

The importance of Instrumental Music in our State Schools.

I wanted to take this opportunity to paint you a picture of a life filled with music.

My name is Sally Newstead, I work in a small Victorian state school called Mullauna College. My new Principal doesn't like me to refer to our school as small so I hope she forgives me for writing this but I believe its size makes it unique in many ways and I'm sure that along with the broad experiences we offer the students it is why parents send their children to us. Our school spends a considerable amount of money staffing its instrumental music program.

I am the performing Arts coordinator and teach woodwind and classroom music. I have yard duty, which I spend chatting with kids. This year I have a year 8 form every morning to care for, I go on camps, involve myself in all full school activities like swimming carnival athletics sports and battle of the houses Performing Arts day. I also coordinate many performance experiences for the school and the wider community and work with an amazing team of music teachers.

Last year we recruited more than 60% of our year 7's into the Instrumental program. For the size of the school we have a large number of students involved in the program. The instrumental program at our school costs just \$150 for the year for each student. What an amazing opportunity for all the students to be able to be involved in.

All our instrumental staff teach 5 periods a day plus a lunchtime rehearsal and all except one also takes a before or after school rehearsal. All go on camp. I started teaching in 1991 and it has always been a ridiculous workload but we are all happy to do this as we have created such a good environment to work in and it makes such a difference to a child's life. This would be much harder to maintain if the employment style of Instrumental staff was changed to instructor style, pay by the hour. The good will we have survived on for so long wouldn't be maintained. It would also be difficult to manage the issue of Instrumental instructors being paid for evening concerts and classroom teachers not.

Our students lives however go beyond our walls and our music department and in every music department I have ever worked in, we have pride ourselves on being a support network for the students well being as a whole.

Students spend a lot of time with us and in small groups in a nurturing environment. It is such a big part of the job maybe the training facilities need to include counselling training in their courses. It is a very important part of our job and one that again requires a lot of good will and extra time.

The last task I did on the last day of 2012 was from home at about 7pm when I returned a call from Eastern Palliative care who needed our help with one of our students who is losing his Dad. The son who is 13 really wants to learn the guitar, but Dad is leaving behind debt as well as his loving family. On the first day of 2013 Palliative care rang again and I was able to tell them it was all ready to go and he had his first guitar lesson this week.

If this wasn't bad enough 2 more of our Instrumental music students lost their mothers these Christmas holidays, they are 13 and 15 years old. Getting back to school with their friends coming along to band and their usual lessons with their same music teachers has helped them along the way. The Music Centre was their first stop upon returning to school.

It is fabulous that parents in our area have the opportunity to send their children to either a smaller state school like ours or the larger state schools all around us and still be able to get the broad range of subject choices including extra subjects like Instrumental music just as in the private schools, but at a much smaller cost. I hope the government is proud of what they achieve in this way. If the funding model was changed to match the size of the school and not the size of the music department it would have a huge impact on the smaller schools.

We are not one of the famous huge state school music departments in Victoria but we are able to make a difference in children's lives and give them skills of life long learning. Many of our students go on to play in the community ensembles and keep their musical enjoyment throughout life. Many parents remark they wish they had such opportunities when they were young. We have had students in the orchestra and choir for State School Spectacular, which is an amazing event and experience for all. Imagine being lucky enough to have contact with the same teacher for 6 years, in music this can happen.

Music teachers often know more parents than other teachers in the school due to the nature of our work. All our contact with parents is positive. Last year I went to a 70th birthday of one of the Dads who was on my parent committee from the early 90's. I've been to his daughters wedding, in fact she played flute at my wedding, she is a music teacher these days. I'm in contact with many of my ex students and love hearing all their musical pathways and general life stories. I have my next wedding on March the 4th and this student also played in my wedding with a woodwind ensemble all of which are still playing in the local concert band whose conductor is another state school music teacher. We all connect in the same circles and that the way it should be.

Teaching Instrumental Music and providing this at an affordable rate to the children of Australia is something the government should be really proud of. This will not be one of your flamboyant submissions as I am just finding my feet after family leave, but I knew it was important to voice my schools concerns. I went to a government school; I have always taught in government schools but will be watching this topic closely and adding private school information tours onto my choices list for my own primary school age children's pathway, as every parent wants to give their child the best start in life and life skills should include music.

Thank for your time,
Regards Sally Newstead