EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Red Cliffs — 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

Witnesses
Jess, Year 10 student,
Nic, Year 12 student,
Bec, Year 11 student,
Kayla, Year 8 student,
Anna, Year 10 student,
Michael, Year 10 student,
Jorrin, Year 9 student,
David, Year 7 student, and
Lyndon, Year 12 student, Red Cliffs Secondary College.
The CHAIR — Firstly, thank you very much for agreeing to take part in today’s discussion. I am not sure how much pressure was put on you, or whether you put both hands in the air and said, ‘Hey, I want to be involved in this’. But if you have not been made aware already, we are looking at, obviously, particularly music in schools and what we can do as the Parliament of Victoria to improve programs and to find out what good programs are on offer and what we need to do to ensure that there is more access to, more availability of and better music programs throughout our schools in Victoria. We have been very lucky to spend a couple of days in Mildura, and we are coming to an end now with your school.

I need to point out a couple of things for you. These lovely microphones in front are not for breaking out into song — although if you wish to do that at any time to keep us entertained, please feel free. They are actually to record the information today via what we call Hansard, so we will have a transcript of everything that has been said. The other thing I need to say is that, if you could, when you speak just give us your first name, not your full name, because you will not be identified by your full name in the evidence. It will just be, say, Bec said whatever you wish to say. That is how we will be doing this. You do not have to make comment on every question we ask, but if you feel like it is a question you would like to contribute to, just give a little wave and I will call you out and you can then contribute.

What I might do is just quickly go around and you can tell us what you are currently doing, what your experiences have been at the school with music and what your instrument or music preference is. We will start with you, Lyndon.

LYNDON — I am Lyndon. I am in Year 12 and I play the saxophone. I have been playing it since Year 7, so that is nearly five years or so. It has brought out new experiences, because without playing these instruments I would not have participated in some things around Sunraysia in general.

The CHAIR — And what about your primary school? Did you know when you came to this school that it had a music program, and was that something that made you think about coming to the school?

LYNDON — I played guitar in primary school, but I did not really enjoy it that much. That was mainly because our school did not have a very big music program. When I came here I knew I wanted to play an instrument, just to keep following something up. I was aware that Red Cliffs Secondary College did have a music program, and that allowed me to play saxophone.

ANNA — I am in Year 10, and I play the trumpet. I have been playing since Year 7. I love it; it is great. We have had so many new experiences with playing in the eisteddfod and Red Hot Jazz, which our school hosted. We actually toured around some schools last year, and that was just great — bringing our music program to the attention of other schools.

The CHAIR — And your primary school experience?

ANNA — Throughout primary school I was playing piano. My sister actually went to Red Cliffs Secondary College before me and she started up the flute, which kind of got me wanting to play another instrument, so I started up trumpet. That was how I found out about the music program here.

KAYLA — I am Kayla, I am in Year 8. I play tenor saxophone. I have been learning since last year, so the start of Year 7. It has allowed me to be able to do the band, which I had never been able to experience before. I love it, it is really fun and I hope to continue.

The CHAIR — And did you or your family know about the music program from primary school?

KAYLA — Yes, we just heard during Year 6 that Red Cliffs had a good music program going.

The CHAIR — Excellent.

MICHAEL — I am Michael, I am in Year 10. I play guitar and the banjo. I have been playing guitar since Year 7, and recently, last year, I started playing the banjo. After that I started playing lap steel guitar as well. I have had good experiences with it; I never expected to play it that much.
The CHAIR — And in primary school?

MICHAEL — In primary school I wanted to play guitar and do all that stuff, but our school did not have that good a music program, so I did not. But I found out that Red Cliffs had a good one.

The CHAIR — So were you doing extracurricular activities in primary school?

MICHAEL — No.

The CHAIR — So it really started when you came here.

MICHAEL — Yes.

The CHAIR — Excellent.

BEC — My name is Bec, and I am in Year 11. I play the clarinet and the saxophone. I have been playing the clarinet since Year 7 and have just recently picked up the sax. It has been a great experience. I have been able to play in the band. With performance I have been able to build up my confidence a lot, and I made lots of great friends as well along the way. In primary school we did not have a music program, but I learnt the piano outside of primary school.

JORRIN — I am Jorrin. Through primary school I played bass. I did not know that Red Cliffs had a music society. I was quite surprised when I got here and happy. I have played guitar my whole life and only recently started getting good.

The CHAIR — Do you play much outside of school?

JORRIN — A lot.

NIC — I am Nic. I am in Year 12, and I have been involved in music for quite a while. I started learning guitar through primary school privately, because our school did not have anything there. Since Year 7 I have been playing clarinet and from that saxophone in the school band. Music is everything really. Dad being a music teacher, we have been around it all our lives. It is something that was a given: I was going to end up doing something along those lines.

JESS — I am Jess, and I am in Year 10. I play the flute and I sing. I have been playing flute for quite a while now, but I really started to get serious the past couple of years. In the district the eisteddfods have opened up a lot of opportunities for me. Last year at the eisteddfod I was presented with a scholarship, and that has boosted my confidence a lot with music and has gotten me to do a lot more things out of the district with music.

DAVID — I am David. I have just started learning the French horn at the start of this year. I am in Year 7. I have always wanted to play an instrument, but I have not really had any particular choice of what to play. In Year 7 we do music as sort of an elective to give us a taste of it for one semester, so the whole class does music. We were passing around a few brass instruments, and I picked up a French horn, and I started to have a play of that. I took the lessons.

The CHAIR — Prior to coming to the school you did not have much exposure to learning an instrument?

DAVID — No. In prep and Year 1 they had a bit of a recorder program.

Ms MILLER — We all had that.

DAVID — Yes, but nothing more than that.

The CHAIR — Who feels as though they had a really good program? You do not have to tell me the school, but who had a really good music program at primary school?
There you go. The answer is zero answers. I will hand over to Gayle in a minute to ask some questions, but in terms of your extracurricular or music activities outside of the school, whether you are playing in bands, whether you are involved in any other lessons outside of school, maybe some of you could indicate if you do that and what you might do.

**ANNA** — I do piano lessons. This year I am doing grade 5 in piano. That is about it.

**JESS** — Late last year I joined up with the Mildura District Orchestra. Just recently the orchestra has been offered the chance to perform in the production that is coming up of *The Producers*, so it has opened up another opportunity to play in a musical and get a different feel for it.

**The CHAIR** — Fantastic.

**BEC** — Last year I started playing in the district stage band for the senior students at the senior college, which has come across from the teachers at our school. They invited me over. It has been good. Lots of performances and stuff. It has been fun.

**ANNA** — I am also participating in the Mildura District Brass Band, which has opened up a lot of opportunities to perform as well.

**JORRIN** — Last year I started up a metal band with some friends, and the music department here has helped us a lot with recordings.

**The CHAIR** — Friends inside of school or outside of school?

**JORRIN** — Both. He started here and left.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Are there any aspects that you think could be improved in terms of what you are doing musically here at school?

**LYNDON** — Probably more opportunities outside of school. I know that, for example, with Jorrin, lately, in the past couple of years, there have been a lot more opportunities band-wise, but personally I have not heard much about other opportunities for jazz bands or something like that. We have got the brass ones and the orchestra, but other than that I have not really heard much for other bands and things like that.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Anyone else?

**JORRIN** — Maybe a bit more equipment for the music department, more brass instruments

**Ms TIERNEY** — More brass instruments?

**JORRIN** — Maybe a couple of more teachers, too.

**ANNA** — The music department is really good. But it is just that we do not — —

Our stands, for one thing; they wobble everywhere and you cannot focus on your music when they are swaying backwards and forwards.

**BEC** — Especially when the music falls off the stand.

**ANNA** — Yes. We have a good set-up. It is just really equipment-wise; we need more of that.

**LYNDON** — Yes, another one is awareness in primary schools. For instance, most of us here were discussing before we came in here about how at primary school we did not have much opportunity. I know that at my primary school I think the only lessons we had were for guitar or piano, and from my personal experience I did not learn a lot for my guitar, which has put me off the guitar. Others were saying they had the recorders but little programming, but other than that, not a lot. I think personally that could be improved for them as well.
Ms MILLER — In terms of the opportunities for rural and regional Victoria, do you think there are enough opportunities for young people in the Mildura region to be involved in music and see live performances? And if not, what opportunities would you like to see available?

NIC — Just as far as opportunities go, the main ones are going to be the Mildura Eisteddfod, which is the district competition for different instruments. As far as stage bands or district brass bands it is quite limited; they are really quite small. With live performances as well, if you are going to be involved with a musical or something like that, they are big productions and they take a lot of commitment. As far as school-aged kids are concerned it is quite limited, I find, and if there is stuff out there it is not advertised well and I have not heard about it.

The CHAIR — Others?

LYNDON — Personally I agree with Nic. Like he said, the stage bands are very limited to a certain amount of people. I know there are some little bands, like brass bands, in Mildura and stuff like that. But it just makes it difficult, say, to come from Red Cliffs to Mildura. It is just a big task just to go into Mildura. If it was set later probably it would make it a lot easier transport-wise and things for our parents; it would make it a lot easier, but a lot harder in some ways, too.

The CHAIR — What about seeing live performances? Are there opportunities for you to actually —

KAYLA — The only live performances we really get here are the ones we put on ourselves. If the band or the eisteddfod or —

They have one; I think it is called The Beat. We did that. We were actually in that last year. Other than that, there are none we can actually just sit and watch without being involved or doing a workshop.

The CHAIR — Would you like to do more of that? Would you like to see more of that?

NIC — Yes.

The CHAIR — Nic said ‘yes’ and all the others agreed.

Ms TIERNEY — Jorrin, what do you play? What does your band play?

JORRIN — Metal.

Ms TIERNEY — Whereabouts? Do you get gigs around town?

JORRIN — There are a fair few gigs out at the Edge Hotel. That is really the only place we ever get them.

Mr CRISP — Would any of you consider a career in music? If so, what would you like to do?

JESS — Just recently I have been talking to some of my music teachers and careers pathway coordinator and we have discovered music therapy. I am all about music; there is nothing else. I have always wanted to be able to help people, and finding out about music therapy has given me the chance to be able to help people through music.

The CHAIR — Would any others like to comment on that one?

LYNDON — Probably not to go into a career, but in the future I would still love to play an instrument or to just keep that there. As many of us here know, it is a sort of relaxation for us. We can just play music and it is a form of relaxation for us. I would probably not take it up as a career but I would like it still to be there.

The CHAIR — Do others want to comment on that?
MICHAEL — Every now and then I go around the markets and I do busking. I reckon I will continue that for a while now.

Ms MILLER — How do you go?

MICHAEL — Yes, all right. I make a bit of money. I am not complaining.

ANNA — I find that going through school sometimes it gets a bit tough. It is really great when I can come home and play my instrument, because that is my stress reliever. That is what I use just to let everything out. It is a great way to express yourself and it is really good. I love it.

The CHAIR — What do others think about that comment? Do any of you have a similar experience?

NIC — Especially in Year 12 this year there is a lot of stress with it, being the big final year, when you get your magic number. To have my guitar at home to just chill out for 20 minutes or half an hour and not worry about is relieving. It is a stress relief.

MICHAEL — Whenever I get sad or something like that, I always play guitar. It is always great. Or the banjo.

The CHAIR — Great.

LYNDON — Just to add to what Nic said, on Tuesdays we have our school band. Just coming into band and playing some pieces with everyone here is another form of social communication with everyone else and we can all just talk, joke, have fun, even talk to our band leader, if you will. The doctor, if you want to call him that. Yes, it is just a good way to chill after a hard day’s work.

The CHAIR — This might be a hard one for you to answer, but do you think studying music has helped you academically in the other things that you might learning and doing?

KAYLA — In Years 7 and 8 we only get the opportunity to do the music subject once over the four semesters. So we do it for half a year and then don’t get to do it for a year and a half. If we could somehow have an extra subject or be able to choose to do music — because we don’t get the opportunity to choose our subjects until Year 9.

NIC — I have been playing music. I find that it has helped a lot. It is like learning another language; that is how it helps you academically. I was looking around our maths methods class the other day. I reckon 99 per cent of them have played or at some stage are playing music. In second top maths, most of them are playing music, and I thought that was quite interesting to see.

The CHAIR — Do people agree with the comment Nic has made? There is general agreement. We ought to have a video of this; we have to commentate as we are going. This is particularly for some of our younger panellists. You have all said that your music program was not too good at primary school. What would you have liked to see in your primary school years, now that you are in secondary school.

ANNA — I reckon an introduction to instruments earlier, like maybe in Year 3 or 4, being given a whole heap of instruments and someone saying, ‘Choose one. That is what you can play’. That is kind of what happened when I came here. It was on the Year 6 orientation night, it was the music night and all the musical instruments were out. I said to Dad that I wanted to play drums. He said, ‘No, you have to be able to carry your instrument to school’. So I said, ‘Okay. Trumpet is the next loudest. I will play that’. That worked out well.

The CHAIR — I like your thinking.

KAYLA — In primary school we had no music program. There was nothing at all to do at our primary school. They did not even run anything at lunchtime. We just had art, computers and sport and nothing to do with music. In primary school I did private lessons on the piano. But we did not have anything at all,
and I think it would be good if you were introduced to it younger, because then you could continue it and have more of an experience when you get to high school.

**BEC** — I was fortunate enough to have really supportive parents, and I was able to learn music. But other students I know have not ever had the opportunity to learn it. Maybe if they could have had an introduction to it in primary school, they might have been able to further their dreams or try to learn something new.

**Ms MILLER** — Did any of you students have singing classes or a point in time in your day when you all sat as a class and sang?

**LYNDON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Tell us about it, Lyndon.

**LYNDON** — At our primary school we had three different principals. I think it was when I got to Year 5 that our principal really encouraged music and things like that. I remember that in Year 6 at some point in the day he would go to each class — because it was a primary school and not very big — I think usually at about 2 o’clock. He would come into our class on Tuesday and Thursday and he would pull out music and we would sing. Some people thought it was a bit stupid and they did not really want to do it, but as they became more and more encouraged by it I could see the bullies, if you will, singing along. It sort of changed some people’s perspectives. I think it was very good.

**Ms MILLER** — Anyone else?

**KAYLA** — I moved schools. I was at one school from prep to Year 2, and then I moved to Mildura. I was only down in Ouyen, so not that far. We had a teacher who liked singing and she brought in boards of lyrics, and after assembly the whole school sang random songs. But when we moved up here there was nothing. I think the only singing I did was to sing *Lest We Forget on Anzac Day* — not that I am a good singer anyway.

**JESS** — At my primary school we had a choir which sang at lunchtime. In 2008 our school was lucky enough to have the opportunity to be a part of the Victorian State Schools Spectacular. There were only 25 of us, and we had to go through the audition process. Bec and I managed to get in, so that involved rehearsals during lunchtime and some classes, and we had to go down to Melbourne a few times during the school year. But it was a great experience to be a part of such a big production.

**The CHAIR** — How important do you think competitions and performances are for you as performers?

**JESS** — I found it was a great way to have a friendly competition. When you are against some of your friends you are always trying to be better than them, but it is all in good fun, and it also boosts your confidence when you get to a more serious level of music.

**ANNA** — It gives you something to strive towards. In the eisteddfod you are put into categories and you pick your songs and you play. You want to play the best you can because you want to win. It is all good fun. There are usually only about two people in my trumpet section, and I know those two people and we joke around. We have bets on who is going to win and all of that. It is really good fun; it brings everyone together.

**LYNDON** — Last year, for example, we went to the eisteddfod as a band, and we had a sense of accomplishment that we had won in two different groups — jazz and open band. We won both of those, and we came back to school and were able to celebrate the sense of accomplishment that we had given all our time to music practice and then come out with first position.

**NIC** — Even the informal competitions like the school talent quest get dominated by singers or small bands. So even those small fun events have a little sense of competition and accomplishment.
Ms MILLER — Is it kind of like a Red Cliffs *Australia’s Got Talent*?

NIC — That sort of thing, yes.

KAYLA — I think you find, once you are in the music program in Mildura, that you know everyone who plays the same instrument as you. You find that when you go to competitions and eisteddfods and things, you all come back together again. I know that I have met a lot of people through eisteddfods and various music programs.

Ms MILLER — You spoke earlier about confidence building. Do find that the confidence and success that comes from the fact you are all working together as a team transfers into your other curriculum activities, whether it be science, maths or English?

JESS — The majority of us here all play in the same band, and through the years we have played I know have become more confident in ourselves, and we feel more comfortable around each other, which has brought the confidence out in us even more. Sometimes we just muck around, and then someone else will join in. It sounds good, and we keep on building on that.

Ms MILLER — In terms of your learning, though — if you are taking on a new subject and are totally unfamiliar with the content, do you find that that success and positivity from the music domain has transferred into your academic application?

JESS — It depends what subject, but yes.

NIC — Just on that, the oral presentations that we have to do in English, for example, require us to stand up and be judged on something that we are doing in front of a crowd, which relates directly to eisteddfods where people are sitting in front of you and judging what you are doing. You get a confidence boost through that and the sense that it is nothing exciting, it is just doing another performance.

KAYLA — I found when I first joined the band that everyone already knew each other, and they had all already formed relationships, so I felt a bit out of place. But after a couple of weeks, you know, we have become good friends now. You fit in pretty nicely, and it does boost your confidence, I guess, when everyone else is really friendly.

ANNA — In terms of the other classes: what music does for me is I get told to have a go; even if I do not feel confident, I just have a go. That is what I apply to my other classes. This year I am in Year 10, and I am taking a Year 11 subject, which is legal studies. What music is bringing out in my legal studies is that I should have a go, try my hardest and in the end I will get my results — and most likely it will be a good result.

LYNDON — Just on that last one, that she was saying: when we go home we practise and practise. Then when we finish the song we are able to play it off by heart. We can apply that to other subjects, so it is sort of like studying for an exam or studying for a test. You know that because you had the ability to finish that song maybe you can actually study that, remember it and then come out with good results in other tests.

The CHAIR — I want to finish with one person with a last word. David, Years from now do you see yourself playing an instrument or still being involved as a result of what you have done so far?

DAVID — Yes, just as a hobby. I do not think that I would want a career out of it. It is, as other people have said, great for relaxation, and just knowing how to play an instrument is great. It opens up so many more opportunities.

The CHAIR — Excellent. Thank you to all of you for coming and appearing before us. I know it can seem a bit daunting doing this. You can now say that you have appeared before a parliamentary committee, but more importantly than that, we want to wish you all well with whatever you end up doing. Go out and pursue those dreams that I am sure you all have. Thank you very much.
Witnesses withdrew.