EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 9 April 2013

Members
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Ms E. Miller

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Witnesses
Mr I. Harvey, Director, and
Mr K. Owen, Director, Musical Futures Australia; and
Ms V. Miles, Associate Principal, Doveton College.
The CHAIR — Thank you very much for appearing before the committee this morning. I have just a couple of things to point out. Firstly, today’s hearings are being recorded by Hansard, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcript and to make any typographical errors. Also, the evidence that you give today is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament, so feel free to say what you wish today in this room, but certainly that does not apply to what is said outside of the hearings proper. We have a number of questions for you. We will give you an opportunity for short introductory remarks and then get into some questions.

Mr HARVEY — Thank you, Chair. I will make some very brief opening comments. Musical Futures is an approach to teaching and learning that concentrates on the training and development of teachers. The results from the program both here in its initial stages and through a well-developed network of schools in the UK shows improved student outcomes through a relevant and authentic learning approach that is undertaken in the whole of classes, so all of the classes are involved in this particular form of music learning. It offers improved productivity. Everyone — that is, students, parents, teachers, principals and school councils — get more for their money from a given resource through Musical Futures. It is shown to significantly improve student engagement and teacher satisfaction, both here in the pilot that was run in Victoria and in Queensland a couple of years ago, and through the experience that they have had with this approach in the UK.

It is a whole-of-class approach, so all schools and all students can have access to music learning through this approach to the subject of music. It is modelled at office cost-effective delivery that utilises many existing resources, including existing teachers, for a significantly better and more sustainable outcome. When the work of Musical Futures is completed in a school, all these attributes remain. The investment of Musical Futures is in the teachers, their teaching and in the fabric of the school. That is our opening statement, and we welcome any questions that you might have.

The CHAIR — Could you briefly describe how the Musical Futures program differs from other school programs that are currently out there?

Ms MILES — From my perspective, I am the Associate Principal of Doveton College and was previously at Trafalgar Primary School, and we have had Musical Futures running in both of those schools. From my point of view it offers equity for the students that I have. One of my schools was a rural community, and the community I am in now is the fifth most disadvantaged community in Australia — that is, Doveton. The program offers equity to the students. All students can participate, which I think is a little bit different from some programs. Financial costs and rural disadvantage are quite significant in terms of getting music teachers, but for me it also is a cross-disciplinary program. Musical Futures is not only about students learning music, but is also about students learning social capabilities, working in teams together, learning about learning, learning about how they can access and learn about music for themselves. They do that within the school and out-of-school, and I see that as different to what they have had before.

I know there are students who have learnt a lot about themselves as people through the process, so for me it is not just about what they are learning in their musical skills but it is how they are getting additional capabilities, and their cultural understanding, particularly at Doveton, where we do a lot of work in different cultural music.

The CHAIR — From what we have read so far, the program obviously focuses on the kids as well, but it seems to focus on the teacher training. Could you just elaborate a little more about that and indicate what happens at the conclusion of the program? With all of the programs at the school, is your program allowed to kick on after you have actually done the teacher training?

Mr HARVEY — Perhaps Ken should answer that as he has been the person responsible for the training.

Mr OWEN — I suppose being a 100% practical approach to classroom music — so that students play 100% of the time — the focus on the teacher training is to allow them to be coaches in that situation.
Rather than directing content and delivery to the students, it is to facilitate their playing. With the training they need to be versatile teachers who can look across a number of disciplines and instruments and facilitate the whole class of 26 or 28 students learning at the one time. The focus is on that changing of the culture. Does that specifically answer the question?

The CHAIR — Yes. So you provide that coaching capability, if you like, for the teacher, and I think you were talking about confidence.

Mr OWEN — Yes, it is just an approach to music. It is not seeking different outcomes or a specified curriculum, but it is a different approach to student-centred learning, so they can look at the students and do music that is culturally relevant to them, if that is what they are choosing. It lets them work in groups and to assist them to play and learn. The training undertakes to support the teachers in the way they do that, and sometimes that is in rather practical day-to-day things, such as how to use iPad apps, or get the students to get the resources they need to play the songs they want, or how to make the guitar work the right way. The teacher who comes in might be a clarinet teacher by training, so they will need a broader range of approaches to engage the whole class in music making.

Mr HARVEY — Perhaps I could just add one other point that I think speaks directly to your question. We fully anticipate after a period of time working with a school on Musical Futures that the structure of Musical Futures, the intervention, the training, can be withdrawn and those skills will reside and remain with the school. When funding inevitably changes, or processes change, the residual benefit is that those skills remain within those teachers and within the structure of that school.

The CHAIR — Would that in essence differentiate it from a number of other programs that are in constant need of that support?

Mr HARVEY — Put simply, yes. There are lots of good programs out there where somebody gets parachuted in, an expertise gets parachuted in, and it works for a period of time while that expertise is available. The expertise does not get transferred into the school environment. It remains with those specialists. The specialists get withdrawn for whatever reason, due to demand elsewhere, funding changes, or whatever, and you are left with a return to where you were. In our view that is the worst possible case, but equally it also makes the strongest case for something like Musical Futures.

Ms TIERNEY — I think in some ways you have probably just answered my question, but to narrow it down for Hansard in particular, your submission does touch on the importance of ensuring classroom music education programs are related to the school’s general instrumental music programs. Can you expand on this integration — that is, why it is important and how the Musical Futures program actually achieves this.

Mr OWEN — That is a great question about the integration. Instrumental music teaching is great in small groups, but it does have some limitations — that is, the number of students that can be taught at the one time, that it is teacher directed all the time, that it is sometimes narrow because of the teacher choices you have and the number of instruments, and it is a little bit inequitable. An instrumental music teacher might teach between 6 and 40 students in a day. In a class instrumental group of 26, they could attend five classes. They could influence six times as many students.

I think the question you are asking is how would they do that? In a classroom, in come the 28 students and you might have a teacher team-teaching with an instrumental teacher. Students break into their groups — either band groups or instrument groups — and teachers can move around as students are working on their performances, resourcing a bit, and they can coach different instruments.

Music is music. If you have a flute teacher move into a class group, they know lots about all the different instruments. They can help a bass guitarist to play what they should be playing through chords and things like that. It is not a difficult task to bring instrumental teachers into the classroom to work with so many more students. A strength of our approach in successful schools is that we can work with many more students and share that resource effectively. All students get access to the expertise, and the teachers develop versatility over a number of instruments. Team-teaching allows the teachers to perform and enjoy
and model to kids. Whereas they might have been in a small room with three children, they are now working in a performance environment, so the class is the band and the band is the class. It is quite an exciting environment.

Indeed we now have silent band technologies, where you can plug into little JamHubs through which a drummer can be playing digital drums. You can have four bands in a room, and it is almost silent. It is marvellous. There are lots of ways to do this, and classroom teachers love that assistance.

Mr Harvey — To add one more point to that, in terms of integration, you no longer need the typical approach to doing instrumental music. Learning is a literal approach. A student will leave geography for half an hour one week, and that gets rotated through the particular day. All of those sorts of things are eliminated.

The other thing that becomes really important is that you have the peripatetic teachers coming and going, and there is not often a lot of connection between even the classroom music teacher in that school and those specialist teachers who come and go. This puts the classroom music teacher and their responsibilities and their connections with the other teachers who are in the staffroom working with them every day of the week, front and centre of the whole delivery process.

Ms Miller — The committee understands Musical Futures has an emphasis on incorporating the up-to-date technology available today, so I have a two-pronged question. Firstly, can you explain how the program uses that technology and how this benefits the students’ learning? Secondly, what types of barriers prevent schools from making the best use of the music technology?

Ms Miles — Musical Futures looks at the way students are learning now, so it uses things like YouTube, for example, so that the kids can get their tuition straight from YouTube; they do that at home. They learn to do that in class with the support of people who understand music, so they can then ask their peers or their teachers what that means and how they can practise, and they can slow that down. They use other apps that are specifically about finding chord notation or showing them how to play a piece but in slow motion so they can see it.

Mr Owen — You cannot live without these things now. They have got phones and things.

The Chair — Can you state the name of that app for the transcript?

Mr Owen — I was using an application called OnSong for iPads. It is also for generic devices, and it is available on a phone. Students bring their phones and their things to class, and they resource what they need for their song.

Ms Miles — The kids are also sharing, so they are creating their music, and they are putting their music up on safe sites so that they are sharing their music. Other students can then comment on their pieces, so that is all a part of the curriculum. They are doing that in an environment which is very natural to them and their learning. What appeals to me about that is they can take that practice and place it in any other curriculum area as well. It seems to work well that they have an engagement with music, but often when you talk to the students you say, ‘If you have done this in music, you can find the way to learn in other subjects through the same means’. It crosses the boundaries in learning for me.

Ms Miller — What do you see as the barriers, if any, that prevent schools from making the best of that technology?

Mr Owen — The simple things we need from music are generally available in schools to do what we want to do. Particularly now that they are resourcing, bringing their own devices to school and that is acceptable use policy, there are good technologies.

Ms Miller — If the student did not have the technology, then that potentially could be a barrier. Would the school then have that technology available for them?
Mr OWEN — Schools generally do have access to the internet to use what they want to have. Our pilot schools really make use of some of the silent band technologies. Digital drum kits, headphones and things like that can be expensive, but that is a minor one.

Mr HARVEY — Technology is an enhancing factor not a limiting factor in the application of Musical Futures. You can undertake a Musical Futures approach to teaching and learning, because that is what it is. If you want to, you can use traditional recorders, ukuleles or any of those non-technological instruments, and all the traditional brass, wind and percussion instruments. A couple of technologies enable the whole-of-class activity to which Ken referred. As I said, typically that is digital drums and a device known as a JamHub, which allows all of this activity to go on under headphones in ensemble groups. It is not particularly expensive technology. They are the enablers, but they are not technology dependent.

The CHAIR — Extending on from that, what about teacher competence in terms of the use of that technology, particularly as that technology emerges and changes daily, and in terms of keeping up to date with that sort of thing?

Mr HARVEY — That becomes part of the planning, doesn’t it?

Mr OWEN — Yes, but it is part of the training in doing so. Some of this is so much student led once you start kids playing, performing and doing these things in class. If a teacher leaves, it is very difficult to go back to an academic approach to music once kids have been learning through this experiential way, and they tend to drive it along as well. Many times in schools students are showing teachers the way to use some of these technologies with their demographics of teachers, but it is part of the training.

Mr ELASMAR — My question is about funding. Approximately $27 million is provided to Victorian schools each year as part of the instrumental music program. Your submission outlines a number of concerns with this approach. Could you outline to the committee how you would like to see this funding used?

Mr HARVEY — I might pick that up to start with. Firstly, that money is of critical importance in whatever way music is to be delivered. The way we would see things in this instance is a transitioning of some, or in some cases all, of the instrumental music teachers’ activity to a point where they have some classroom capabilities and accountabilities. They bring their specialist skills into a classroom and work with classroom teachers. In that case essentially they are working as musicians rather than their specific instrumental skills. That is the first thing. Basically we just shift the dynamic in the relationship between the teacher and their involvement with the students.

There are extraordinary deficits in music education in primary schools, and the freeing up of some of that funding and some of that time would allow a lot more activity to take place in primary schools. We have some examples — for example, Lalor North Secondary College and a number of its feeder schools — where schools have integrated their music program between the feeder primary schools and a secondary college. At Lalor North from Years 5 to 9 there is a continuous approach to music in that school. It is because some of the feeder primaries have specialist music teachers.

We actually see this as also taking on a generational change. If we understand the data that has been collected by the Music Council of Australia correctly, about 20% of your teachers are not far from retirement, within, maybe, five years of a typical retirement age, so there is a generational change. Without suggesting that we want to get into an environment where it is a monoculture, guitar and that kind of instrumentation, with graduates coming through, is going to be far more prominent than some of the brass or woodwind, which is typical of the teacher cohort at this particular point in time.

Over time we see that funding more or less one music in most schools. This differentiation between instrumental music over here and classroom music here is far more integrated, far more connected. What is important — and I say this for a number of reasons — is that we need high-class musicians, we need future music teachers and those sorts of things. One thing that is really important with some of that funding is to ensure that we have pathways for the students that we talk about at Musical Futures between Years 5 and 9 predominantly, so that those students who have vocational aspirations have the pathways to achieve the
best they can. You already have some schools that offer that kind of capability. VCASS is the obvious one, but a number of secondary schools such as Blackburn, McKinnon, Balwyn and Eltham have built up and are resourced very well in this respect to be able to provide those vocational pathways for those students who have that aspiration.

Also the VET programs in music — I think there are about 2500 students across the state who do a VCE music component — are very important. We have to recognise that music is not just about playing. Perhaps only 10% of the people engaged in the music industry are players. A good proportion are production staff and a good proportion manage music. I am talking about a commercial environment. Those people are all, generally speaking, musicians and have had some experience, sensitivity and understanding of that playing process. Those are the things that we see.

It is essentially a refocusing and a reuse of some of the resources, and continuing to provide those specialist skills in certain areas. Certainly being able to look at redirecting some of those funds to ensure that those students — Melbourne Youth Music is another one, for example — who have the skills and the aspiration to be vocationally engaged in music have the opportunity to do so.

The CHAIR — What, in your view, would be required to support the rollout of a music teachers program now that you have done that trial. Also, maybe you could reflect a little on the UK model and what was done there. I understand the funding was supported by a foundation.

Mr HARVEY — It was indeed. I might ask Ken to pick that up.

Mr OWEN — In the case of the UK, our funding and program development was funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation to nearly £5 million which allowed for a lot of research and development. We basically get all that material free of charge to pass on lessons and resources free of charge. That is the first part. What was the second part of the question?

The CHAIR — What is required to support the rollout in Victoria?

Mr OWEN — The rollout here is basically as a professional development program, and the specifics of that usually are a two-day introductory PD, supported teacher resources and lesson plans, links and references to schools, follow-up support in classrooms where teachers can be supported, showing classes being modelled and support them through that change process, and then grouping into networks for peer support with resource sharing as we go on.

All the hard work has been done in this program development. Now it just remains to be implemented into schools and to put that cultural change in through supported professional development, on-site and ongoing professional development, because I think there is some great evidence that the best change happens within the classroom, not taking teachers out, and we want that to be sustainable. The key point of this is cultural change and more students playing.

We have a Champion School model that we have also throughout the UK. There is the key and exemplary Musical Futures schools. Our pilots were chosen strategically around Victoria so it would be geographically spread and they could also become key places to train, influence and lead the local networks, so that would be a key strategy in that. I think you should pick that up from there as to what is required in terms of financing.

Mr HARVEY — We have looked at how we would implement this in Victoria, and we have got to put some numbers to it. They are similar sorts of numbers for the actual implementation phase that the Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded, or continues to fund actually, in the UK. It is about $350 000 a year to actually deliver the program. That is the provision of the professional development days, the catering, the travel — all of those sorts of things that are required to effectively implement that program.

We currently receive a little bit of money through the SPP program of the department, and that keeps us ticking along at the moment. We just did some professional development a few weeks ago with about 20 teachers. Ken is currently working at MTEC, one of the national conferences which just happens to be
in Victoria at the moment, where there are another 30 or so teachers who have come along to get a ‘taste of’ session, I suppose, in that sense.

From the department’s point of view, it would be ideal if there were some sort of endorsement of the approach — something that says that this is something that we would encourage our school leaderships, music program and arts program heads to consider. It is important to have that imprimatur. We certainly do not see that there is a role for a mandate or anything like that at this level. The outcomes are best delivered on an opt-in basis.

**The CHAIR** — Could you just touch on some evidence that supports the actual taking up of the program and what it has been able to deliver, and maybe you could bring Vicki in on this question.

**Ms MILES** — I was at one of the first primary schools to trial the model. Just as background, it is a rural, middle-class town, very sport oriented rather than arts oriented. We had a private instrumental music program running where it was user pays, but we let the children do that within class. Within 18 months of us doing that program we had 270 of the 330 children at the school participating in part of Musical Futures, but also participating in private lessons. So we actually increased our private tuition to those students. In terms of engaging students in music, it was very significant in that school.

At the present time — I am at a Doveton — we have been operating now for 12 months. We have had Musical Futures running for almost that time. This year we have brought on our secondary cohort, so we have got Years 7, 8 and 9 coming in from closing schools. An example, with our elective program at Year 9, we have things running like robotics, plastics, woodwork and art, and the children chose Musical Futures. So within that short period of time, for those students there is an engagement element to the music program that is significant within our community.

**The CHAIR** — Have there been any quantitatives arising from the impact of Musical Futures within schools.

**Mr HARVEY** — There are three pieces of research — two of them out of the UK. I think I have included them in the submission as appendices. There is certainly a report from the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, known as Ofsted, which is the regulator of schools in the UK, and that was done at the very early stages when the four approaches that are inherent within Musical Futures were being examined. There was a subsequent report, from the Institute of Education, University of London. I will not quote numbers, but essentially it is saying that significant levels are measured in improvements in student engagement, improvements in student learning outcomes — and that is their musical outcomes — and improvements in the behavioural aspects of their schooling. The other key part of all of this is — and to us this is critical, because these other things in part flow from it — a significant improvement in the satisfaction of teachers and the benefits that they see in being able to take this approach, and then it flows on to the student. So there is the teacher satisfaction and the reports refer to teacher skills.

There was a third report done, and remember that the pilot here in Victoria was just with 11 schools and something like 20-odd teachers were involved. But Neryl Jeanneret, who I believe will shortly be appearing before this committee, undertook a review of the process of Musical Futures during that pilot period. Her report is also contained in our submission. In addition, the University of Melbourne is not far from completing a second review of that some period of time later. That was based around work done at Vicki’s school in Gippsland. Vicki was very modest. In actual fact the work done at her school in Trafalgar was in fact the first time Musical Futures had ever been deployed in a primary school. The English did not think it could be done, and Vicki spent a lot of time convincing us that it could be done. In actual fact it is now de rigueur. Musical Futures in the UK and in Australia, and in the three other countries where it is currently being rolled out, at one level or another effectively runs from Year 5 to Year 9.

**Ms TIERNEY** — I understand and I get it that the entry point for getting children engaged in music is through contemporary music and popular instruments, songs and guitar. That is great; I have been able to see some of that. But where do you as an organisation see more traditional instruments like the flute and
the violin, and the forms of music that are not contemporary — more classical and indigenous art and music — fitting into our music education program?

Ms MILES — I have seen some fantastic work done in all those areas. I do not think it is correct just to say, ‘Yes, it is contemporary music’ when the children are engaged in looking at how other music is created. I do not think it is either/or and I think it is a very personalised approach. At Doveton we have 52 different cultures in our school. We have done a lot of work around Indigenous Koorie music, we have Afghani groups and we have different dance groups. I think as that comes in the children bring that interest and the teachers bring that interest. So I do not think Musical Futures, while it starts with contemporary, needs to be considered to be just that model. I have seen some terrific work done on looking at classical music. We did that at the Trafalgar unit so that kids could see how that relates. I do not think it is either/or.

Mr HARVEY — The approach can be overlaid on any type of instrument, as I said before — from records to contemporary instruments through to the whole range of orchestral instruments. In the UK in particular, where there is a breadth of schools, you see Musical Futures approaches being applied to orchestral programs. It is not about a particular curriculum; it is the approach that is the important part.

I think the really key part is that the focus is on engagement initially. Get the children engaged, give them — I mentioned the word ‘authentic’ before; I am not sure whether ‘authentic’ in this context is really that well understood. If the children’s experience is what they hear on radio or what they carry around in their hip pocket and on their iPods — and their relationship with music is far, far different from when I was growing up, for example, and many of the approaches that were applied to music — they own music; they have a relationship with music at seven or eight that we never had, by and large. So you take them from the familiar and you engage them with what they understand and with themselves, through their own interests and with the overlay of the teacher’s skills and experiences. You take them on that musical journey. Where that finishes, for some kids, is they may never get beyond a love of Kylie or Green Day or anything like that, but for others Mahler is within their reach.

The kids do not have — it is us who have — a view of whether country music is good or classical is good or jazz means anything to them. It is as adults that we form that view. Appropriately applied, the children and students will take themselves where they want to go and where they find things that interest them musically. Remember that with every lesson they are getting more and more literate, they are getting deeper into it and they are getting more and more engaged. Things that we think may be at the very edge of musical interests — Stravinsky or some of those sorts of things — are exciting in a musical sense, and they will go there because they are engaged by the excitement of it. They see the limitations, or some of them at least will see the limitations, of the three-chord pop song.

The CHAIR — To finish with one last question, why are universities not employing the same form of strategies for teacher training that Musical Futures offers?

Mr OWEN — That is funny; in the last two months that has changed. In fact, I am lecturing at the University of Melbourne conservatorium in Musical Futures pedagogy, and in Sydney another chap we work with has been engaged on the same basis. So there is a big change. People are seeing that we need to — we have today’s students but sometimes we have yesterday’s approaches with teachers. This contemporary engagement of where the students live needs to be embraced. I think the world is rapidly changing. And in other subject areas, which I think you would know well — it is true of course of mathematics — there is this hands-on approach to experiential learning. Of course, with sport, if you go and play sport, if you kick a football the first time you go out you do not do it academically. Imagine if we did, in Melbourne, study how the ball goes down. Unfortunately we do that in music in class, we really do, instead of going, ‘Let’s play’.

Mr HARVEY — Imagine trying to learn the rules of cricket or golf before you even start it, you would never play the game would you?

Mr OWEN — They have two expressions that I love about Musical Futures. One is: sound before symbol. The other is: music should be taught, not taught. That really resonates: music should be caught.
Instead of being delivered in a dimensional way that we choose, it should be caught. I think that sums it up — I hope that sums it up.

**The CHAIR** — It does.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Just a quick one, off on a different tangent. I would have really loved to have had more engagement on that in terms of contextual learning. My question is a straightforward one about the new national curriculum and how you think your program will be able to be implemented, given the changes that we are about to see.

**Ms MILES** — I think it fits really nicely with the new curriculum, and in particular I think the general capabilities. If we go back to my original statement about it being about music, for the children that I have seen involved in the program it is much more than that. Their social capabilities, the way that they see themselves as learners — all those things really come to the fore with Musical Futures because to play in a band situation you have to develop those skills. I have seen students who really do not get along in the playground working side by side to get their music played. Amazingly, the kids, particularly at Trafalgar, as young as in Years 5 and 6, could identify through that project, through the program, things about themselves that they had not been able to identify through any other curriculum area.

I had a young girl who said to me, ‘I’m not normally good with other people. I’m not a team player, but in music I have to be because it is not about me, it’s about the music’. It really stuck with me. There was a group of young boys who I caught really struggling to get through a piece they wanted to play. I caught a little fellow saying, ‘Come on guys, if we keep doing this we’ll get there, we just have to keep going’. We were able to talk to them about how you can apply that to other areas of the curriculum, and I think with the national curriculum there is a big emphasis now on cross-disciplinary learning, learning how to learn and the social capabilities that sit beautifully alongside the music components in the draft at the minute.

**The CHAIR** — I think that is a great place to finish. I want to thank you, firstly, for the very detailed submission you presented to us and for coming along today and sharing with us more about the Musical Futures program. Good luck with the work that you continue to do.

**Witnesses withdrew.**