EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Red Cliffs — 2 May 2013

Members

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Witnesses

Mr D. Browne, Principal,
Mr D. Mayne, Music Coordinator,
Ms K. Morrish, Classroom Music Teacher,
Ms H. Penna, Specialist Maths Teacher,
Ms A. Smith, Instrumental Music Teacher,
Mr A. Pusz, Instrumental Music Teacher, and
Mr R. Peirce, Instrumental Music Teacher, Red Cliffs Secondary College.
Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for the opportunity to visit your school and for the
tour. We have already heard from the parents and kids and now we will hear from you. There are just two things
before we start. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript containing all the information you give us
today and make any changes that need to be made.

The evidence you give is covered by parliamentary privilege. That all sounds very formal. It is the same
privilege that is afforded to members of Parliament. Go for it today — do not hold back. That parliamentary
privilege does not cover anything outside of the hearing proper. Today is really a discussion. We are here to find
out more about what you have on offer at the school and also how we can improve music in schools in general
across Victoria.

We have a number of questions. I am going to start, and then if there are things that we have not covered that
you would like to add, feel free to do so.

I will start with a very simple one. Could you provide an overview of how music is delivered as part of the
curriculum of the college and also tell us what types of extracurricular activities the school offers in regard to
music?

Mr MAYNE — The music at the Red Cliffs Secondary College starts in Years 7 and 8 as a semester
subject. They basically do a Year 7 semester or a Year 8 semester. That is because of the technology electives
that we offer in Year 9. When they get to Year 9 they have an elective option where they can choose a semester
of music, and that continues into a semester of Year 10. Then if they choose to do VCE music, they have a full
year in Years 11 and 12. From there we try to keep a structure of three sessions per week for the semester in
Years 7 to 9, then five from Years 10 to 12. Hopefully they get about 125 minutes of music a week or
thereabouts, so that is good.

That is the overview. We cover four or five units a semester in that time and then we encourage those guys to
also get involved in an instrumental program, which is an extracurricular activity. But as part of the school’s
curriculum, kids who do that can use that to their advantage in getting music places in the classes. That is the
overview of the subjects as a whole.

For our extracurricular activities we have a stage-concert band happening at the moment, a guitar ensemble, a
choir and lots of small groups the kids are managing themselves at lunchtime and recess. We also look at doing
some performances with combined schools as well, so the district has a combined stage band which some of our
students are part of.

The CHAIR — Before Gayle asks the next question, is can you quickly tell us what you currently teach at
the school and a little about your background.

Ms MORRISH — I am a classroom music teacher. I am actually a double music major. At the moment I
teach Years 7 and 8 drama, Year 10 music and Year 7 Indonesian, but next semester, because they are
semester-based subjects, I will have a completely different load again.

Mr PEIRCE — I am a district instrumental teacher, teaching brass and woodwind throughout the district.

Mr MAYNE — I am the Music Coordinator at Red Cliffs Secondary College teaching Years 7, 8 and 9
music this semester, as well as wood and other subjects which escape me at the moment. Part of my role is that I
am a double music major like Kylie, and I also do a lot of professional engagements outside of school as well.

The CHAIR — David, we know who you are. But for Hansard, can you tell us your background too?

Mr BROWNE — I am the Principal of the school. I am a fully qualified music teacher, also with a double
music major, and have worked in music programs. Prior to joining the principal class, I was a music teacher
both here and prior to that at Robinvale. I have also been involved with the Soundhouse Music Alliance and I
was Deputy Chair of the Soundhouse alliance for a number of years and introduced Soundhouse to Red Cliffs
Secondary College.

The CHAIR — You have been Principal here for?

Mr BROWNE — I have been Principal here for four years.


**Ms PENNA** — I am a specialist maths teacher. I also teach chemistry. At the moment I am teaching Years 11 and 12 specialist maths and advanced Year 9 maths, and I have no musical ability. I try to sing.

**Ms SMITH** — I am an instrumental music teacher from the district, but I spend three days at the moment at this school only. I have been here probably for 16 years, doing up to three, three and a half to four days at one stage. A lot of my time is spent at this school, with brass, woodwind and guitar, so a mixture of instruments which helps when I put my groups together. I can mix and match everything.

**Mr PUSZ** — I am a district percussion, drum-kit teacher and I am at this school one day per week.

**The CHAIR** — Excellent.

**Ms TIERNEY** — My first question is to David. Can you tell the committee a little bit more about the Soundhouse Music Alliance and, in particular, what this school’s relationship is with the alliance and what is involved?

**Mr BROWNE** — Soundhouse was established in 1982, from memory. The original concept was to establish a high level of interest in schools in the areas of music and multimedia, and the use of technology in those areas. There are two aspects to Soundhouse: one, the provision of professional development for teachers; and two, to provide extra opportunities for students to enhance their studies in music and media through exposure to technology.

Our involvement started in 2002 when I was invited to join the Soundhouse group, mainly through the work that I had done previously when I was at Robinvale where I had introduced the use of videoconferencing for the teaching of instrumental music lessons due to the tyranny of distance. We were not able to get instrumental teachers to Robinvale so we started the concept where we were beaming lessons in — flute lessons from Mildura and violin lessons from a school in Melbourne. That gained a little bit of publicity at the time and that interest in music technology brought me into the Soundhouse tribe.

Since the establishment of Soundhouse at Red Cliffs Secondary College, we have been a professional development provider for primary and secondary schools in the areas of music technology, video editing, stop motion animation and audio recording. We have also been able to provide opportunities for students to access those same software programs. One of the Soundhouse partners is the Roland Corporation, and Roland have been able to provide quality resources for Soundhouse member schools.

The role of Soundhouse is currently in a state of flux, as the Soundhouse organisation is changing. I suppose you could call it a generational change in that many people who have been involved in Soundhouse for a number of years are getting to the end of their teaching careers. So as personnel change, the focus of the organisation is changing. Since Donald has been at our school and taken over the role of music coordinator, he has taken on the mantle of Soundhouse coordinator and is providing those opportunities for students. Probably one of the major areas of strength over the last couple of years has been the Musical Futures program, which you saw earlier in operation. Students are working in small groups and through the use of small audio-mixing devices, they are able to work together, four or five groups in a small area, through the use of headphones and recording facilities. Don, do you want to add anything to that?

**Mr MAYNE** — We were part of that pilot that happened in 2010 for Musical Futures. What we found through our raw data was that the number of students increased as far as their involvement in music was concerned. We also found that they got a lot more confident in other subjects. They sort of found their voice by peer support, so our role became more of a mentor role as a teacher. We would come alongside them and assist them rather than teach them. I recently attended the m:tech conference with Soundhouse people and we were able to highlight what our school is doing because of our involvement in that program. We are now seeing a flow-on effect in that the kids are using lunchtime, recess, before and after school to use our facilities for practice, and we have some guys at the moment recording basically every lunchtime with that. It is a really positive thing.

We have found with the Soundhouse Music Alliance over the last couple of years, as David said, that it is going through a change. It is becoming a bit more of an advocate for technology rather than professional development owners, but we are still able to network with schools. I have been networking with rural schools in South Australia and Victoria about what we do in our program, sharing resources and allowing them the opportunity...
to experience what we have experienced. It is changing, but at the same time that concrete resourcing of people and using technology as a driver for our music curriculum is still there. It is still foundational.

The CHAIR — In relation to the types of music teachers you mentioned before in the program, what is your view on those sorts of programs being offered in schools, particularly those that may not have much an offering in music — to kick things off?

Mr BROWNE — It is a bit of a chicken and egg story. You can put equipment into schools, you can put programs into schools, but the music programs that are successful are not because of equipment or resources but because of the passion of people. I have to say the success of Red Cliffs Secondary College is not because of the skills of the people around this table at the moment — which are obviously very important — it is the passion of the people and the relationship that they have with the students that makes our program so successful. There has to be a balance. Yes, you can put the equipment into the schools, but it is how it is utilised and the drive from the people at the coalface that is very important.

The CHAIR — But are you an advocate for those sorts of programs as well?

Mr BROWNE — Yes.

Mr CRISP — On to the challenges faced by rural schools: what are the issues and barriers that rural schools face in trying to deliver music education?

Mr MAYNE — For us it is location. If we were in Melbourne I could take a group of kids to a theatre every five minutes if I wanted to. We cannot do that up here. It costs $1000 to get a bus down to Melbourne and back, so location for a start is problem. Then we have teaching opportunities, as far as getting people who are specialists in areas. We have great guys here, obviously, but because of where we are and the amount of funding that has to stretch over an area, we cannot employ a vast number of teachers for a vast number of instruments — and they are just not around. In the end we have to have teachers specialising in more than one instrument, which is in some ways a disadvantage to some kids. That is really the big thing. We are isolated, so any resources that are in the cities we cannot just put our hand out and get. We have to plan and resource for.

Ms MORRISH — The staffing is a big thing, though.

Mr MAYNE — Massive, yes.

Ms MORRISH — Because if your students, even privately for, say, primary school age children — there are not terribly many schools up here that can run music education at a primary level because they do not have the specialist music teachers. If my child is eight or nine and I want them to have music lessons privately outside of school, even up here we can probably nearly list who all the music teachers are in the whole district. There are just not the resources up here. That is probably the biggest challenge.

We are just extremely fortunate here that we have four double music major teachers — including David and one teacher who is on leave — in our school. I think that is a huge benefit for our college. The fact that we have an instrumental teacher who is here three days a week gives you that consistency. I think Aleks and Rex would probably agree that it is really difficult walking in and out of a different school every day. It is like being a casual relief teacher. You cannot follow up with kids as easily; you do not have the relationship with them that you do when — Annette is here three days, she can say to them, ‘Okay, I’ll catch you tomorrow’ or ‘I’ll see you on Thursday’ or whenever it is. So it can be a long time between weeks, and if you throw in public holidays and things like, you can go half a term without seeing students. Staffing is a really big thing.

I would like to add to what David said about the programs too because Musical Futures — the equipment we have that you have seen is fantastic, but it really is about the staff. If you have not got the staff there with the skills and the confidence to use the equipment — great teachers can do great stuff with very limited resources. It is fantastic when you have the resources, but you need to have the staff to do it first. It is really about the training for those teachers that we have.

Mr CRISP — If I was to then ask what do you think should be done to improve the provision, obviously no. I would be your staff and training. Is there anything else you want to add to that list?

Ms MORRISH — Can we give you a wish list?
**Mr CRISP** — By all means.

**Mr MAYNE** — I think what Kylie said about primary specialist stuff is really important. We have junior music at the moment. I have three classes and each class has asked who had primary music training to help, and I reckon less than 10 per cent of the class put their hand up. There might be three or four kids in each class. Being up here and knowing the teachers and knowing the schools — we can name the schools that have a music program. Part of our targeted response, obviously for transition, is to try to get as many kids as possible who have the skill of music to come into the program at our school. That is not easy. It is made even harder when we do not have the data from primary school to back up what we do with the Selmer test or what we do to try to recognise them.

It is staff training. It is starting to change in this region because of the new arts centre, but regional tours and things that come up — we had the Australian Chamber Orchestra come up a few weeks ago, which a few of our students were able to get involved in, and the Syzygy Ensemble. Aleks was instrumental in getting a lot of guys involved in that; our school probably had about 18 kids go to that. Again that would never have happened if they did not come up here. We just could not afford to do it. It is really about getting those things up here so the kids have the opportunity to be a part of it and experience and see it, and for us as staff to be able to get the training to assist with it, so when they leave we have some skills that we can use.

**Mr CRISP** — A quick supplementary question, Donald, because I have one eye on the clock: has the provision of that new arts centre theatre changed the number of specialist performances that come to Mildura? I know it has not been there long.

**Mr MAYNE** — I would say so. When the arts centre shut four or five years ago or whenever, they were starting to get things happening. We had mOVe at our school for five or six years. Every year mOVe, Orchestra Victoria, would come up to do a program. That ceased. We have basically not seen an orchestra since the arts centre shut. The string ensemble comes to Mercy every year. What has happened is that we are getting a diverse arts culture at the arts centre now. I think tonight is the 360 Allstars circus, or whatever it is. That would never come to the old arts centre. So they are getting different items and different things happening, but it is still in its feeding stage of trying to get things happening.

**Mr BROWNE** — I just want to add something to that. One of the interesting issues is that there are a number of groups, particularly in the more popular music genre, that do come up, but our students do not have access to them, mainly because quite often those performances are at licensed premises. Whilst that is fantastic for 18 to 30-year-olds, our kids do not have access unless they are going along with their parents. So their access to quality popular music groups outside of a pub is limited.

**Ms MORRISH** — David, something else we have talked about this year is that it would be really great — there used to be arts funding that we could access to transport the kids to the city. So we could go to Melbourne and take the kids to the theatre — to the really big theatres, too — and get them exposed to all the cultural things there are in Melbourne, so to speak. What really cemented that for us was that I had a parent come in to see me about a student and say to me, ‘I remember Mr Browne; he had me as a student at Robinvale’. She said, ‘The highlight of my whole schooling life was when that man took me to see *Phantom of the Opera*’. That is all she could remember from her secondary schooling. She adored David for it. She said, ‘I could never do that now. I would never be able to afford to do that or to go there; I will never be able to take my children, but it was a highlight of my life’.

A lot of our children, because we are so remote, will never go to Melbourne. If they do get out of here, they still come back here to settle. Some of them would never go to a big theatre to see some of those great productions. In order to foster a love of that sort of thing, probably highest on my wish list would be that we have compulsory music education from Year 7 right through. Trying to teach Year 11 and 12 when a child has only done music for six months in Year 7, six months in Year 10 — you would never do that to a chemistry or a physics kid.

**Ms MILLER** — Just following on from what Kylie was saying before about the availability of specialist music teachers: we have heard anecdotal evidence that there is a shortage of specialist music teachers in rural and regional Victoria. Have you had any difficulty finding specialist music teachers to teach at the school, and what strategies can you suggest to increase the number who come to regional and rural Victoria?
Mr BROWNE — The first answer to that is very simple. Yes, we have had huge troubles. The concept of how instrumental music staff are employed is really difficult. The issue of trying to employ fully qualified teachers as instrumental music teachers is difficult, and quite often the people who are quality musicians are involved in other aspects, whether it is with their performance or with their private students, and the concept of being a qualified teacher actually gets in the way of their real life of being a musician. Therefore, that adds one barrier. The reality is that if that was enforced, we would lose — —

Mr MAYNE — Almost all.

Mr BROWNE — almost all of our instrumental music stuff in Sunraysia. Therefore, that is a huge barrier. The categorising of instrumental teachers, tutors or whatever word needs to be used is something that really needs to be clarified with the education department. It does not fit into the current structure.

The CHAIR — I am going to leave that there because we have heard that point a number of times, so we are going to take that one up.

Mr CRISP — VCE music at Red Cliffs: we have heard some evidence that rural schools struggle to attract enough students to run a VCE program. Has this been the case at Red Cliffs, and what strategies would you suggest to support VCE music to small groups of rural students? Are there any aspects of the VCE music program you believe need improvement?

Mr BROWNE — Yes, we have had those difficulties. I think the biggest difficulty with having a VCE music program in our schools is something that both Kylie and Donald have already touched on. We probably have an overcrowded arts and technology curriculum in the 7 and 8 areas, which means that the students get a taste at Years 7 or 8, a taste at Year 9, a taste at Year 10, and then all of a sudden, bang, we are into a full VCE program, whereas the concept of that at an English, maths or science level would not even be considered. A way around that is the introduction of music into the middle and upper primary areas so that the students are coming to the school with an interest and some basic skills and we can therefore then pick the level up. What we are doing at 7 and 8s is higher level and moved further up the ladder. The second thing would be a serious restructure of our curriculum offerings at the junior level, but to do that you are robbing Peter to pay Paul. If we are going to increase our music time, where are we going to take it? If we are going to add something, we have got to take something away, and that is a very difficult question.

The CHAIR — To conclude, do you receive instrumental music funding from the department?

Mr BROWNE — We do not. Our funding goes to our district and the Mildura Senior College is our coordinating school. That funding has not changed in — —

Mr PEIRCE — Eighteen years, I reckon. Terrible.

Mr BROWNE — and that is a real concern. As a district our instrumental music programs have all expanded, but our staffing has not.

The CHAIR — I understand that the pool has not expanded. In terms of the administration of that and the way it is set up, do you think it works well, or do you have ideas about ways in which that could be improved?

Mr BROWNE — It all depends on what the philosophy is for why you teach instrumental music in schools. For me it is very simple. We provide instrumental music to provide opportunities for students to play music, for opportunities for students to have that amazing experience that we call music. That is my philosophy. It is what I have always had, and I believe it has been a very successful philosophy. Other people have the philosophy that you provide instrumental music lessons in order to get to Year 12 solo performance. If you provide a nurturing and positive environment, that will happen by itself.

Ms PENNA — As a maths and science teacher, the top students I have taught — the dux of the school — have all been music students. I have no musical background. It is something they learn when they are learning music — in the way they learn. They just learn better than a lot of the other students. This school offers so many opportunities. If that could be transferred to any other students — to Years 5 or 6 in primary schools — to get kids interested in music, I think you would see results in their maths and science. It is just learning a new
language. I have no musical background; I wish I did, but these kids pick up concepts. They learn so much better when they have a musical background. It is amazing.

The CHAIR — That is a fantastic place to finish in terms of our evidence. I wish we could spend more time with you, but unfortunately we cannot.

Mr CRISP — Mind you, if any of you feel that we have missed something burningly obvious that you wanted to say, you can write and have it included that way.

Ms PENNA — We do not want to share the instrumental music teachers. We want them here.

Mr BROWNE — David, can I just conclude by thanking the committee for coming to Red Cliffs and for allowing us to be a part of this process. It is something we really appreciate, and we value your interest and support of music education. It is really important to us that this inquiry is occurring, and I just want to express my gratitude on behalf of my colleagues for your being here today.

The CHAIR — And thank you for what you do, the passion you all show, and certainly for the success you are having in the school, which is very evident. Thank you.

Committee adjourned.