

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

Education and Training Committee

57<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Received from the Legislative Assembly on 23 October 2012

## Background

I am responding to this review with over 30 years teaching experience in all Victorian education systems (Government, Non Government Catholic) and sectors (early childhood, primary secondary, tertiary).

I commenced learning the flute at Canterbury Girls' High School in 1968, where I was one of 100 students in the very new instrumental music program in Victoria. I studied through to the end of form six, with the same teacher. That opportunity is not standard today. In 1990, I returned to teaching in the Government system with a fulltime load as a region-employed woodwind instrumental music teacher across a number of schools and regions. I still hold this position, although totally in the Western (now South Western Victoria Region).

The Victorian program has 'grown like Topsy' and the administrative concerns of instrumental music teachers and school music coordinators have always been related to this fact. Historically, the advantage is that the program and its teachers have always had significant flexibility (now considered too much as the years have rolled on) in comparison to Government instrumental music programs in other Australian States and Territories.

I will limit my comments to the following terms of reference:

### Evidence supporting music education in schools

(1) benefits to society and to individual students wanting to pursue music as a career

The choice of words "to pursue music as a career" suggests that the focus is on gathering evidence that reflects benefits to students aiming for a career as a performer. I hesitate to use the term 'professional musician' reflecting a growing body of Australian and international research that takes as its starting point the question, What is a Musician? Musicians are involved in portfolio careers and have a career in music. For practicality, I recommend the reference by Michael Hannan (2003) Australian Guide to Careers in Music, now available on the Music Council of Australia website:

[http://www.musiccareer.com.au/index.php/Australian\\_Guide\\_to\\_Careers\\_in\\_Music](http://www.musiccareer.com.au/index.php/Australian_Guide_to_Careers_in_Music)

(2) general benefits to students as a result of music education and

(3) benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education

These two terms of reference are very similar and the quote from the Media release (Committee to consider whether school music education is hitting the right note, 3 December 2012) suggests that the answers are already known.

“We all recognise that music plays a crucial role in the development of children and young people,” said the Committee’s Chair, Mr David Southwick MP. “Not only do they gain enjoyment and reward from making and listening to music, but research also shows that learning music can lead to improved academic and social outcomes for children and young people.”

Published case studies of successful programs, gathered through evidence submitted to the Education and Training Committee, would be valuable to inspire others teachers and school principals to develop, build and sustain current or new programs.

#### Current provision of music education in Victoria

##### (4) music education provided through specific funding for music education

The current funding approach based on school population does not take into account the actual number of students in the school wishing to learn an instrument. As a result schools have staff who are under utilised and others have extended waiting lists. Programs that focus on rock bands and ignore support for concert band instruments and strings, is a related issue. Instrumental music teachers can be under utilised for both general lack of interest in instrumental music in the school (geographical/cultural reasons) and a specific focus in a school. Equity of staffing schools has been an ongoing debate from the beginning of the program (1960s) – ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’.

##### (7) the extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools

Actions and decision-making within individual schools - by instrumental music, classroom music, principals and parents - directly impact the extent and quality of instrumental music provision. Many of the issues are locally-based. Examples of actions that inhibit instrumental music teachers to run half-decent programs include:

- Working conditions for instrumental music teachers – changing rooms every lesson damp, dust, inadequate/no sound proofing, close proximity to the toilet, teach anywhere will do. Some teachers need to pack up and change rooms every lesson and then set up again to teach. ‘A wandering Minstrel I...’
  - Failure of school instrumental music coordinators to show interest in the all aspects of the instrumental music program, no support and administration to benefit all instrumental music teachers, is only interested in rock programs at the expense of other instruments, although teachers continue to be allocated to schools.
  - Interest from school principals that is word - not action - based.
  - Other subject faculties not supporting music, e.g., actively enforcing that VCE students do not study VCE music study designs, learn an instrument, refusing to allow students to have lessons in school time. This puts pressure on instrumental music teachers to provide before school, lunchtime and after school lessons.
- \* Individual teachers refusing to allow Year 7-10 students to attend lessons as their subject is the only important one. They have little regard for instrumental music teachers being only available to a school one day a week.
- Employment of school-based under/postgraduate musicians, without teaching qualifications, who are pursuing a performance career - to accommodate the shortfall of availability of DEECD staff. Teaching is part of their portfolio career and it takes second priority to performance/recording aspects. Results in continually changing

lesson days and short term employment (one year). Student learning is disrupted and the opportunity to work with the same teacher over an extended time is not possible.

- School timetables based on four lessons per day (e.g. 70-75-80 minutes each). Instrumental lessons need to be half the time of each school lesson, making it difficult for the students in each second half to remember to come on time. They constantly need to be collected, resulting in a major loss of lesson time.

- Non-payment of fees, even as low as \$30 per year. Students stop before they start, stop as soon as an invoice is sent home. If fee collection is enforced, the number of students learning drops dramatically. Fees defeat the purpose of teaching and encouraging students to learn an instrument.

- With little or parent support, students do not attend the one concert per year, in the evening and are discouraged from practicing at home.

State-based examples:

- No career structure for instrumental music teachers within the Government education structure. The career restructure process (1994) invited discussions with instrumental music teachers but there was no outcome.

- Advice given in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (2005) makes it possible for a student (based on curriculum offering decisions made by schools) not to study music. It is possible across Government primary and secondary schools not to teach classroom music from Year Prep to Year 10. Semester-based and elective-based classroom music is the norm in secondary schools, therefore instrumental music is the only continuous form of music education available to students.

- The development of instrumental music levels and support materials associated with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards have not been published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

#### Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

(8) optimum governance and oversight arrangements

- Employment of a statewide instrumental coordinator (we did have one) who has oversight of all activities in the state. Victoria is the only state that funds an instrumental program without a statewide coordinator/instrumental school principal who can ‘represent’ the state on a national level.

- Implementation of the massive regions, from 2013, with one fulltime instrumental music coordinator per region makes the job an impossible one, for example, South Western Victoria Region.

In an advocacy campaign in America (2012), a fourth grade student coined the slogan “Music is medicine for the mind”.

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