

Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Music Education

Monday, February 11, 2013

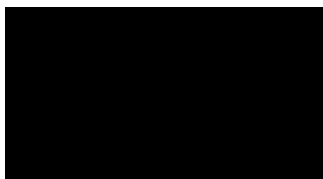
Ms Kerryn Risely
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne 3002

Dear Ms. Risely,

Attached is our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Music Education.

The VCA Secondary School would also like to provide a verbal report to the committee if they think it suitable. We would think our music staff would have valuable contributions to make and the voice of our music students, from a wide variety of backgrounds and from different parts of our state could illuminate the research of the committee.

Yours sincerely



Colin Simpson
Principal

▪

A Specialist Music School for Gifted and Hardworking students

The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary Schoolⁱ provides a nationally and internationally recognised specialist program for the training of talented young dancers and musicians. Integral to this program is the provision of a high quality academic education that is also offered to other elite training organisations. The VCA Secondary School is a highly professional school that has high expectations of staff and students.

Our school was initially founded by the Victorian Government to feed dance and music students' into the undergraduate programs at the Victorian College of the Arts. In the early years the school was a formal part of the university and students generally went from year 12 straight to second year.

Entry to the school for VCA Secondary School dance and music students is by competitive audition, which is held in August each year. The mission of our school is to help identify, and assist, children with exceptional potential, regardless of their personal circumstances, to benefit from a quality specialist training as part of a broad and balanced education, which will enable them, if they choose, to proceed towards self-sustaining careers in music and dance. This idea of 'regardless of socio-economic factors' was an important foundation principal of the then VCA Director Lenton Parr.

The Victorian State Government support of our specialist program in music and dance currently enables over 200 exceptionally talented children to have access to the best specialist music and dance training available alongside an outstanding academic education. 100 of these places are designated music. Our data collection indicates that somewhere between 20 and 30 gifted music students miss out on being placed in our school each year and we have requested an increase in our ceiling numbers in music.

There is a need to educate and train, from an early age, children who show promise. The need for early training, in particular the primary development of the physical and intellectual disciplines required of dancers and musicians, is recognised by many to be greater than for some other forms of artistic endeavour. The program offered by the VCA Secondary School enables these children between the ages of 11 and 18 to receive an outstanding academic education alongside the best specialist music and dance training available.

- We believe that children benefit from close association with similarly gifted and hardworking children who provide the stimulus of competition, connectedness and example
- By receiving support with the costs of lessons, pupils from all over the state have access to an extended teaching day and to practice and studio facilities within the environment of the school
- School organization can take account of the individual requirements of the pupil and the need for orchestras, choirs and performances to be integrated with other parts of the school curriculum
- Distinguished practitioners can be attracted to teach and/or take master classes
- Positions are open to Years 7 to 12 students throughout Victoria. During audition a student's potential is taken into account as well as his or her talent.
- The school has a dance program and also provides its academic program to The Australian Ballet School, Gymnastics and Diving Victoria and the National Institute of Circus Arts. Other specialist students are selected from within their national training programs.

Our response to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Music Education should be seen in our context as a Selective Specialist School and a school that can be defined as being populated by 'gifted and hardworking' students. Our reputation for value adding to students is strong and typically a 'good' music student will be considerably improved in our hothouse. This data can be made available to the Inquiry.

Our interest in music education can be expressed in the following ways:

- 1. Music learning has a developmental continuum and opportunities and programs need to be in place that offers access to a music education while allowing students to grow and develop at a rate appropriate for them. A key part is providing opportunities for talent to be met with opportunities along that continuum.**

Any discussion about music education should be done in the context of this continuum. In terms of opportunities we need to develop our knowledge of any gifted, Specialist or semi-specialist music schools and programs like Melbourne Youth Musicⁱⁱ within the state as well as how grass roots or community based activities can impact on as wide a number of children as possible. This continuum of music education and delivery means students can start at the best point for them but that also the system will provide access points for advanced or Specialist activities.

The Wells Cathedral School, 15 The Liberty, Wells, Somerset BA5 2ST, United Kingdom, is a co-educational independent school located in England gives the best example of this. They have a Specialist Music Program similar to ours and a 'very good music program' which all students benefit from.ⁱⁱⁱ The school is one of the five established musical schools for school-age children in the United Kingdom.^{iv} Our view would be we need a 'gifted' music school or schools but many 'very good music schools'.

- 2. The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School is interested in music education broadly and providing opportunities for gifted students specifically**

We clearly have an interest in three strands of this discussion

1. Giftedness
2. Specialism
3. The provision of music education at a secondary and primary level to feed into this development continuum

We would expect that our school, as well as other good music schools in the government sector would benefit from having music applicants well grounded in a high quality music education. On that basis we make the following recommendations:

1. A sequential step by step training program is the best way to develop music learning, where the building of skills, techniques and experiences contains musicianship at its core. This encompasses:
 - a. Aural Awareness
 - b. Theoretical knowledge
 - c. Creativity
 - d. A deep understanding of some musical genres
2. That an approach like Kodaly, or other appropriate aural based and sequential learning is the key, which involves the interchange of the dimensions of aural and seeing. Primary schools could provide a Kodaly based Choral Program and this would be enough even if nothing else is in place^v

3. One on One Teaching is important but can start off with group classes that then move to individual lessons as appropriate. On that basis the skills of music teachers in group and one on one teaching need to be developed
4. Ensembles enable students to work together on their development and build technique collectively as well as support the collaborative nature that musicians - and children – thrive in
5. It is important that schools are supported to allocate music time within the school day, both formal and co-curricular. We would recommend two time slots each week, one in Kodaly and one in instrument activities

The work of Brian Caldwell^{vi} is worth exploring as part of the inquiry. Professor Caldwell's book, co-authored by Dr Tanya Vaughan, 'Transforming Education through The Arts', provides a powerful argument for the arts in raising achievement and enhancing student wellbeing and draws on research conducted by Educational Transformations on The Song Room^{vii} programs in 2010. He is able to explain improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for children due to experiences in arts activities including music.

3. VCASS Music has real concerns about the current provision of music education in Department of Education and Early Childhood Development schools.

- There is a lack of quality control from school to school, region to region resulting in a few very good music programs and the overwhelming majority providing little or no program of substance
- Instrumental programs in general, are delivered at a much higher level than classroom programs
- In many schools in the primary sector, generalist teachers are expected to deliver music programs

Support of the School Leadership group

It is vital we assist in the development of the understanding of school leadership teams about the value of music education to the outcomes they deliver for students. The myriad of expectations and conflicting demands on these leadership teams is a negative on a coherent and state based approach to music. We would recommend that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development considers the level of support they can give to develop this understanding.

The VCASS Setting

VCASS delivers an internationally benchmarked specialist music program. This program started 35 years ago and continues to be at the forefront of music teaching in Australia. Our program has 5 strands: Choral, Small Group, Large Ensemble, Classroom (including composition and stylistic analysis at every year level) and Solo Performance. Our program is underpinned by a high level, aural based musicianship at every level. This is based on a Kodaly approach to teaching musicianship.

Staffing

To deliver this program, VCASS relies on high quality music educators. It is interesting to note that we are finding it increasingly difficult to access appropriately qualified, highly trained music specialists for the teaching of musicianship.

Foundation Programs

The foundations of successful music life are found in the delivery of an appropriate Music Program in the classroom - Foundation to Year 8.

Aural foundation

Music, which is an aural tradition, should be taught from an aural basis. As a language, it must be taught sequentially. The following are some points around a strong music program.

A good classroom music program (is):

- Aural based, sequential, developmental program using age appropriate song and instrumental repertoire
- Develops understanding and manipulation of the music elements of rhythm, pitch, melody, harmony, texture and timbre
- Develops aural responses using musical elements
- Develops aural creativity
- Develops aural improvisation

Developing literacy

A good music program develops literacy by:

- Aural support of awareness, response and manipulation of music notation
- Move from aural understanding to creating using music notation and stylistic analysis
- Aural support of creating, improvising and composing in the notation environment

Classroom resources

- Music for all does not require big budget items
- Aural based program uses the voice as the starting point
- Classroom instruments add variety to the program and the beginning development of fine motor skills: Orff instruments, tuned percussion, non-tuned percussion, guitars, recorders
- It is recommended that in the upper primary years that a string program be introduced

ICT Resources – year 5 & 6, 7 & 8

Computer Lab setting allows for the:

- Development of basic keyboard skills
- Supports a developing understanding of harmony and texture
- Moves into the areas of music scoring, composing, arranging and recording software
- These resources can piggy back on other IT resources/funding

Teacher Training

The delivery of a sound, aural-based music curriculum can only be done by specialist teachers with specialist training. It cannot be delivered by the general classroom teacher.

- The delivery of an aural based sequential music program requires appropriately qualified teachers and teacher support
- A typical university delivered Dip Ed will NOT deliver the sort of training required
- Teachers need to develop teaching skills, methodologies and repertoire to support their classroom teaching

Instrumental Music Programs

Instrumental programs are implemented across a wide area of the state. These programs are typically delivered in the secondary years. These programs work best as a band program, strings program and choral program. In our view these programs should be managed centrally and not by regions. This will encourage consistency across the state.

Strong Instrumental programs will be supported by:

- Small group (up to 6) instrumental lessons. These lessons have the emphasis on fun group learning and support the instrumental learning process. After 2 years or so, these lessons should be replaced by 1/1 instrumental lessons.
- A range of graded ensembles through which the students move. These ensembles typically present to audiences 3 or 4 times a year.

It is our view that these programs will work much more efficiently and effectively with the support of a strong, developmental, structured and continuous aural based classroom program. This foundation also provides the necessary preparedness for students electing to continue through VCE music studies and tertiary music courses to a career in music.

End notes

ⁱ Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
<http://www.vcass.vic.edu.au>

ⁱⁱ Melbourne Youth Music,
<http://www.mym.org.au/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Wells Cathedral School,
<http://www.wellscathedralschool.org/wells/>

^{iv} UK Dance and Music Scheme,
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/toolsandinitiatives/b0068711/mds>

^v Kodaly Australia,
<http://www.kodaly.org.au/>

^{vi} Professor Caldwell article,
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/performing-arts-instrumental-in-school-success/story-e6frg8n6-1226224429285>

^{vii} Song Room, New South Wales,
<http://www.songroom.org.au/home/introduction>

Prepared for the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School by:

- Colin Simpson, Principal
- Michael Sargeant, Head of Music
- Mary Jo Kelly, Assistant Head of music

End of document