

Friends of Music Committee
Blackburn High School
60 Springfield Road
Blackburn, VIC 3130

Mr David Southwick MP,
Chair,
Education and Training Committee.

13th February 2013

FRIENDS OF MUSIC RESPONSE TO
The Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of
Music Education in Victorian Schools

Dear Sirs,

Please find attached response from the Friends of Music Committee at Blackburn High School.

This response was put together following a Special meeting of the committee, called to address the Parliamentary Inquiry.

If you require clarification of any of the points raised, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully

G Heather Pennings
President



Cecilia Joyner
Secretary



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Music Education in Victorian Schools

Evidence supporting music education in schools:

(1) Benefits to society and individual students wanting to pursue music as a career

- High achievement is possible for those students who have a talent for music but may not have been achieved in the sporting or academic areas. A good introduction to music and, in particular, instrumental music, in primary school and continued in secondary school inspires and enables those with musical talent to pursue a career. There are many students from Blackburn High School who have gone on to pursue a career in music, either as teachers or performers or both.
- Individuals in society who are engaged in music are engaged in community life also, through participation in local bands, orchestras, music events, etc. People engaged with life make for better citizens, quite apart from the pleasure given to those who attend performances.
- Instrumental music students have a lifelong skill which can benefit both themselves and others. Society is enriched by the variety of musical performances available, from opera to rock bands. Even those who don't play all their lives do have an abiding interest in music, attending performances, participating in events or organizing such events.

(2) General benefits to students as a result of music education

- Self-esteem. Students who participate in music develop a skill that can aid their self-esteem. Just as those involved in sports can feel good about themselves, so, too, do music students who play an instrument feel good about themselves. Striving for and developing a skill is a boost for the confidence of students.
- Social skills. Participation in music encourages tolerance and patience as different age levels and students from different backgrounds join together in musical groups such as bands and orchestras. Playing in a musical ensemble is

essentially a team activity with all the benefits of socialization and shared enjoyment.

- Fosters creativity. Through study on their instrument and participation in ensembles students are able to develop their artistic and creative sides.
- Engagement with school. Music students who are seen and see themselves as a vital part of an ensemble feel more positive about their school life in general. Some students who are negative about school see no place for themselves or benefit in school. Music can be the link that connects them to the whole school process and keeps them engaged.
- Team and leadership skills are an integral part of instrumental ensemble programs. Ensemble rehearsals are led by conductors but the sections within the ensemble all have a leader who has responsibilities in arranging sectional rehearsals and making sure all the players in the section have the right music and know what is expected of them. Student-driven activities, such as sectionals and extra rehearsals must be arranged out of lesson time so teamwork and leadership are essential for it all to run smoothly. Walking through the music department at lunchtime is an amazing experience, observing teenagers from various classes and different year levels working together to ensure the overall performance of the section, and so the whole ensemble, is improved.

(3) Benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education

- Statistically, academic results are often linked to study of music and there is a strong correlation between either mathematics or language skills and musical ability.
- Music students who have to fit in instrumental practice and rehearsals with their academic studies learn to be organized and disciplined and this approach can improve their academic results.
- Many of the students who perform well academically (gaining academic excellence awards and higher ATAR scores) are familiar to the school music community from their participation in the music program.

(4) Music education provided through specific funding for music education

- A school such as Blackburn High School which has had specific funding provided to enable the school to build an excellent music program over the years, has the opportunity to involve many more students in instrumental music education. This funding means that programs can be sustained and staff retained for continuity, encouraging quality. A reputation for excellence attracts students to the program and ensures an ongoing level of participation. Excellence in music encourages more excellence and attracts students. Music is seen by the students at Blackburn High School as relevant, desirable and a path to achievement.
- If public schools cannot provide excellence in instrumental music education then many students from families who cannot afford private school education will not have the opportunity to have a musical education, and will not be in a position to gain all the benefits or choose it as a career. The expense of an instrument as well as the cost of lessons is prohibitive for many, and public schools can help with the hiring of instruments and providing group lessons for a reasonable cost if the program is funded.

(5) Music education provided through parent contribution

- Some level of parent contribution is important to ensure the involvement and support needed from families in the music program. Parents will always need to contribute through the general expenses of instrumental music such as instrument purchase* and maintenance, sheet music, concert attendance, camps, transport, accompanists, insurance, etc.

* When students reach a certain level of excellence, it is often necessary to buy a better quality instrument than that which can be hired at the school.

(9) Optimum use of targeted funding

If money were not limited, it might seem that with all the benefits of music, all schools should be funded to the same extent as Blackburn High School. This is clearly not an option financially, but even if it was, this would not be a good outcome. Why? Blackburn H.S. benefits from the fact that its music program draws students from a wide intake area and if the students were all divided evenly into other schools, then it would dilute the talent in each school and weaken the programs. The achievements of the music program at Blackburn H.S. are very dependent on having enough students in the music program so that a large range of ensembles, including stage bands, orchestras, concert bands and choirs, can be maintained. If the number of students falls below some critical level the music program would be

diminished not just in musical terms but also in terms of all benefits to the students. In fact, there must be a 'critical mass' of students enrolled in the program plus a level of excellence for the program to be worthwhile.

Distribution of the available specific funding equally between all state schools might seem attractive as being the fairest option. This would also not be a good outcome. The level of excellence in music achieved by schools such as Blackburn High would then not be achieved in the state education system, and no students in this system would have these opportunities. Equity might seem desirable, but many students would not be interested in these opportunities. The fact that not all students at Blackburn High School participate in the music program provides clear evidence of this.

Providing specific funding to a small number of schools would make the opportunities available to some students. Students travel large distances to Blackburn High School in order to participate in the school music program. Blackburn is a good location for such a school given its proximity to Blackburn station and a number of bus routes. The opportunity is therefore not confined to students for whom this is their local high school.

(11) Optimum balance of music specific funding, non-specific music funding and parent contribution

A school such as Blackburn H.S. has been able to crucially maintain its music culture through a combination of all funding sources.

Non-specific funding has already been reduced meaning that the overall contribution from parents has had to increase. There is concern that if this continues it will severely affect the quality of music and opportunities for students as some parents simply won't be able to participate because of financial strain.

Ideally, specific funding should provide some 75% of the finance required. Demands from other departments and the school requirements mean that non-specific funding cannot always be applied to music in the way it needs to be supported.