



12 February 2013

Ms Kerry Riseley  
Executive Officer  
Education and Training Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

**RE: INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT, BENEFITS AND POTENTIAL OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS**

Dear Ms Riseley,

I am writing to make a submission to the Education and Training Committee regarding the Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

I would like to request that my name and any personal/identifying details of mine be kept confidential in order to prevent any of my comments reflecting negatively on the school my children currently attend.

**SUBMISSION**

As a parent, the disparity between schools in the availability and quality of music programs has been a concern of mine for some time. I would like to share my personal experience of music (and lack of) at the primary school level as I believe it is relevant to your inquiry. My personal experience could be considered a case study for the inquiry.

My eldest daughter has attended two different government primary schools in Melbourne – one with a music program and one without. We have experienced first-hand what a significant difference music makes to the culture of a school and to the quality of each child's education.

My eldest daughter was lucky enough to have had two years at a school which offered a brilliant music program with very competent and committed teachers. Music was taught as a general subject and in addition, instrumental music was available to those students who chose to participate. This school was able to offer a junior choir, senior choir, Recorder, junior strings, senior strings, junior band, senior band and a rock band.

At this school, the children invariably came out of music class looking very happy and enriched. Besides the obvious inherent benefits of music, through general music class the kids learnt about different cultures, history, geography and maths. Through the instrumental music program they had the opportunity to mix with kids from other grades and put on a brilliant performance at the end of the year. They also performed at school assembly, held soirees throughout the year and performed out in the community. The connection to the community through music was wonderful. The performances

bolstered the kids' confidence. At Christmas time, the whole community was invited to a sing-along with the children where the teachers played piano and violin.

The music program didn't just benefit the individual child; it shaped and permeated the culture of the school. This was a very vibrant school where the parents talked about how much they loved the school at drop off and pick up times. (It wasn't just music that made this a great school, but there's no doubt music was critical.) Even walking past the school and hearing music being played would make you feel good. As music was a general subject available to all children, music was egalitarian and inclusive. There were no auditions or competitions – music was available to all students.

At my daughters' current school there is no music program to speak of and it feels there is really something lacking. Although many parents I have spoken to at our current school wish for their children to have the opportunity to learn music in a school setting, music is not taught as part of the regular curriculum. My understanding is that, some years ago, our current school had to make a choice between having ICT or music as it did not have the funds for both. Instrumental music is offered through two private companies on the school grounds (one inside schools hours and one outside school hours), with attendance numbers being quite low, which means that music remains on the periphery and sadly does not really contribute to the culture of the school.

By way of substitute, some efforts are made to incorporate music in some capacity by having the occasional term length programs run by an external provider for one year level only, such as, drumming workshops. These workshops are great in themselves but are no substitute for a solid school music program.

Other attempts have been made to incorporate music in some capacity, for instance with a school choir, but because there are no qualified or experienced music teachers at the school, and because the commitment to it is not really there, and because it is not valued, the quality of the teaching is not satisfactory and has in fact put some kids off music altogether, which is very sad. The message our children are receiving is that music is not valued.

There is an argument put forward by some that music can be pursued outside of school. This view holds music as superfluous when evidence shows that music is integral to education. Private tuition is an individual pursuit whereas music education in schools is an educational and school community pursuit. Private tuition is no substitute for music as part of the school curriculum. Perhaps some people undervalue music because they have not witnessed or experienced it taught well.

In addition, when it comes to school performances, because there is no music program, these performances tend to be dominated by the children who go to private lessons. This divides the children into performers on the one hand and spectators on the other. The children in the audience learn that music is not in their domain and that they are just to remain spectators. The message the kids are receiving is that you have to be wealthy and talented to participate, and that music is an exclusive, competitive, individual pursuit. At the primary school level, music should not be about talent. And it should not necessarily be exclusive.

Furthermore, when school concerts incorporate performances that children have learnt from private tuition, the quality of song choice can be questionable. My children have gone from learning beautiful, harmonic and historically relevant folk songs to watching their pre-teen peers shake their behinds and sing inappropriate lyrics over the top of pre-recorded top 40 songs. This is because our current school lacks a musical framework. Children will discover questionable music without our assistance; shouldn't we be offering something more than this?

Music is crucial to mental health and considering the current climate of public and mental health, I think mental health is a strong argument for the inclusion of music programs in all schools. It seems very unfair that a child's education depends on luck and the school zone you live in.

Finally, in the context of other subjects, it is difficult to fathom why sport and other subjects are given preferential treatment over music. We don't treat other subjects in the manner that we treat music. Quality music programs can enrich the culture of our school communities, and support our children's learning and mental health. Music is vital to education.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences and thoughts on music in schools. Again, I would like to remain anonymous as I don't want my comments to reflect badly on our current school.

Kind regards and all the best with the inquiry,

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