

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

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The following submission is based on my personal experience as an instrumental and classroom music teacher and coordinator with more than twenty years' experience in state and private schools in Victoria. The view expressed here are not necessarily the views of Canterbury Girls' Secondary College nor the DEECD.

Terms of reference 1,2 and 3:

During the past 24 years, I have taught many students who have gone on to make music a career path. However, for the vast majority, the learning of an instrument is an enjoyable past-time and something which remains a part of their lives well into adult hood. For most, it is hopefully a positive and creative experience enabling self-expression and the means by which students develop self-confidence through performance with their peers.

At Canterbury Girls' SC, every student has the opportunity to participate in aspects of the music program. Those who choose to take on more specialized studies are supported through to year 12 with tuition and a wide variety of solo and ensemble performance opportunities. Specialist instrumental staff are supported by additional visiting clinicians to further enhance the range of musical experiences available to our students and also demonstrate the possibilities to continue their studies beyond secondary education.

At CGSC, there is a strong connection between the Music faculty and the wider school community. In addition to the performance programs we as a faculty produce, the school frequently requests our participating at a range of events. Beyond our school, we have over many years developed a close network with other schools and local businesses and the services of our ensembles are frequently requested at public events such as conferences, street performances and awards evenings.

Whilst we offer an extensive instrumental program at the College, it is our choral program, in which all students participate at across all year levels which is the most inclusive component and one which we view as being of particular significance to the culture of our school. In addition to the compulsory Music classes at years 7 and 8 (one semester only), all student across the colleges are strongly encouraged to participate in the House Choral Festival. This three day event includes soloist choral and instrumentalists, small groups items and a large group item with the prize cup being hotly contested by the four houses. Whilst the soloist and small group items engage our more skilled students, the large group item caters for all who enjoy to sing regardless of training. The high level of engagement and enthusiasm shown annually by the students, and the fact that the event is run primarily by our student leaders with the support of all staff, not just music staff, it is testament to the importance of this event both as a fun and inclusive event but also one where all students have the opportunity through music to come together across year levels and other differences and work together to produce a wonderful experience. Sell out performances remind us not only of the importance of this event to our students but to their parents and the wider community who support it with their attendance.

Choral work is a major component of the classroom program at year 7 and 8 and through the electives offered at years 9 and 10. Students who continue into VCE music subjects are required to sing regularly. My personal belief of 'if you can't sing it, you can't play it' being reinforced. Whilst we may not all consider ourselves to be great singers, the ability to determine and replicate pitch is a fundamental requirement for instrumentalists. The skills associated with the development of intonation and tone development, I believe are best taught through choral work. Our band programs often use choral work to develop the understanding of phrasing, breathing and shape to what we are playing.

During my time as an instrumental teacher and more recently as the head of a large music program, I have observed many changes in the music faculty. Whilst our numbers of individual students choosing to engage in tuition of an instrument has remained fairly consistent with fluctuations being minimal and occurring more between instruments rather than the overall number of students, the major increase has been the demand for greater variety of ensembles. Students are heavily influenced by contemporary popular culture and by the time they reach us in year 7, strong likes and conceived ideas are well established. We are fortunate in our

area to have many local schools with excellent class music programs from which we benefit greatly. The challenge then becomes differentiating our classes sufficiently to be able to challenge those students from these well supported primary schools through to beginning the journey for the many that have not had the exposure to musical equipment, computer software and creative learning opportunities.

The concert band style program has for decades formed the basis of many secondary programs enabling the mass teaching of young students supported in our case by a team of specialist instrumental teachers. This is not always the case. My first teaching experience was of being one of only two teachers in a high school having to teach all woodwind, brass, percussion, guitar and keyboard and develop a classroom program. The disparity between what is possible in one school versus another is highlighted when you are faced with this scenario.

I am a strong supporter of the concert band model as it is a proven and successful means of teaching large numbers of students and is often the most financially viable option found in many schools. At our school, in addition to this structure we have felt the need to expand the range of ensembles to include world music groups such as Klezmer Ensemble utilizing world instruments such as bouzouki, piano accordion, tapan together with orchestral and contemporary instruments played using different techniques. This expansion has created new challenges and inspiration for our students not always content within the larger ensembles. We have also added stage bands, string quartets, smaller vocal groups and other instrument specific chamber ensembles. A strong philosophy behind our program is that it is considered by parents and students to be inclusive. We encourage those students who chose to learn their instrument outside of the college to play in our ensembles as it is only through group performance that so many essential skills are learned.

Teaching via the 'band method', an American teaching model widely accepted as the most efficient and productive model in schools, was how I began as a student and was what was preached throughout my time at university. I believe it to be a sound model but one that needs to continually be modified to better cater for changes in our society so as to better reflect the changing ideas of our young people, and of how music is produced and disseminated today. The speed with which music is created and received via the internet means that the longevity of what our young students are listening to and are influenced by, changes in a blink. If our

craft is to survive, the importance of instruments not usually found in this music needs to be known. Learning an instrument is not being creative. The creativity comes as a result of the learning. The focus on teaching these skills, available on all instruments which in turn provides students with the means to develop creativity must be supported with qualified and expert teaching staff.

General benefits to students as a result of music education;

The connections made with students through the study of music are enormous. In the classroom, students who may have difficulties contributing because of poor social skills are often able to play. At even the most basic levels, students with learning difficulties are able to participate in practical activities and enjoy creating new music and contributing with their peers.

Australian research conducted by ACER looking at evaluation of the Arts in education on student learning included findings from many of the subject schools indicating an increase in the levels of participation, engagement and even attendance for students including those from cultural minorities. Music can be such a great 'leveller' removing language, age, development and social barriers.

More specifically in instrumental lessons, the nature of the lesson itself often leads to a close bond developing between the students and teachers. As a teacher playing in the lesson, demonstrating, you are the example you want them to follow. Students need teachers to be competent and passionate about what they do or why would they continue? The emotional connection comes through the performance and the joy from the achievement of having reached the goal and perhaps having had someone else there to hear it. Even a less than successful performance can be a positive reinforcement by the teacher to encourage reflection and develop a plan for future strategies to improve outcomes.

I have been fortunate to have taught many students considered to have 'special needs' and found the experience to be very positive for both parties. The students I have personally worked with have generally had learning issues such as cognitive or auditory processing problems, anxiety and depression and autistic spectrum disorders. In each case, it was

important to work with year level coordinators and often directly with parents to create a program which supported the student's development. Whilst these students may not have necessarily been able to compete in terms of standard of achievement with other students, the focus on participation, engagement, creativity and enjoyment were paramount. For some, increased fine motor skill development was important; for others, being able to play in a group with other students and then prepare work for performance was the goal; for some, the ability to understand notation where there were literacy concerns. For many students with learning or physical difficulties, listening and participating in music making can be a very rewarding.

Of the many students who learn an instrument, the reality is at our school, that most will participate in this for a period of about three to four years. At this time, the focus on academic rigour often leads to time being taken away from enjoyable past times. Looking at the lists of names of student leaders and high achievers across all subject areas, it is always of interest to notice the dominance of students who at some time studied a musical instrument. We are all aware of the vast array of studies to support the connection between successes in learning to the study of music but it is when we see this as our reality, that we are affirmed by this knowledge.

Terms of reference 4,5 and 6:

Current provision of music education in Victoria:

How instrumental teachers are employed and remunerated is of great concern to school leaders, heads of music departments and individual music teaching staff. In our program we have staff employed in several ways creating an inconsistency in expectations, obligations and salary structure.

Instrumental staff are currently employed by the school however some may have on-going status with the department (DEECD), others are on a one year contract. Due to fluctuations in numbers, it is not always possible to advertise some positions as on-going because the number of students we have the next year may not support the position creating a potential excess situation. Once the decision is made to create an on-going position, moving that teacher on can be next to impossible. Staff employed on contract who are not fully qualified cannot be granted on-going status as teachers, although recently more and more schools have chosen to advertise for ES staff potentially lowering the salary scale for these staff even further. As there has been no tertiary

course available in Victoria in recent years enabling instrumental staff to become fully qualified with an *Instrumental Music* method, there has been a need to employ unqualified staff to teach particular instruments as sessional staff. These staff, on our local payroll and only subject to our own contract system making them employable directly by the school. These staff receive remuneration for all hours of participation in our program however this is at the discretion of each school and is not always the case, disadvantaging staff in some schools.

When we employ a qualified teacher who has taught in the private system, it is also not always possible to acknowledge their level of expertise resulting in very experienced staff being paid as equivalent to a graduate and denying them reasonable a fair remuneration for their level of teaching experience.

In my experience ensemble programs are considered to be part of a teacher's allotment. These ensemble rehearsals usually run before school, lunchtime and after school and are in addition to the normal teaching day and without additional remuneration. It is mandatory for all instrumental students learning at the college, to participate in the ensemble program as it is seen by our program as being an essential component of learning and is also demanded in the current funding model by the region formerly referred to as the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR).

Parents are asked to contribute towards the costs of staffing through a levy if the student is learning from the school or if learning outside of the school but participating in our ensembles. The funds raised via the levy, together with the regional funding granted to the school each year (amount granted determined following the submissions of data relating to the number of students and classes taught) does not cover all of the costs of staffing not the allocated budget used for the purchase of music, scores, musical equipment and other necessary resources. The Parents Association grants funds via a submission process for unfunded equipment and the music program in our school has been well supported by this. As a music department, we also raise much needed funds from fund raising events across two years enabled us to purchase a second hand piano.

We are fortunate at CGSC to have a space designated for the teaching of classroom and instrumental music lessons. Built without any consideration to sound transfer, some of the rooms are adequate in size but all are inappropriate to have teachers in adjoining rooms because of the noise from one to another. There are insufficient rooms for the number of students and teachers and sometimes our staff teach in a storeroom or outside, weather permitting.

Students learning the more expensive and larger instruments (Bassoons, Euphoniums, French Horns etc) are able to hire these from the school for a nominal fee. Many of these instruments are very old and costly to maintain but are irreplaceable for lack of funding. Students learning smaller instruments have no choice but to purchase these themselves. We encourage the sale from former students to new students to assist families with these purchases where possible.

In addition to the annual budget we receive from the school for resources, we also receive an annual Professional Development Fund which enables our base staff and local payroll staff to be supported in keeping up with their profession and also meeting the requirements of VIT registration.

Music education provided through parent contribution

Music is an expensive subject to be involved in. The cost of equipment alone prevents many from participating in the learning of an instrument. Parents are required to provide an instrument either through personal purchase or hire in the case of the more expensive instruments, provide some of the sheet music, pay for excursions, tours, examinations, ongoing replacement costs such as reeds, oils, strings etc and maintenance on their own equipment. Parents are frequently asked to support their children by attending concerts, some of which have tickets costs, and with transport of equipment to and from concert venues. As we do not have a venue on site suitable for main annual concert, we incur the additional costs of hiring an outside venue which in turn increased the cost of tickets to cover this.

Students are encouraged to attend live performance and we occasionally engage the services of musicians, clinicians and travelling performers to present workshops and performances at the school. Whilst every effort is made to minimise costs to parents, we have no choice if we are to offer these important opportunities, to charge for the experience.

Terms of Reference 7 - the extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools;

The Music program at CGSC is highly valued both within the school and throughout our wider community. Pressures on the curriculum mean that all of our students at Year 7 and 8 receive 100 minutes each week of classroom music and a variety of elective programs are offered at years 9 and 10 which are allocated 450 minutes across a two week timetable cycle. Instrumental lessons are given on a withdrawal from class system where students are given a 50 minute lesson, usually in small groups, once a week. Most of our rehearsals run for 1-1 ½ hours.

Head of Music position is a Leading Teacher position and carries a time allowance which enables the coordination of a large number of itinerant music staff. The fact that many of these staff are only in the school for one day each week, creates difficulties with communication and connecting staff to each other and to the range of ensembles we offer. Regular meetings with staff as they are available and more often via email is important in maintaining a program of this size. The idea that we as a group of fifteen people are a team is an important focus but a difficult one to develop given the lack of regular contact between many staff and also the physical isolation of our teaching practice which often means that teachers are not free even at recess and lunchtimes to connect with each other as they are involved in rehearsals or still working with students.

We are fortunate to have over many years been able to participate in the Melbourne Schools Bands festival with as many as seven ensembles performing. Over the past five years, an increasing number of students have participated in the State Schools Spectacular and each year that it has run, we have had significant numbers of students participate in the EMR Youth Concerts.

Many students are encouraged to undertake AMEB and ABRSM examinations where individual teachers feel that this may be of benefit to students. All students undertake an assessment process involving the preparation and presentation of technical work, pieces, sight reading, aural skills and performance both solo and ensemble. These assessments are a combination of formative and summative assessments and are reported against the VELS standards similarly

to all other subject areas in the school.

Terms of reference 8, 9, 10 and 11:

Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools:

Optimum governance and oversight arrangements;

To suggest that throwing more money into music education and in particular instrumental music education would improve the situation is of course to over simplify, however one only has to look at the advertisements of schools both private and State where inclusion of students learning musical instruments are colourfully portrayed and bands and orchestras play at parent evening welcoming prospective families into the school. Music is a leveller, an subject which provides positive reinforcement, an authentic activity where often students are working towards a public performance and provides a 'safe' environment where risk taking is acceptable and even encouraged.

As a teacher regularly involved with working with 'student teachers' completing final rounds from our tertiary institutions, I am often disappointed with the lack of real skills particularly relating to content and 'how to teach' skills shown both in instrumental lessons, ensemble direction and classroom practice. No course currently exists in Victoria which adequately (in my opinion) prepares developing teachers for the range of tasks which will be asked of them in a school. Teachers wanting to become 'qualified to teach instrumental music, have to date had to complete a classroom qualification in order to receive remuneration more appropriate to the level of education and experience they hold. The teaching of classroom music and instrumental music are very different crafts. Tertiary Institutions should recognise this and develop course which teach the real skill needed by those in both areas of music education. Skill in one area does not necessarily imply an understanding of the other.

Optimum use of targeted funding;

Do you think instrumental music should be administered by individual schools, or 'centrally' by Regions and /or specialist school(s)?

A central body responsible for the spreading of qualified teachers across schools based on demonstrated needs is what we had many years ago. The idea that individual schools could take on that responsibility seemed like a good idea, however schools do not have the authority to make staff on-going in certain circumstances and are restricted with altering time fractions where staff are employed for differing amounts of time between several schools. The delegation of responsibilities between schools is also unclear with schools left in hope that all instrumental staff value all of the schools in which they teach. Not all teachers are either capable or willing to take ensemble rehearsals and if they are taking an ensemble in School A, they may not consider themselves to be under any obligation to do the same in School B. Which school the teacher is based in determines who pays for professional development and is a base for the purposes of administration.

The base school should not be responsible though for the staff members' employment in other state schools as is the case where an excess situation occurs in another school. Base schools are held responsible financially for those staff who teach in other schools with no recourse available to them.

Optimum balance of music specific funding, non-music specific funding and parent contribution.

The ability for schools to be able to offer specialised music programs in both primary and secondary schooling is essential if we are really to develop the whole child, including the creative, cognitive and personal competencies needed for academic success. Several Australian studies have established that 'engagement is positively related to academic achievement, and... other educational outcomes, including better attendance and aspirations to higher levels of education'. (Fullarton (2002)p3.

The delivery of music programs in both primary and secondary schools to all students should be funded in a manner which allows all children to have the opportunity to be exposed to the Creative and Performing Arts. "The Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools" paper clearly demonstrated the wide range of benefits particularly in regional and lower socio-economic communities in the engagement and stimulation of students through the Arts and in particular, through the study of music.

The specific study of a musical instrument where this is not in a classroom situation, I think should be jointly funded between parents and schools. It is unrealistic to expect this type of tuition to be fully funded, however, the costs associated with the purchase of equipment and then lessons and then later on, accompanists etc are extremely prohibitive. Students who do undertake this learning greatly benefit the wider school programs and engagement of larger groups of students and their impact on the whole school program should not be underestimated. The potential increase in self-esteem and self-awareness, the development of emotional intelligence, language use and conceptual thought and a greater understanding of music-its forms and the skills associated with it are all powerful reasons to expand the resources available to all schools to support music education for our young people.