

Music Review Submission – February 4, 2013

The Review's Terms of Reference include:

- the current extent and quality of music education in Victorian schools
- the status of music education in Victorian schools
- the current funding arrangements for music education in Victorian schools
- what factors affect the quality of music education in Victorian schools
- the support available in Victorian schools
- key benefits and issues surrounding music education in schools, including any identified gaps in existing educational opportunities
- and music education programs considered best practice

To whom it may concern,

I appreciate this opportunity to write a submission to a Music Review committee.

I would like to voice my opinion regarding instrumental music in Victoria. Over the past 35 years I have taught woodwind instrumental music classes in Primary Schools, High Schools and Colleges in Government schools in Victoria and West Australia, and in the Private school system in Victoria at The Geelong College, Scotch College (Melbourne), Tintern Girls Grammar (Ringwood) and Methodist Ladies College (Kew).

1. the current extent and quality of music education in Victorian schools

Young graduates seem well trained in teaching the instruments but need more instruction about "selling" the instrument to teenagers in particular. There is a great deal of data extolling the virtues of studying the discipline of music but if the numbers of students starting is not increasing the benefits of music is being wasted. Many parents measure the success of a music program by the style of music being taught rather than the rewards of being involved in music.

We often support students who tend to be solitary, don't like many school activities, find personal goal setting important. They can be under achievers and/or high achievers. Because we offer small groups or solo lessons, we offer a wide variety of music situations and styles and we talk to students for long periods of time one to one. We are valued by many students and parents because of our concern. We also teach a student for up to six years. No other teachers have this amount of contact with students each year for up to six in a row.

Small music programs require the most support because a small fluctuation in student numbers has a far greater effect on staff and the program in general. Large music departments tend to have more resources more students interested in reaching high musical goals and therefore more funding per student. There is a place for both types of music schools. One shouldn't jeopardize another. Often the quality of teaching is the same but other factors come in to it.

2. the status of music education in Victorian schools

Teachers, students and parents generally like the idea of learning music so long as it does not take time away from other activities. Consequently the Principal classes and all the school staff need to support music much more across the board. Staff, parents and students need to be reassured and encouraged by the Principal classes and all the school staff as much as possible that music enhances learning rather than detracts. Unfortunately not all Principal class staff and all the school staff support music to this extent and are not seen to support music to that extent. School boards as representatives of parents in running the school seem to value music when they need, would like, items at official occasions, concerts and fairs, and do not always support the efforts put in by the music staff.

One trouble in most schools is the difficulty of teaching instrumental music as withdrawal classes which affect the teacher's classes, the student's classes and this increases the parents concern regarding their children falling behind in general school subjects.

3. the current funding arrangements for music education in Victorian schools

The current funding arrangements seem to give principals more and more control over the finances. As a result the attitude of the Principal directly effects the funding amount and the direction the money is spent. This results in unstable instrumental funding, pressure on music staff to perform as the Principal wants (numbers of students) and unreliable job prospects for many instrumental staff. Funding and staffing would be better controlled and directed by people, not Principals, with music expertise who understood music programs and staffing for them.

4. what factors affect the quality of music education in Victorian schools

The quality of teaching music depends on many aspects. But I believe it is mostly about communication between staff, parents and students. Trainee students and music courses do not teach this aspect enough. Good teachers are good communicators, they can 'sell' their ideas to other people in a way that encourages the attributes of learning. I believe more emphasis on psychology, socialization, and marketing would be great assets for an instrumental teacher. The ability to speak to children in a manner that imbues confidence, trust and dedication is more important than is given credit in training courses.

Instrumental music programs rely on instrumental teachers being enthusiastic, willing to work out of school hours, have the ability to run large and small groups and teach individual and group instrument lessons. They require instruments of their own, music for all the instruments they teach, keep up to date with AMEB and VCE music and requirements, a reliable car to travel to and between schools, arranging skills are good to have and the ability to get on with many (1-7) music directors and school administrations and report writing requirements. Plus if the music program numbers decline, despite these efforts, instrumental teachers could be declared in excess or given notice that they are not needed the next year, often in February when a low number of applicants appears.

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Drum teachers should also teach percussion. Some do not. They need support from the region to develop in this area.

It is most beneficial for an instrumental program to be coordinated by a member of staff that is full time in the school to help maintain continuity of the program.

5. the support available in Victorian schools

Support needs to be given to schools, staff, instrumental staff, students and parents to help maintain a vibrant music program. Adequate money is one. An adequate number of regional support staff who are given the time to sit with school based staff to work out individual school strategies and to support the instrumental staff whose numbers are declining not necessarily due to their teaching strategies but other factors within the school. Support to parents who are financially struggling to support their children and pay for music lessons, books and instruments. More free regional concerts for students to participate in and by professionals giving free school concerts on instruments. Instrument pools owned by the department and distributed and redistributed to needy schools.

Class room teachers do not appreciate the difficulties that instrumental staff have with feeling solitary, un-involved in school decisions, and the looming end of year dilemma, sinking feeling about what students they will have after the Christmas holidays. Class room teachers are assured of year 7 classes each year they work. not just good recruitment years.

6. key benefits and issues surrounding music education in schools, including any identified gaps in existing educational opportunities

Music programs at their best provide a support network to students across all school levels (vertically), and helps year level students bond, talk and experience socialization in a non threatening environment. Students can combine progress, goals, fun and out of school goals and activities within a homogeneous group who are non threatening to each other. Much of sporting groups is about beating someone, music is about doing your best to improve yourself and the group and the reward is applause and a lifelong interest and involvement.

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The most serious problem with the Victorian instrumental system is not being able to start students in primary school and there for start building the program from this early age. All successful music programs in Victoria and interstate, private or public, start students in the primary years and build the program from this broad base.

7. and music education programs considered best practice

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Looking after instrumental staff in each school means talking to them each time, making them feel welcome as they return to the school, trying to make them feel involved in decisions which concern them and their students. The best administrators need to relate to their instrumental staff and often these people have experience in teaching instruments. Class room teachers do not appreciate the difficulties that instrumental staff have with feeling solitary, un-involved in school decisions, and the

looming end of year dilemma, sinking feeling about what students they will have after the Christmas holidays. A good program can address many of these pressures on instrumental staff by being well organised, have planning well in advance, a good recruitment plan, before and after Christmas and mid-year, and a good music administrative computer program. A good instrumental music elements require a certain amount of structural elements to help it function effectively, this could be provided by the education department to all programs.

I believe the instrumental administrative model set up in West Australia is very good. I taught there for 7 years. It is ran like a school(Principal and staff), instrumental staff are the teachers in the school and all communication and administration is conducted as if it is a school. It provides stability for instrumental staff, adequate funding and support services and has good communication avenues. A library, in-service requirements, non teaching staff, etc. like a normal school. More importantly, instrumental; teaching begins in grade 5 in Primary Schools and continues through cluster type areas between the main high school (usually 1) and the feeder primary schools (usually 5). The system ensures primary parents and students understand they can continue learning in to secondary school and it provides some security to the secondary school about getting new instrumental students coming each year who have already learned.

Mr Lee Trigg