



Victorian Parliament Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

**Submission from the
Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB)
15 February 2013**

The Victorian Catholic Schools' Parent Body (VCSPB) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Victorian Parliament Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools.

The VCSPB represents parents of students in Victorian Catholic schools at diocesan, state and national levels, through school boards, or where none exist, through school based parent support groups.

The VCSPB supports the work of the Victorian Catholic education authorities in advancing the interests of Catholic schools and their students, particularly in those areas where parent input can strengthen the quality of Catholic school provision.

The VCSPB's submission to the inquiry addresses some issues that are important to Catholic school parents and seeks to highlight parents' perspectives on these. The VCSPB speaks from a perspective of parents who value education in the Catholic faith and tradition for their children, but also as interested citizens.

Throughout this document we have used the term "*parent*", this term is used to include natural, adoptive or foster parents, guardians and caregivers of students.

The VCSPB supports music education in schools from Foundation to Year 12.

The reasons for this support are explained in this submission, but are in essence based on the overwhelming evidence of the benefits for students who learn music and the general preference of the majority of parents for music to be taught at school.

There is significant evidence both nationally and internationally that participation in the arts can have a powerful and direct impact on achievement in other areas of the curriculum and on student social-emotional wellbeing.

Some areas of the Inquiry are outside the scope of VCSPB's functions. In particular the VCSPB offers no specific comment on the following areas set out in the Honourable David Southwick MP's letter dated 27 December 2012:

- The current funding arrangements for music education. This is a complex issue that as parents we are unable to comment on in a meaningful way.



- The supports available for music education. As we understand it, this is handled on a school by school basis and is very much connected with funding, as parents we are not privy to the fine detail of this issue and cannot comment in a meaningful way.

Evidence supporting music education in schools

Benefits to society, and to individual students generally, academically and in career decisions.

The VCSPB support the following statements in The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) draft curriculum for Music:

'Music is exploring, performing, creating, listening and responding to sound and silence. In music, students engage the music from diverse cultures and places. Through this practice they construct and communicate ideas, meanings and values about their personal, social and cultural worlds. Like all art forms music has the capacity to engage, inspire and enrich all students, exciting the imagination and encouraging students to reach their creative and expressive potential.'

'Students work with the elements and materials of music to develop musicianship, critical thinking and aesthetic understanding.'

'Students' active participation in music fosters learning for life-long well-being, developing understanding of older times, places, cultures and contexts.'

Attention is drawn specifically to the research commissioned by The Song Room (TSR)¹ which showed that students in TSR programs outperformed students in non-TSR schools in school achievement tests and in NAPLAN tests². In addition to the TSR research, the 2006 *National Review of School Music Education* conducted by DEEWR and the Victorian Music Work Shop Report produced by the Victorian School Music Action Group Report both made similar findings about the broader educational, social and well-being benefits of teaching music as a standalone subject. There appears to be a consensus amongst the experts about the benefits of music and, from a parents' perspective, this is compelling evidence that cannot be ignored.

The analysis of the data also indicated how the TSR influenced student social-emotional wellbeing through increased self-esteem and confidence, positive teacher-student relationships, social skills, self expression, love of learning and confidence towards school work while decreasing lack of control in anger and stress and worry. In Louise Downie's³ address to the Victorian Music Work Shop she stated, based on her 33 years experience as a teacher: *"I can say, without a doubt, that music education is a vital component in teaching the whole child"*. Treating each child as an individual and valuing the unique gifts they have to offer is a key aspect of Catholic education, but

¹ Vaughan, T., Harris, J. & Caldwell, B.J. (2011). *Bridging the Gap in School Achievement through the Arts. Abbotsford: The Song Room* and Caldwell, B.J. & Vaughan, T. (2012). *Transforming education through the Arts*. London and New York: Routledge. TSR (The Song Room) is a national not for profit organisation that provides free, tailored, long-term music and arts-based programs for children in disadvantaged and high need communities.

² Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012

³ Louise Downie was then the Principal of Mentone Park Primary School and a recipient of Victorian Department of Education High Achieving Principal Award.



has benefits for society as a whole. The benefits to society in having children who have a positive education experience, where they have been allowed to develop and achieve their potential are obvious.

This evidence confirms what many parents know instinctively about the arts in general and music in particular. Unfortunately not all parents can provide this experience for their children outside of the school context. Music education should not be experienced only by those who can pay for it. Parents expect that children in all schools have a right to access education that is holistic and includes quality music education (and possibly the option of studying a music instrument) taught by professionally trained teachers. VCSPB also notes the many social benefits that being part of school band can offer to children, who may find interaction with their peers difficult.

In the words of Caldwell and Vaughan⁴: *“The ability of music (and the arts) to cross cultural boundaries”* cannot be ignored. VCSPB also notes the following observations of Caldwell and Vaughan *“The classroom of the recently migrated refugee would be dominated by talk in a foreign language which presents a territory of the unfamiliar. The universal language of music can reach into this classroom and engage the child through its ability to express emotions without cultural constraints. Furthermore, without the use of a common language the unique culture of the child can still find its own expression through the arts. It may be one of the reasons music was so effective in the engagement of multicultural communities in disadvantaged settings (for example, one of the schools studied contained 92 percent of students from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE)).”* VCSPB considers that this observation, which is echoed in other research, demonstrates the ability of music to provide benefits in all areas of the curriculum.

Current provision of music education in schools

Like other sectors in the Victorian Education system, the provision of music education varies from school to school in the Catholic Sector. Access to music is often limited to students from more affluent backgrounds or where music is highly valued by the parents. The evidence demonstrates quite clearly that music has its greatest impact if it is experienced in the primary school years. Where children miss out on that experience this is a significant educational opportunity that is lost, not just with respect to music but in respect of the other non-musical benefits.

As parents with children in Catholic schools, we hold social justice as a core belief which we voice and action. A key aspect of social justice and the promotion of social inclusion is equal access to rights and benefits. The education system in Victoria must not deny primary school children equal access to music or perpetuate social exclusion for those children.

VCSPB notes that in the Catholic sector (like other educational sectors), that music is taught as a standalone subject in secondary schools.

The 2006 *National Review of School Music Education: Key Messages* (DEEWR) by ‘revealed patchiness in opportunities for participation in music, significant variability in the quality of teaching and teacher education, a need for much greater support for music teachers, and unintended

⁴ 2012: 52



detrimental impacts on music education arising changes in the place of music within the overall curriculum. The recommendations from this Review and the action points from the National Music Workshop Report (Australian Music Association, March 2007) were considered in the Victorian context by the Victorian School Music Action Group. The VCSPB commends the key suggested actions (see **Appendix 1**) in the areas of the status of music, access and equity, pre-service training and professional development for teachers, curriculum and the promotion of partnership development in music education. Suitable accountability and reporting would follow.

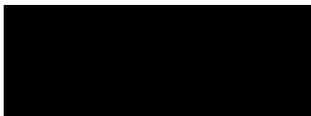
In terms of the factors that affect the quality of music education in schools, the detail of this issue is outside the scope of the VCSPB's functions. Having said that, the VCSPB believes that a user pay system will adversely affect music education as it reduces the number of students who can access music irrespective of their talent or passion for music. Ultimately this system will impact on the quality of music education as some of the most talented may be overlooked and denied an opportunity to use their gifts.

Future optimum provision of music education in schools

Governance and oversight arrangements, funding and support.

Music education is highly valued by parents and by many experts in the field, but the system (in particular the curriculum) does not appear to value music as a standalone subject. The VCSPB for all the reasons detailed above, would like to see this change and for music to be taught as a standalone subject with specialist teachers in all schools, including primary schools. This necessarily will require additional funding and supports for the teaching of music. In this respect the VCSPB supports the key suggested actions made by the Victorian Schools Music Action Group. Many of the experts have referred to music education as being in crisis, we are not in a position to adequately assess this, but as parents believe strongly in ensuring that music education is properly valued and recognised in the curriculum. This will require on-going support through funding, professional development and teacher training

The VCSPB acknowledges the importance of this Inquiry and is pleased to have the opportunity to canvass these issues amongst the Catholic school parent community and report through this submission.



Tracey O'Neill
CHAIR



Appendix 1

Victorian Music Workshop Report

<http://www.amuse.vic.edu.au/EXTRA/Vic%20Music%20Workshop%20report%20May.pdf>

Key suggested actions

Adoption of the following actions will result in the successful implementation of the recommendations of the NRSME here in Victoria:

1. Status of Music

- That the Victorian Government, its departments and authorities explicitly and unambiguously develop statements and policy that demonstrate to Victorian school systems, school leaders, teachers and parents the role, extent and benefits associated with music learning in Victorian schools. These statements should demonstrate linkages to the *The Future of Schooling in Australia* report
- That continuous, sequential and developmental music programs from P to Year 10 (as outlined in the NRSME's *Guidelines for Effective Music Education*) be *explicitly* supported within the VELS framework and throughout Victorian schools
- That the Victorian Department of Education and Training and other stakeholders recognise the extent of parental and community demand for music education and assist schools by promoting music education program models that effectively include music learning within the timetable to all Victorian schools
- Work with the Commonwealth and other States through MCEETYA (and other mechanisms) to ensure reporting on participation and attainment in music education is achieved as outlined in the NRSME report.

2. Access and Equity

- Provide sufficient teachers with adequate training and skills to provide quality music education for all Victorian school students
- Collaborate with the Victorian Institute of Teaching, so that by 2012 all generalist primary teachers who complete their training can demonstrate an appropriate level of music competency before entering the classroom
- Provide special programs so all students in special education settings have a meaningful music education experience delivered by music specialists
- Further expand opportunities for students identified as gifted and talented so they have access in school and/or in the community to music programs that will enhance their development.

3. Primary Music Education

- Over time increase the number of specialist music teachers and extend the provision of instrumental music programs throughout the primary years in all Victorian school systems. Realistic and achievable benchmarks should be set at intervals of three years, that is 2010, 2013 and 2016.

4. Access to Instrumental and Voice-Based Programs and Activities

- Provide all necessary resources so that every Victorian school student has the opportunity to participate in continuous, sequential and developmental instrumental and voice based music programs
- That students with interest and talent in these areas are provided opportunities to access sustained supportive programs.



Appendix 1

5. School Leadership in Music Education

- Affirm to school leadership, parents and the community the benefits and value of music learning
- Explicitly communicate and reinforce the value of music learning, including the non-musical benefits through policy statements and reports such as *The Future of Schooling In Australia* report.

6. Facilities and Equipment

- Provide funding for facilities and equipment where school leaderships have chosen to include music learning as part of their schools program so that they may to deliver programs in line with *Guidelines for Effective Music Education* from the NRSME
- That schools and/or classrooms where teachers can currently demonstrate effective music skills are suitably resourced through the provision of teacher resources and materials and core music education equipment.

7. Pre-service Teacher Training for Specialist Music Teachers; and

8. Pre-service Teacher Training for Generalist Primary Teachers

- That specific competency measures for both future specialist music teachers and generalist primary teachers be developed as part of future teacher accreditation processes by the Victorian Institute of Teaching
- That demonstrated music skills be a requirement of teacher registration no later than 2012.

9. Professional Development for Teachers

- That the VDET, universities, the music sector and school leaders develop a continuous professional learning program for all teachers, both generalist and specialist within music education
- Over the longer term, work with the music and tertiary sectors to establish a Victorian Institute of Music Education.

This entity would develop high performance skills amongst teachers and trainers to support Professional Development programs and school mentoring.

10. Curriculum

- That a rationale that informs teachers of the VELs framework and states what music is (and isn't) with respect to the other subjects bundled in the Arts KLA be developed and distributed
- That the support materials for music education *already* developed for the VELs framework are distributed and promoted to Victorian teachers and that the understanding and use of these materials be supported through professional development programs via VCAA and professional music/teaching bodies
- That further curriculum and teaching resources focusing on student music literacy are developed and promoted to all Victorian primary schools
- That the Victorian Government work with other jurisdictions to implement a national curriculum for music education over time.

11. Creating Time Within The Curriculum For Music Education

- Ensure that music education has the status of a core area of learning and is therefore allocated adequate time within the curriculum
- That particular effort be made to increase time for music education within primary schools.



Appendix 1

12. Technology in Music Education

- Actively support teachers and schools who seek to develop or extend their music programs utilising music technology by providing funding, facilities and equipment
- That the on going development of digital capabilities within all schools include those that support music learning through the use of computers and other digital devices.

13. Music Education Support Services

- That the Victorian Government re-examine teacher support functions such as advisory teachers, curriculum specialists and music education officers with the view of improving access by students to music learning and improving the quality of provision.

14. Partnership Development in Music Education

- Work with the music sector to maximise resources that allow for the universal provision of a quality music education for all Victorian school student.

15. Accountability and Reporting

- Include music education in the assessment process outlined in the Reporting on Performance section of *The Future of Schooling in Australia* report. With the requirement that assessment take place at an individual, school and systemic level as stated in that document
- Support and encourage the adoption from the *Guidelines for Effective Music Education of evidence-based evaluation processes founded on authentic and rigorous assessment to the support ongoing improvement and development of school music programs.*