EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Broadmeadows — 6 May 2013

Members

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Witnesses

Ms S. Barnes, Parent; and
Mr L. Devine, Parent.
The CHAIR — Thanks for having us out here today. Please do not be taken aback by all these microphones in front of you. The reason they are there is that we are recording the information so that we can create a report. It is all being done by our parliamentary reporters. You will get the opportunity to review the information and make any changes that need to be made. I have to point out that anything you say today is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, which is what members of Parliament get and means that you can say what you like and no-one will hold it against you, so go for it, but that applies only in here and not to anything that is said outside of the hearing.

Thank you for having us. We have a number of questions, so we might just ask those. If there is anything you want to say at the end, feel free to do so. I might kick it off. Could you tell us about what instrument your child is learning at the moment at school? Obviously, if there is more than one child, then a little bit about each would be good. What have the benefits been to your children through learning music? Les, we will kick off with you.

Mr DEVINE — My son, Shane, plays the cello, and he loves it. He loves coming to the ensemble night, which is tonight. Sometimes when he is late home we wonder where he is, because we forget. He tells us where is. He loves his music.

The CHAIR — How old is he?

Mr DEVINE — He is nearly 12. We are hoping to get him into Gladstone Park next year for music and all that.

The CHAIR — What do you see as the benefits of him learning music?

Mr DEVINE — It teaches him new skills. He is a good sort of a scholar. This music thing is not taking him backwards or anything; he just loves doing the music. Every time I hear him talk about music, he forever says, ‘Bonnie’. I do not even know Bonnie, but he keeps saying, ‘Bonnie in the MSO’.

The CHAIR — Sindy, what about you?

Ms BARNES — I am very lucky. I have two kids. I have one who plays the cello and one who plays the viola. One has been playing for three years and the other one has been playing since it started, so six years now, so we have been very lucky. They practise together at home all the time. They are learning new pieces, so it is really good.

The CHAIR — What do you think the benefits are of them learning music?

Ms BARNES — The benefits are learning the new notes and how to understand the notes, because it is pretty hard. They have the knowledge of learning and are then going a week later and thinking, ‘I remember that’, and still having to do the work at school and things like that. It is a benefit big time. They love it; they practise all the time.

The CHAIR — Do you think it helps with their other studies?

Ms BARNES — Yes, I reckon, because they concentrate on the music, so they will concentrate on their work.

The CHAIR — Les, do you think it helps?

Mr DEVINE — I would think so. It is good too if they stick to it, because it could take them a long way. Both Sindy and I and a lot of other parents have gone out and seen the kids go a long way at Birrarung Marr where they have played with them and have done their music stuff. A lot of good stuff has come out of this music program.

The CHAIR — Do you think it is important for all primary school students to learn music? If so, why?
Mr DEVINE — I really think it is something different. Everybody learns about maths, English and all the other things you have to learn, but usually it is something different. As I said, if they stick to it, it can take them a long way with that. You see a lot of kids overseas with the instruments they play, and they have gone on in life and all that, getting paid good money to do what they are doing.

Ms MILLER — In some schools students get charged a fee to participate in music programs. Do you think that is fair? Would the fee affect your decision to be part of these programs?

Ms BARNES — It really depends on the price of it and if we could afford it, but, yes, I would pay for it. We are lucky that we have had this program for free, because my daughter Jessica is a left-hander, and the viola is perfect. It makes it easier for her to use her left hand even better now, so I think I would pay.

Ms MILLER — What would you consider to be a fair price?

The CHAIR — We will not hold you to this.

Ms MILLER — We are just interested; that is all.

Ms BARNES — I would pay probably $100 a year, because each lesson out in a public type of thing would be at least $10 or $20 a lesson maybe.

Mr DEVINE — It is the same for my son, Shane; he is a left-hander too. It has given him more time to use that left hand when he is using the cello. The same as Sindy, if there was a fee, whatever the price, you get the money for what your children want to learn. Yes, we would definitely pay for it.

Mr ELASMAR — The committee has heard that many students are happy or more encouraged to attend school when there are music classes on that day. Is this the case with your children?

Ms BARNES — Yes. On Mondays they really get angry when there is a curriculum day or any other day on Monday. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays they have to be at school or they will go crazy at home.

The CHAIR — What is on Wednesdays and Thursdays?

Ms BARNES — Wednesdays and Thursdays are their practice days, when at lunchtime they go in and practise together. Monday is the day when they have their lessons with the MSO, and then they have their night one too. We have all been very lucky. Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays — no days off.

Mr DEVINE — We have had some concerts and all that, and we have seen the children play. I look at Shane, and I say, ‘No, that couldn’t be Shane’, but he is up there. He has found some knowledge in music, and I never thought he would even have the music or the skills to play. He is just excellent, as are all the kids. There are so many of them — Sindy’s two and all the others — and it is just tremendous what they have done.

Ms MILLER — Students have had the opportunity of being in contact and participating with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. How important do you believe it is for students to actually perform, and what impact do you think it has on them?

Ms BARNES — Jessica and Shane too have played at the Regent Theatre.

Ms MILLER — How old are they?

Ms BARNES — My daughter is turning 11 this year.

Mr DEVINE — Shane is turning 12.

Ms BARNES — We also had them playing for Prince Charles. They were like, ‘Yay’. On the day they went and saw Prince Charles, my daughter had to go to camp that day. She said, ‘Mum, no. You can drive
me up to camp’. The opportunities that they are getting with the MSO are fantastic. You would not have that anywhere else. Even the Regent Theatre! There were thousands of people. We have been very lucky to have chances to even go and see all these concerts.

**Mr DEVINE** — I really think they are being taught properly from the word go. Helen as their maestro puts some hard work into what she does. The Regent Theatre, wow! In Broadmeadows we would not have thought that the kids from here would even go there. The children have also been to Crown to see a singer. It is just unbelievable what Helen has done for these kids with both music and the cello, and of course MSO for what they have done for the school.

**The CHAIR** — Would you like to see your children continue to pursue an instrument and music into the future, if that is what they want to do?

**Mr DEVINE** — Yes, sure. We are trying desperately to get him into Gladstone Park, and the other day one of the teachers said, ‘You are trying to get into a music school, so what would you do?’ He said, ‘I know how to play the cello’, and I was right beside him, and he said, ‘I’d like to play the drums’. I said, ‘No, the cello is fine’.

**The CHAIR** — What about you, Sindi?

**Ms BARNES** — Samantha is just starting, but Jessica is the one who started at the start, and she would love to do music through to high school. There is a camp I think that the MSO has, and she said, ‘Mum, I’m a little bit too young, but I’m going to get there’. I said, ‘Okay, all right, yes’. Her aim is to continue with her viola if she can. They love it.

**The CHAIR** — Do you think it has done much for the broader community around here in terms of the program, the school and the reputation maybe? What do you think it has done?

**Mr DEVINE** — I really think it has done something good for us parents. We have become friends. It has got us to talk to each other. You see a lot of parents sitting over in the corner and having their own little chat, but this music class has brought everybody together. They have got up and spoken about how good their child is, or it is just something to talk about. It has been excellent for that. Also for the child, every child who does the music class does well. It has been excellent.

**Ms MILLER** — Just following on from that, what do you think the key reasons are from an academic, teaching background?

**Mr DEVINE** — I really think the communications have done well for them, all the way from the word ‘go’. It is something different. I forget how many years they have had it here, because I have been at the school for a long time, as I said before. When they said we were going to get music, I laughed. But since then it has been just good for all the children who get taught and all that sort of thing. Now, it is not in this program; we also have a man who volunteers to teach the children guitar, and they are loving it. It just feels as if someone has really taken notice of a Broadmeadows child, that is what I think.

**The CHAIR** — So, Les, just going back in terms of your other kids who are now a bit older, do you think there is a big difference between the child who is going through a program like this and them? If you had your time again with those kids, do you think that a program like this would have really benefited them?

**Mr DEVINE** — A couple of them used to do it. They did music and everything else at the school. They have already benefited from it. When we have concerts here, they come and see them. If they have a day off school, they come down and see them play. Even they say they have achieved: ‘This is our school; we went to it before’. They are shocked at seeing it, but, no, it is really good for the kids and for the school.

**The CHAIR** — Did either of you have a music background yourself?

**Mr DEVINE** — No.
Ms BARNES — Not really. When I was in high school I played saxophone, because at Hume Central, when I was at Broadmeadows Tech, we had a music program where we were able to have music, but you were lucky to have an instrument really, because there was only a certain number of them. Yes, at Blair Street at Hume they had a program where they had music, but not an instrument. My daughter is 14 and she does singing, and that has brought her out because she used to be very shy. That has brought her out and it is like, ‘Oh, she can sing’. They are teaching her on little notes and things like how to hold and things like that. With music it does not matter if it is an instrument or anything like that, there are music programs around at the school. It will be great to keep it still at the schools.

The CHAIR — Thank you. We are done. Is there anything that you wanted to add that we have not covered?

Mr DEVINE — I would just like to get the children who are now at school, before they move on to a high school. At some time they can come back and even just show these other children how they got along and teach them a bit or do a bit of mentoring; that would be really good.

The CHAIR — That is a good idea. Excellent.

Ms BARNES — We have had the program since my daughter was in Year 5. She has been doing it since Year 1. Shane must have been doing it since Year 1.

Mr DEVINE — Sharon, my older daughter, was doing it at 14.

Ms BARNES — It has improved a lot, because when you first start you walk in there and it is pick, pick, pick. Now it is a big, big tune. It is fantastic. I was lucky enough at one of our concerts to have my daughters play together and that was very, very good. At home I have it every night. Every night it is the cello and the viola. ‘Mum, an hour, an hour, an hour.’ I say, ‘Yes, no worries’. It is really good.

Mr DEVINE — It is also good that we can see in the corridor, in the locker room area, our children or our child has had their photo taken with their instrument and it really shows what this school does when people come in. ‘You do music’ or ‘You do this or that’.

Ms MILLER — That is good.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for agreeing to speak today. Hopefully it was not too painful.

Ms BARNES — No.

The CHAIR — Well done and good luck with your kids. I hope to see them on stage doing something one day in the future. Who knows?

Witnesses withdrew.