CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Mildura — 2 May 2013

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

Mr D. Southwick
Ms G. Tierney

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

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

Witness
Mr C. Barbary, Specialist Music Teacher, Mildura South Primary School.
The CHAIR — Thanks again, Corey, for joining us this morning. We have these lovely microphones not for the purposes of singing — although if you want to break into song at any time, feel free. They are for recording for Hansard. Today what we will be doing is gathering all of the information and recording that information for part of the assistance in writing our report. You will have the opportunity to review that. If there is anything that needs to be changed in terms of errors or omissions, you will be able to do that. Also I have to say that what you say today is covered by what we term parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to MPs, so feel free to say what you wish, but obviously that applies just to the hearing proper, not anything that is said outside of the committee.

You know why we are here. It is very much an informal discussion. We are really keen to hear about the sort of things that are happening in your school and what we can do to improve music in schools throughout Victoria. We have a number of questions. We might fire off with those and then, if there is anything we miss, we will give you the opportunity afterwards to cover that. I might begin by asking if you could provide an overview of how music is delivered as part of the curriculum at Mildura South and what other types of extracurricular activities you have for music in your school.

Mr BARBARY — Sure. The music program we run at Mildura South is really a performing arts program. I like to spread it over the year, doing drama and music as well, so it is a bit of an all-round sort of program to encourage children to be more open and positive and also to have a bit of confidence to perform and be up in front of their peers. I sort of alternate from music to drama. As an example, with the younger children we go straight into a balanced music program looking at pitch, beat, rhythm, timbre, how different instruments sound and all that sort of basic information, and finding out what they can bring and what they already have, before they actually get to school, in their knowledge of music.

We then work into building up musicians as well. For the first three years it is about giving them the skills and knowledge about music and then in around Years 3 and 4 we concentrate on notation; we have a recorder program. I take the kids for the last half of Year 3 and the first half of Year 4, and we run this recorder program, teaching them how to read the stave, how to use the instrument and get a good tone instead of just squeaking and annoying their parents. A certain number of those children get chosen in what we call our gifted and talented recorder group. They are the ones who I train up for the Mildura Eisteddfod. They perform solos, duets and in ensembles.

As they go on to Years 5 and 6 we look at giving them opportunities to compose and write music, whether it is non-instrumental or new students, who use things like computer programs online, notation and mixing and all those sorts of things. There are a lot of really good websites where they drag in samples, like a drum or guitar sample, and they can mix it and play around with it and create their music that way.

We encourage the instrumental students who have excelled in writing music and playing their instrument to write things for their instruments. We look at a whole heap of different genres. They write raps and parodies of other songs. We supply them with an opportunity to get up in front of each other and perform and not be embarrassed about performing, and we focus on moving them a little bit out of their comfort zone in that way.

Then obviously on the drama side I look at a whole heap of different activities as well. I will not go into the drama side, because we are focused on music education.

That is just classroom music. I am the classroom music teacher, so I have every class for approximately 40 minutes a week. It is a small amount of time, but it is a restricted timetable obviously and we are quite a large school, so in order to get around to all the classes every week we limit it to 40. We have tried lots of different ways — like a two-week rotation, but then you get things like holidays and curriculum days and things like that, and you might not see your class for far too long, so we decided that seeing them even for 40 minutes once a week was ideal for us.

The CHAIR — Every child has the opportunity to participate in that?

Mr BARBARY — That is correct, yes — every child.
The CHAIR — How long has that been going for?

Mr BARBARY — I have been at Mildura South for 13 years, teaching music. But there was a music program at Mildura South when I started there as well. We have a school concert band — we started off as a concert band, and it has sort of evolved into an orchestra now because we have violins in it.

We have what I would call a double-edged sword at Mildura South. We have our music program and our classroom music, and then we have our specialist music program that we run as well. So usually in about Year 3, once they have done a little bit of theory with me, students have the opportunity to learn an instrument. That is a half-hour lesson during class time at school.

We are very lucky because we have two great teachers there. We have a guitar teacher, Iwan Soebardi, who is very talented; he takes students for guitar. In the lead-up to the eisteddfod he has children who do solos, and we enter an ensemble group and they compete in the eisteddfod as well. Then there is Alison McGann, who is an instrumental teacher in the district. We are lucky enough to have her for I think it is about three and half days a week. Alison is very talented. She teaches everything — flute, clarinet, trumpet, violin and piano. The beauty of it is that she does not have to be a master of those instruments; she just has to be at a particular standard, because we are working with primary school children. The gifted students might get to about grade 2 AMEB by Year 6.

She is a woodwind teacher but she is very talented at all the instruments. She is able to teach those students to a relatively high level for 12-year-olds to then be part of our band. Alison and I work together to put our band together. The school gives us an hour and a half, give or take, however long assembly goes for, for the band to meet and we have new pieces which we work on for the Eisteddfod and assemblies. For our Anzac Day assembly we had school concerts and all that, so Alison and I work together as far as putting the band together, working with students and making the concert band or school orchestra.

The CHAIR — I just have one other question. Mildura South is obviously quite successful in the number of students it attracts; you have 700-odd students and are highly regarded. You have obviously made a deliberate attempt over the years to run music in a very specific, concentrated manner. Do you think the music programs have contributed to your reputation and success within the school?

Mr BARBARY — I think the fact that we have a school band is a huge asset to our school. Whenever there is some advertising or publicity to be done in the school, the first thing that happens is, ‘Get the band, get the kids with the instruments’, because it is perceived as something special and different and something that other schools do not necessarily possess. It is a real asset to our school and something we can call on. When we have the school promotions, things they do in the papers and stuff like that, it is usually band members, school captains, all that sort of thing as well. Yes, it is a big part of who we are.

Ms MILLER — The committee understands that you have a role lecturing in music at La Trobe University. What is your view on the readiness of graduate classroom teachers to deliver music education in primary schools, and what strategies can you suggest for improving the musical skills and confidence of pre-service primary school teachers?

Mr BARBARY — I went through La Trobe as well. I have a bit of love for La Trobe because that is where I went. I started my first year in Mildura and then went off to Bendigo to finish. Back then all the teachers majored in something. When it was a three-year course, you could major in children’s literature, you could major in Australian stage, you could major in maths, you could major in music or you could major in phys ed. When that was happening we brought a lot of really competent music teachers to the area. From what I know, out of all the music majors in my year, of which there were probably 20 or so, I am the only one working as a music teacher.

Ms MILLER — Really?

Mr BARBARY — Yes. Because we came out of university in the early 1990s and there were not a lot of job opportunities for us. A lot of them retrained and went into IT. Some of them started their own businesses and so on. Yes, I was lucky. I went overseas for a few years and when I came back I was
actually contacted. They said, ‘I heard you’re coming back to Mildura. Would you teach our music program?’ I was very lucky. Back then we had quite a few talented music teachers who could have come in through the whole education department, but they did not.

Ms MILLER — What strategies can you suggest?

Mr BARBARY — I teach the second years at La Trobe for 10 weeks. That is the only block they actually get of music. I am not actually teaching music for the whole 10 weeks; it is actually one third of my curriculum. I am teaching music, drama and dance. Obviously then I set the tasks. It is very much based on my music program and what I believe is important for the children to learn. I am teaching them about pitch, beat, timbre, all those aspects of the music program, because there is a high chance that not many of them have been exposed to it in their primary schools, or even in secondary schools if that is not their interest.

I occasionally get some ex-Mildura Southies in there. I will be talking about something, then they will be nodding their heads, because they have heard it all before from me as students. I am not sure what we could really do as far as increasing that. The second-year students are required to teach a music lesson on their second-year rounds. They videotape it, and their supervising teacher evaluates it and everything. That is an assignment that I look at; I look at their planning and their resources. They are marked on a specific music lesson. It is music focused, and I want them to include an aspect of drama or an aspect of dance. They have the opportunity, but that is one opportunity in four years.

Mr CRISP — It is a matter of who teaches music. We understand that Mildura South Primary is the only primary school to be employing a specialist music teacher. Why did the school decide to employ a music teacher? What do you believe are the benefits of a primary school having a specialist music teacher?

Mr BARBARY — I came through Mildura Primary, and now I work in Mildura South. When I was at primary school I believe music was quite strong. I went to a completely different school, and we played recorders and we had autoharps and lots of different things. Obviously over the time of going through high school and university and coming back, it has changed a lot. Mildura South has had a music program for quite a long time. I am not exactly sure why and how it started, but I do know it had been running probably for about 10 years before I got there. I believe it was the priority of the Principal.

When I got there, the Principal, David Aplin, was very passionate about music. His son was a very talented musician and is now writing music for the BBC. It was a bit of a turnaround, actually, and he found that it was very important. He decided that this would be a priority of our school. When the lady who was doing my job beforehand decided she wanted to stop, he could have said, ‘Let us look at a different specialist’. He rang me and said, ‘Do you want to do music? We want to keep this music program going’. His successor, Debbie Chandler, our Principal, as a classroom teacher was heavily involved in choirs. She won the Charlotte Harvey award in the 1990s or something as a classroom teacher taking our senior choir, so it has been a priority for her as well; she loves music. I think it has been the personality of the principals and I suppose their priorities have driven the fact that Mildura South has got a music program.

I think there is also the publicity for and promotion of the school; you cannot beat it. When you see primary school children with musical instruments playing something, it is something special. I love sport, but lots of kids can kick footballs. I love my sport as well, but that is something a little bit different.

Mr CRISP — You talked a little earlier about your work at La Trobe. What strategies can you suggest for improving the musical skills and confidence of pre-service primary school teachers?

Mr BARBARY — Music is not something you can just do a quick-fix course for. I feel it needs to be something that they have a little bit of each year, instead of one hit like mine is, like my subject is. I think the only way you can be comfortable with music is to be doing it. There is no quick fix. They brought out wonderful programs like Upbeat and stuff like that which were aimed at the classroom teachers, but it had to be something they had to keep using.
Our pre-service teachers really need to be exposed to it every year of their course. It does not have to be as in-depth, because mine is a bit of a one hit. It just needs to be little simple things, like maybe they choose an instrument to learn all the way through. I know when I was going through as a music major we had instrumental tuition which was partially funded by the uni. We would go and learn our instrument, we would hand in our receipt and we would get partially refunded to make it a little bit easier. That is a good way of doing it, but it has to be progressive. Music is not something you can just get straightaway; you need to be exposed and do it in small steps.

**The CHAIR** — Do classroom teachers at schools still have a role in ensuring that music is integrated into the curriculum?

**Mr BARBARY** — Some teachers will because they are comfortable with music and they have a musical background. We have a young graduate who did his last lot of teaching rounds with me in the music room and he was then employed at Mildura South. He has a love for music. He incorporates drama and music into what he does, because that is part of who he is. We have got another teacher who teaches Year 4. She plays guitar, so the guitar comes out frequently because that is part of who she is; it is part of her make-up.

I do not believe general classroom teachers would take music and integrate it as much as it could be. They listen to songs linked to whatever they are studying — for example, with the stolen generation, they listen to Archie Roach and lots of different media that reflect whatever they are studying, but it is not what I would call integrated. It is a bit of a tool to help push things across.

**Mr ELASMAR** — What is your overall assessment of the quality and provision of music education in rural and regional primary schools? What are the major difficulties or barriers that rural and regional schools can face in trying to deliver music education at the primary school level?

**Mr BARBARY** — Obviously one of the biggest problems is the cost when you come to music instruments. For a long time our school had bought a whole heap of musical instruments — flutes and clarinets and everything — and our job was to try and get them out to students as cheaply as possible, maintain them and so on. That became a bit of a nightmare for us. Now the parents have to try and buy their instruments. They get on eBay and pick up cheap instruments that I cannot make a sound out of, let alone the kids. That can hinder a lot of learning. There are companies like Musicorp that rent things out, and that is where we try and steer our parents, but there is no face-to-face person who can manage that instrumental side that you can go and see, talk to and offer suggestions to parents as far as purchasing instruments and stuff is concerned. A lot of it is done through me and a friend of mine who has got a school in Bendigo. He gets a lot of business because I had nowhere else to point them.

I have annoyed the MSO quite a lot over the years. When I first started at Mildura South — it must have been about 2000 or 2001 — the MSO came to Mildura. I do not know how many performances they had, but I know the one that we had was packed. We almost took the whole school, which back then was probably about 400 or something seats, so it would have almost filled the stadium. I still get MSO brochures with their country tours and stuff like that, and it usually stops at Horsham and Bendigo. They do not get here. I am hoping our beautiful MAC is going to attract some top-notch performers and the MSO back, and even Adelaide’s orchestra.

Distance is obviously difficult. A lot of the people in orchestras and big groups live in Melbourne. If they have got to play at Essendon, it is a couple of train rides away. If they have got to play on the Mornington Peninsula, it is probably difficult but not impossible for them to get out there. To come to Mildura is a three-day minimum trip. It is a day to travel, it is a day here and it is a day to get back. If they fly, then there is the cost on top of that. That is really difficult, and it always has been in Mildura. I think people in Mildura realise this, because we know that we have to go four hours to get anywhere, but the rest of the state does not.

**Ms MILLER** — In terms of singing in schools, some submissions suggest introducing more singing programs into primary schools. It is suggested that these programs could be delivered by generalist
classroom teachers provided they receive the necessary professional learning and support. My question is:
do you believe the idea has merit, and if so, what type of professional learning and support would
generalist classroom teachers need to be able to confidently deliver these programs?

Mr BARBARY — I think it is an absolutely wonderful idea. Singing is great in so many ways. It makes kids happy; it lift their spirits. My only concern is when are they going to do it? Where in the crowded curriculum is it going to happen? My fear is that because it is not something that we are assessed on, it is not something that you will find in NAPLAN and those sorts of things, that it will also be the first thing that will give when we have to focus on our reading, our writing, our maths and so on. They are the most important areas. So if we decide to introduce this wonderful singing, which would be brilliant, how long would it stay in the curriculum? My feeling is that it will be the first thing to go, because they can sing at music time.

Ms MILLER — Do you agree that a generalist classroom teacher is capable of providing it?

Mr BARBARY — Absolutely, yes. Given the right tools — copies of the audio, snippets of the song with singing, karaoke versions without singing and all that sort of thing. They can be taught to sing the song with someone singing it. It can be done. We have three choirs — senior, junior and middle — and they are run by classroom teachers because we are so busy with the instrumental side.

Mr ELASMAR — The committee has heard that specialist music teachers can often feel professionally isolated. What is your view on that, and what support do rural and regional specialist music teachers require?

Mr BARBARY — I think in Mildura we are quite lucky. We have some very good music specialists around. But particularly in the secondary schools there is a good network of secondary school classroom music teachers. We have people like Marcus Hennig at the Senior College and John Menhennett at St Joe’s and Donald Mayne out at Red Cliffs. They are all quite tight. Some of them have gone through uni together as well, and they know each other very well.

As a primary school music specialist, I am pretty isolated. I used to have a couple of staff members from other schools that I could bounce ideas off. At the moment I am out there by myself. Occasionally I get people from other schools who ring and say, ‘Look, we’ve employed such and such. We want them to teach a little bit of music. Can you give them some pointers?’ I will have graduates or teachers who have transferred into other schools, and they have been given a role of teaching some sort of music. But I have been the giver, so to speak, because I have been in the role for 13 years now. They come and see me. As far as talking to other music teachers in a primary school, yes, I am a little bit isolated. I am very isolated.

Mr CRISP — I would like to build on that for a moment and ask you your views on whether you have adequate access to professional learning opportunities in music for teachers and a way to improve that access.

Mr BARBARY — My boss is really good as far as PDs go. She has flown me to Melbourne a couple of times, but we have not really had much here. We had, I think it was, the Soundhouse set up at Red Cliffs. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to be part of any of that. Yes, there are not a lot of PD opportunities for myself in particular in this area. I have had to go to Melbourne. I have done an Orff course and a few other things, but not so much here. Like I said, I am sure my Principal would be more than happy to send me off to more places; however, I also have a music program to run and, like I said, it is a big ask. Whether it is driving to Bendigo or if it is flying to Melbourne, it is a big ask.

The CHAIR — I might just finish with a couple of questions, if I could. A lot of schools have suggested that one of the excuses for not having a music-specific program is that it is a cramped curriculum and it is hard to fit music in as a specific program, particularly in primary schools. What do you say to that?

Mr BARBARY — Every teacher needs a legislated two and a half hours planning and preparation time, so as I look at it, that is three specialists. So I think the school needs to decide what their priority is,
and you have your three specialists. We have always had music. We did not always have phys ed. We have had phys ed for, I think it is, about seven years now as a specialist, because the belief was that classroom teachers can teach phy. ed and they are probably more comfortable teaching sport and stuff like that than they are teaching music. I really think it is a priority of the school.

Because we are a bigger school we need a few more, so we have four specialists. We have visual arts, music, sport or phys ed., and LOTE — Auslan. We teach sign language at our school. That is for several reasons: one, they are priorities of our school; but our classroom teachers also need their release. So in order to do that we have to have those specialists. I honestly feel it is the priority of the school. You have to teach and release teachers somehow, so something has to be taught. Mildura being Mildura, it is phys ed. There is a very strong network of phys ed teachers in the town. Don’t get me wrong — I love sport. It is rubbish that you cannot be a musician and a sportsperson, because I love my football, I love baseball, I love cricket and I love all those sports. But music is not a priority. Sport is obviously our priority.

The CHAIR — I am going to ask a question that might be a bit difficult for you. You said before that you do music and drama: three components.

Mr BARBARY — That is at La Trobe, not at school.

The CHAIR — Okay. But with that in mind a lot of schools, if you like, effectively choose which stream they might teach because it is all lumped into the components of the Arts. I know you have a music bias, but leaving that aside from moment, if we are going to have a specialist program that is separated back off, which one would you do and why?

Mr BARBARY — I would say music because of the specific skills. I know a lot of people link music back to mathematics, which is great because it is very much like mathematics to a degree. We want to produce musicians, we do not want to produce Suzuki-style violin players. There is big difference. One is mathematical players; one is a little bit more musical. I think music is probably the most different, and like I said with the La Trobe students, it is not something you can just get. It needs to be little bits at a time. I think they need to build up their music skills from a young age.

We do not do a lot of dance at Mildura South, but we do do dance. We are involved in The Beat, which is our school’s rock eisteddfod thing. I find that a lot of our sporting kids have great coordination, and it does not take me long to teach them dance moves. We have some young female teachers who are good choreographers as well. When you look at ballet and traditional dancing, obviously that is different skill sets, but modern dance and general moving in time to music and all those things I think are a bit easier for children to grasp onto — especially ones with good coordination and sporting ability. I believe music needs to be built up little bits at a time.

The CHAIR — Just quickly, one final one: do you think parents are choosing to send their kids to Mildura South in part because of the music program? But also are kids, once they are finished primary school, choosing their secondary school after experiencing the music program at Mildura South with a good program in a secondary school like Red Cliffs, for instance — particularly those kids that are doing the gifted recorder programs and what have you that you mentioned earlier?

Mr BARBARY — Yes, I know for a fact that parents are definitely sending their kids to Mildura South because of our music program, because that is the thing that is different as far as other schools go. We all compete in sports together, we all enter artwork into the show and we all using the Ultranet. They are all common amongst the schools. Our music program is different. I have had friends who are musicians who say, ‘I’m going to send my kid to your school’, because they want them to continue on with music.

As far as when they go into high school, absolutely again. There are two really strong secondary schools as far as music programs go. I believe one is a state school and one is not. One is obviously further out of town, and every year the number of children from my school going to this other school is increasing. Last year I think there were something like 18 students going to the private school. This year, my daughter included, there were something like 28. I can walk into their specialist music program, which they have
after school on Mondays, to pick my daughter up, and without a lie three-quarters of the class would be ex-Southies.

The CHAIR — That is a great place to finish, I think. Thank you very much. It is has been really informative for us, and it kicked the day off especially well. We really appreciate it, and keep up the great work.

Mr BARBARY — Thank you.

Witness withdrew.