

14 February 2013

Mr David Southwick MP

Committee Chair

Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools

Parliament of Victoria

Spring St

EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002.

Dear Sir,

## **Evidence supporting music education in schools**

### **Background**

We are parents of two children who have almost completed their secondary education through St Helena College in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. This school runs an exemplary music and drama program as part of its curriculum that is of inestimable value to the students, parents, teachers and the broader community in the Diamond Valley region.

### **1. Benefits to society and to individual students wanting to pursue**

#### **music as a career;**

##### **A Better Culture**

In simple terms music programs at secondary school produce a health music culture in our community. Many young people do not have the financial or other means to access music education except through their schooling. Instruments are expensive and private tutoring is a significant long term burden that many cannot afford.

##### **Bringing Out Talent & Career Choices**

These music programs allow students of talent to appreciate their skills where they may not otherwise get the chance.

My daughter was in the various school bands and did not pursue music after High School, however my son has decided as a result of his involvement with music that this is his preferred career path. He had always said he would do Medicine but coming into his final year and being faced with the prospect of cutting down on music in favour of science, he decided that he could not live

without his music. We are very happy and grateful he has had this opportunity for a number of important reasons I will explain shortly.



**Tim and Gabby as "The Thenadiers" in the St Helena College production of Les Miserables**

Music programs such as those run at St Helena produce people of exceptional talent who go on to entertain and delight the whole of our society and often the world. There are kids at our school (like Gabby above, and Tim's best friend Jordie who makes Michael Buble look like an amateur) who would not get the chance to show what they can do, and the world might never get to see them without secondary school programs.

## **2. General benefits to students as a result of music education**

There are individual and collective benefits for students.

### **Developing Creativity**

Talking from personal experience, for our children the music programs have allowed them to express their creativity and to develop what they do in a friendly environment. Ultimately performance needs an audience but when you are learning the trumpet or violin it had better be a friendly one! A student can perform in front of peers and parents knowing that their effort will always be

appreciated. The end of year concert attracts an audience of nearly a 1,000 people.



The ST Helena Senior Jazz Band and Tim Overton at Eltham Bunning's in 2011 to raise funds for the Band Tour.

### **Peer Interaction**

Kids who participate in music and arts programs can be a bit different to the majority of students and these music programs give them a vital time when they can socialise with like minded peers and role models. My son is a Music Captain for the school and is involved with the younger kids encouraging them and bringing them into contact with like minded others.

### **Self-esteem and worth**

Those who are a bit different realise there are others like them who are valued and held in high esteem. They see important goals they can aspire to achieve. The school's ultimate Arts award besides captaincy is the Juanita Coco Award made for the biggest contribution to the school musical. This Award commemorates Juanita who was a St Helena student and was an Australian singer and actress best known

for her role on the popular talent/variety show Young Talent Time in the late 1980s, tragically killed in a car accident at the age of 17. This Award is recognized by the school community as one of its pinnacle awards and it carried great prestige for the recipient.

In particular my son has had a tough couple of years having been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in early 2010. We cannot begin to express how much the music program, the students, and the exceptional teachers have meant to Tim and to us during this time.



Tim Overton as "Judge Hawthorne" in Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" 2010

Even when he was very ill and having chemotherapy he was able to participate in the music and drama events which kept him in touch with his friends and gave him an important focus. The care and support of his school friends in the music program and his music teachers was instrumental in him getting through an unbelievably difficult time and making a great recovery.

### **3. Benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education**

Our kids have both appreciated the different approach to the music part of their education. It provides an important counter-point to the intensity of some of the science/math subjects. They return to the classroom fresh and inspired to achieve.

Some students also benefit from academic confidence by achieving great results in music, which gives them the drive to go for similar outcomes in other areas of study. Music is basically maths anyway!

#### **4. Music education provided through parent contribution**

My wife is active on the Music Support Group for the school and it is a constant battle to provide and maintain instruments and fund productions and music experience for the students. Less common and expensive instruments such as bassoons, baritone sax, tympani drums, are hard to acquire and maintain. Additional funding would be money very well spent.

The cost to parents of a music education through Secondary School is substantial. Timothy's participation costs around \$3,000 per year accounting for:

- Instrument purchase, maintenance, consumables and insurance
- Music tutoring (through school)
- Performance expenses
- Annual music trip
- Donations to program and assistance with productions and performances

For a family on an average income this is not affordable and ironically the burden is greater proportionally to the talent of the student.

#### **5. The extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools**

Given the resources the school has to work with the program at St Helena is exceptional. The teachers are among the best of any in the schools employ and contribute vast amounts of personal time and actual personal money to the music program and the students in it. This coming Saturday our Senior Jazz Band is performing at the Eltham Jazz Festival and at least two of the teachers will spend most of Sunday morning with the band and students. They regularly give up willingly entire weekends and evenings to attend and supervise performances.

The least we (the Government) can do is provide them with the resources to do this important job properly.

Music teachers are firstly musicians who love their profession and are passionate about passing this on. They care for students under their tutelage in a way not always matched by other teachers. This can be a great benefit for some students, particularly those who do not readily fit into the normal paradigms of school culture.



The St Helena Senior Jazz Band at the Melbourne School Band Festival 2012

## 6. Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

Schools like St Helena need greater funding to allow greater accessibility to music programs and to ensure the standards of appropriate teaching and performance are achievable for both students and teachers. It would also be fair to pay the teachers for the work they do

I encourage you to come and hear the bands at St Helena or see a musical production and I am sure you will agree that appropriate funding is not only desirable it is necessary.

Yours faithfully,

**Mark and Maryan Overton**

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