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15th February, 2013

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

Dear Sirs/Mesdames,

I write to you as a concerned parent, having seen the gradual degradation of music education in primary schools in recent years. I was raised on a steady diet (10 years) of piano and theory lessons, class singing in school and playing guitar, bass & drums and singing in bands once I reached late high school. I've also given private tutoring in drums and bass. I'm living proof that music can last your whole life (I'm currently 46) if it is taught throughout your (government) schooling.

As I see it, these issues need urgent attention:

1. 'Performing Arts' has become the replacement name for Music Classes in Victorian schools. This change has permitted a diminution of music teaching.

The educational value of a class taught by a teacher who plays an instrument and can read music is simply not replaceable by anything or anyone else. Drama, dance and video production (among others) are not able to replace music tuition. Some drama teachers are even throwing in yoga classes into the mix. Not on!

The curriculum should be changed, with a specific music component (there is not one currently) written by professionals (i.e. who can read music, play an instrument and teach). Hopefully, if the curriculum is written by a musician, then only a musician can teach it! Similarly, schools need to actually teach music; as I understand it there currently is no requirement for them to do so!

2. Private music lessons which are offered in schools are currently 'self governing'. As we know with other self-governing organisations (the Advertising 'Standards' Council comes to mind), they always go for the easiest option. These lessons should be overseen by a qualified music teacher, so the students have access to qualified instrumentalists, not someone who thinks they can play/teach.

The curriculum should specify that private music teachers who teach in schools should have reached Grade 5 AMEB at the least. The curriculum should also be amended so that every student has weekly contact throughout the year with the music teacher.

4. Choir singing should be compulsory for a term.

One full-time, qualified music teacher per school could provide all the above recommendations (to teach each class once a week, oversee the private teachers and to run choir rehearsals).

Measurable educational benefits will flow to each school's when music education is given the appropriate priority!

Yours Sincerely,

Malcolm Pryor.