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Our *children* Our *concern*

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Email to: etc@parliament.vic.gov.au

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

Parents Victoria has represented Victorian State School parents and parent groups since 1925. We are very pleased to have the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools.

Parents Victoria's policies are developed by our members at our annual conference. We have strong policy around Music Education which is included below.

E.13 Music education

Parents Victoria believes that all children should be provided with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills through participation in a quality music education program.

This program should be provided as part of the normal school curriculum.

Parents Victoria advocates:

- (a) That sufficient specialist staff be made available to schools to develop music programs in accord with their needs and overall curriculum development; and that quality support services and resources be available at the appropriate level.
- (b) That, if necessary, in small schools arrangements be made to share music staff.
- (c) That all teachers who desire it receive music in-service education.
- (d) That all primary teachers receive pre-school training in music education.
- (e) That parents and members of the community be involved in the preparation and implementation of such programs, and that appropriate in-service training be made available to them.
- (f) That suitable accommodation, facilities and equipment be provided in each school, or by groups of schools, to facilitate such programs.

Evidence supporting music education in schools

The benefits of music education are well documented. Research shows that students who learn music exhibit

- improved maths and language performance
- improved reasoning capacity and problem solving skills
- better memory
- greater social and team skills
- greater creativity

Learning an instrument can teach perseverance, co-ordination, time management and organisational skills. It can improve concentration, create a sense of achievement and boost listening skills. Involvement in vocal or instrumental ensembles develops skills such as team work, responsibility, discipline and promotes social skills. Music is a means of transmitting cultural heritage and embracing cultural diversity. An appreciation of music developed in childhood has lifelong benefits. Music is part of our celebrations, valued in times of stress or loneliness, an aid to relaxation and also in exercise.

Current provision of music education in Victoria

A quick survey of our member schools shows that the provision of music in schools varies greatly from schools which offer little to nothing in the way of music programs to those which run extensive music programs including class music lessons, instrumental and vocal programs, dance and productions.

Reasons for the diversity are in many cases due to budget restraints. Schools have had to make choices about the type of specialist teachers they employ and class teachers generally have very little music tuition in their pre-service education. The cost of providing adequate facilities and equipment is often prohibitive. In other schools, principals and school leadership don't appear to be supportive of music education.

The provision of instrumental music programs also varies considerably from school to school. The cost of instrumental programs to parents often depends on whether the school has employed specialist music teachers or has to bring in teachers to conduct the lessons. In some schools students are able to hire instruments especially when they are first starting out but usually as students progress they need to provide their own instruments which can be a huge expense for parents depending on the instrument concerned.

Instrumental music programs are often organised on a withdrawal basis with students having to miss other subjects to have their lesson. Some schools make arrangements with external music teachers/private music schools to provide instrumental music lessons. These may be held during school hours or before or after school. The cost usually depends on whether the student receives an individual or group lesson. Fees are generally required to

be paid by parents at the beginning of each term. Sometimes the teacher will make up missed lessons but other times if the student misses a lesson the payment is forfeited.

Some schools hold annual music camps where children from can benefit from specialist music teachers and ensemble playing.

Many parents are concerned that due to the time commitments required, students often have to choose between music and sport when parents see both as being beneficial to their children's development.

Parents Victoria would like to draw to the attention of the Parliamentary Committee conducting this review, an open letter to the Australian community from Dr Richard Letts, Executive Director of the Music Council of Australia regarding music education in Australia. The letter can be found at http://www.musicplayforlife.org/images/stories/documents/music_education_argument_nov_2011.pdf

Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

In Victoria we are currently moving towards greater autonomy for schools. Parents Victoria will be very disappointed if this means that some schools will opt to remove music education from their curriculum.

Parents Victoria endorses the recommended priority actions from the 2005 National Review of School Music Education which were:

- to improve the overall status of music in schools
- to improve the equity of access, participation and engagement in school music for all students
- to improve teacher pre-service and in-service education
- to improve curriculum support services (advisory, instrumental music, vocal music and music technology)
- to support productive partnerships and networking with music organisations, musicians, the music industry and the community
- to improve music education in schools through supportive principals and school leadership, adequately educated specialist teachers, increased time in the timetable, adequate facilities and equipment
- to improve levels of accountability

Parents Victoria also supports the concept of lifelong learning. Music programs are an ideal way to link students with their communities e.g. students performing in the community. A transition program that links school leavers with community music groups could be a very valuable means of encouraging students to maintain and extend their musical skills.

Given the documented benefits of music education, Parents Victoria is particularly concerned about the lack of equity of access, participation and engagement in school music programs for all Victorian students

Elaine Crowle
Immediate Past President on behalf of Parents Victoria