is a very strong Turkish community. We are certainly picking up a lot from the subcontinent, from India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Ms MILLER — Do you think those backgrounds are a contributing factor to the high uptake of music in your school; or just brilliant teachers, really?

Mr LESKE — This would be one that Tracy might like to answer. I would think the students learn and know English, they learn the English language and are able to assimilate and be part of the society and the culture here, and so all that other stuff is a nice little bit on the top.
Ms SCHACHE — I can think of some students who have come with a music background, just a few
individuals who have enrolled into our school who like to slot into that program, and they are very happy
that there is something established and they can continue in their instrumental lessons.

Ms MILLER — And attract more students as well.

Ms SCHACHE — Yes.

Mr CRISP — I just want to tidy up some of the issues around the availability of specialist music
teachers. Andrew, you noted that there are some shortages around instrumental teachers, and you have also
talked about where you have got your specialist classroom teachers from. Are there any other issues you
face in terms of staffing for your instrumental music program?

Mr LESKE — I do not think so, not in the staffing — provision of opportunities and facilities perhaps.
Having taught at a major city school, Immanuel College, which had a very good music program, I think it
would be being able to get access to instruments and all the musical paraphernalia that goes along with it. I
think there is restricted access in the country. There is a good music shop up here, but I still think it has
limited stock, from what I have seen. I do not know whether Tracy wants to talk on that one. In the early
days we used to have to ship stuff up from the Barossa, so you could not go down and look at it on the
shelf; you had to wait for the truck to bring it up. So it would be the provision of facilities, I think, and the
opportunities to work together. There are school concerts and school choirs in Adelaide; there were more
opportunities to perform. I think once children have learnt how to play it is like sport: practice is great but
you want to perform. I do not think there are as many opportunities for them to perform as in the city, if
that is fair.

Ms SCHACHE — A slightly related issue from my point of view is not so much the staffing but the
availability of PD — professional development. This is a large regional area and there are a lot of things
that we have here that perhaps smaller regional areas do not have, but access to professional development
is always a challenge. It is either going to Melbourne or Adelaide, and that can be a little tricky and
expensive.

Mr ELASMAR — What are the main differences between the government and independent sectors
with respect to music education, and what lessons can be learnt from the independent sector?

Mr LESKE — That is a very loaded question. I believe because we are independent we are not
constrained by a region or a district. We have greater autonomy and our own decision making. I believe
independent schools in many different areas, even down to the BER project, were able to work with our
own architects, designers and so forth to build the project that we wanted rather than just having the
blueprint that came down the line. I do not want to get political. This is an across-the-board one and I think
just in the nature of an independent school. We still have a tie to Independent Schools Victoria and also to
our own Lutheran education, but I think we are a little more autonomous in what we can provide.

The CHAIR — Can I be a bit more targeted with that question? We hear a lot from the government
schools about issues with curriculum pressure, having to cram in stuff, and, particularly around music, in
terms of being able to offer that at the expense of other things. It seems from the evidence we have heard
thus far that independent schools have been able to incorporate music in specialist-type programs,
particularly in the early years, and they do that, having the same sorts of pressures — in some instances,
more, with religious education or whatever else they are also offering. Why do you think that is the case,
where you have one group where people are able to incorporate and others where people are really
struggling, with LOTE now and other things as well? Why is it that way and what could we possibly learn,
from the independent schools that are doing it and are implementing it, for our government schools?

Mr LESKE — If it is a wider question, my experiences are in phys ed. The studies show that more is
not always better, so if students are having trouble with literacy, rather than giving them more time in
English or literacy, with the literacy demands in music or anywhere else they will get literacy education.
Being able to offer it on a different platform sometimes gives the students a release. They will have an
interest in music and so are eager to learn to read and understand, so it is a different way of getting the skills that they require.

I do not know whether I made myself clear on the phys ed. There used to be the Vanves experiment in France, which was followed by a Canadian experiment, and that went to the Hindmarsh experiment. They spent a third of their time doing phys ed, so the afternoon lessons were in sport. They found that the students still had all the skills and because they had better fitness were not smarter but they were more aware and so forth. So while you might spend a bit more time in other areas, that is not going to detract from the key learning areas, the key skills of literacy and numeracy.

We certainly still face the problem of making sure our students can read and write and there is pressure from the parents, but I believe for a holistic education a student needs to have a variety and cover the key learning areas. As I said, there are certainly many literacy skills that are available through music, PE and art. We have valuable teachers who work with the class teachers and incorporate. They are not just using music, but music relates to what is being taught in other areas. I know our art teacher always finds out what is the major theme, so she will use her art to reinforce what is going on.

I cannot speak for the public system, because I have never worked in it. I am a career Lutheran, unfortunately. I have only taught in Lutheran schools and independent schools, so I can talk only on what I have known. There are pressures for us as to how we split up the curriculum day. Certainly a primary teacher loves that first two-hour block as the literacy block and does not like to see any eating away of that time, but a well-rounded student will learn literacy and will learn it through a variety of different ways.

Mr CRISP — Does the college partner with any community organisations in order to deliver music education, and if you do, what do you see as the benefits of the partnership?

Mr LESKE — We have a very strong association with the eisteddfod. It is not a partnership; I would not say that. We see it as being good to work with them. We provide our auditorium for a voice choir and certainly encourage students to participate in the sense that they have learnt the skills and here is a good opportunity to perform. I believe that would be the only major partnership that we have.

The CHAIR — Do you utilise technology much in your music programs, and if so, what do you use?

Ms SCHACHE — I use a projector most of the time, rather than an interactive SMART board. That is the facility that I have and so I make as best use of it as I can. I use it to play music over the system that I have, but also we can watch different aspects. We cannot always have every instrument available in the room, but you can always look at something and hear it so children can still make those connections between sound and what the instrument looks like, for example.

The CHAIR — What about software programs like GarageBand and that sort of mixing software?

Ms SCHACHE — I do not make use of those up to Year 8 level. That would be something that I would look at if I was going on to the Years 9 and 10 levels. In Years 7 and 8 I want them to know how to read and write the actual music so that they have an understanding of the mechanics of that pencil and paper stuff, and then I would take it to a computer program. I see that as the development.

Mr LESKE — Previous music teachers have used IT aspects.

Ms SCHACHE — ACID I think it was called.

Mr LESKE — ACID — there you go — to generate music through computers. It is computer-generated music.

Ms SCHACHE — The issue with that is trying to timetable. If I were to go down that path I would have to timetable the music lesson when the IT lab is free, and that is just a timetabling nightmare. It is a possibility but my timetable gets given to me, and then if I were to go down the path of wanting to deliver that particular aspect in that particular year level, I would have to hope there was a match and that does not
always happen. That is very tricky at times, too. I bear that in mind when I am thinking about what I can actually deliver.

**Mr LESKE** — Is there not another parliamentary committee looking at digital education?

**The CHAIR** — That is the next one.

**Mr LESKE** — That is another one. Access and being able to offer one-to-one IT and those sorts of different questions is certainly something that we and the school have to look at.

**The CHAIR** — In closing, if you are sitting on this side of the table and you had to come up with the big recommendation, what you would see as the silver bullet — and I know it is very hard to find that silver bullet? Without saying, ‘More money’, what would you be suggesting as the sorts of things we could do to encourage more young people to participate in music programs in schools? I address the question to both of you, Tracy and Andrew.

**Ms SCHACHE** — One thing that comes to my mind with the development of the national curriculum is that the Arts covers five different arts areas at the moment. My concern as a music educator is that that is one-fifth of the Arts and I find that challenging because I believe strongly in the benefits, as Andrew explained before, of music education for all children in that holistic development. There is evidence to suggest that it helps with brain development and cognitive development and socialising children and performance skills, and sometimes where children are perhaps lacking in the 3Rs they can gain skills through things like learning instruments and learning about music and delivering it and experiencing it. So I would love to see it be a very important part of the national curriculum that is coming out.

**The CHAIR** — That is a good answer.

**Mr LESKE** — Certainly in the rollout of the national curriculum and in the push towards improving history and improving science, something has to give, and the concern is that because there are pushes for particular areas something will give and it generally will not be maths or English. If there was a release on what is seen to be the ‘push’ subjects that you can choose and not have the constraints of two hours of science per week or something like that, I believe that would have a major effect on helping to maintain music.

**The CHAIR** — Excellent. Is there anything else that you want to add that we have not covered?

**Mr LESKE** — I do not think so.

**Ms SCHACHE** — I do not think so.

**The CHAIR** — Fantastic. Thank you very much for coming and appearing before the committee today. It has certainly helped us to get a better understanding of what is happening out there and what we need to be looking at.

**Mr LESKE** — Fair enough.

**The CHAIR** — We really appreciate it.

**Mr LESKE** — Thanks for the opportunity.

**Witnesses withdrew.**