



VASSP

Victorian
Association
of State
Secondary
Principals

VASSP response to the inquiry into music education in Victorian schools

Background

The Committee invites the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals to express its views on the Inquiry's terms of reference, and to provide information on:

- 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 for music education in Victorian schools
- key benefits and issues surrounding music education in schools, including any identified gaps in existing educational opportunities
- any music education programs you consider to be best practice.

The place of music in the curriculum

The benefits of music in the curriculum are clear, both from a cultural and an intellectual perspective. The AusVELS website¹ says of The Arts in general:

The Arts are unique, expressive, creative and communicative forms that engage students in critical and creative thinking and help them understand themselves and the world. In every society the Arts play a pivotal role socially, economically and culturally. The Arts encourage the development of skills and the exploration of technologies, forms and processes through single and multimodal forms. They fuel the exploration of ideas that cross the gamut of human emotions and moods through holistic learning using cognitive, emotional, sensory, aesthetic, kinaesthetic and physical fields.

The draft Australian curriculum² says:

The Arts, Music aims to ensure that students develop:

- *the confidence to be creative, innovative, skilful and informed musicians both individually and collaboratively*
- *knowledge, understanding and skills in music through developing skills in musicianship, composing, performing, improvising, responding and listening with intent and purpose\ aesthetic knowledge and respect for music and music practices across global communities, cultures and music traditions*
- *understanding how to use knowledge and skills to build a future as a global music citizen who engages with music for a lifetime*

¹ <http://ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/The-Arts/Overview/Introduction>

²

http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/DRAFT_Australian_Curriculum_The_Arts_Foundation_to_Year_10_July_2012.pdf#search=music

There has been considerable research into the value of music, and a summary of some of this is available in the following embedded document:



Music Advocacy
quotations.doc

Where are we now?

When considering music programs in schools, it is necessary to recognise the two quite different types of programs that are generally available.

1. Classroom music

It is common for music to be a part of junior and middle school programs, although the delivery of the program will vary from school to school. Music may be a compulsory subject in Year 7 and 8 programs, and an elective after that. Programs will include elements of music appreciation, music theory and music practice (the playing of an instrument of some sort).

Commonly, music suffers from “curriculum crush” in the junior school, and does not have a large amount of time allocated to it. By the middle school, numbers of students studying classroom music is relatively small, as is the case with the many other competing performing or arts subjects. Thus, numbers at VCE level are generally small

Funding of these programs is usually from within the school’s SRP resources. Staffing is problematic.

2. Instrumental Music

This focuses on learning an instrument, such as brass, woodwind, strings, percussion or voice. It often taught by part-time itinerant musicians employed either by the Region or the school. Regions have a set budget for this which is not tied to student numbers. Thus, if the number of students learning an instrument in the Region increases, resources will be spread more thinly to cope.

Programs in Instrumental Music are taught in small groups, or perhaps individually at senior levels. The programs involve learning an instrument and some music theory and require ensemble or orchestra participation.

These programs require high staffing levels, spaces for practice rooms (including ensemble and orchestra rehearsal), instruments, and concert venues.

Regions vary in their approach to providing staff to schools, but all have some sort of criteria for the provision of staff. An example is the Eastern Region, which uses a questionnaire to assess programs and supply instrumental music teachers according to an agreed formula.

However, Regional resources are never enough to cover the cost of programs and it is usual for students to be charged a fee to participate in them. This will usually be in addition to costs associated with the hire or purchase of an instrument and this is used to cover the gap between actual salaries and the regional allocation or to employ additional teachers.

Across the state, the extent of such programs in school varies considerably. Some schools can be considered music specialists because of their large programs and dedicated facilities. Other schools have solid, established programs but not the investment in large scale facilities. Some schools have emerging programs where they are attempting to increase participation and facilities while there are some schools who have limited programs and facilities. In some areas groups of schools work together to offer a broad music program involving a more diverse range of Instrumental Music than they could on their own.

3. Best Practice

To become a “best practice” school in music requires considerable resource allocation. Although there are no available statistics on why parents choose a particular school, it is clear that schools which to a greater or lesser extent specialise in music will attract those students who wish to make music their career, or who are especially interested in learning to play an instrument. The prime example of this is the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, which has purpose built spaces and is located in central Melbourne.

Other schools with exemplary programs include Blackburn High School, McKinnon High School, University High School, Mt Waverley Secondary College, Ballarat High School, Ringwood Secondary College, Frankston High School

and Bairnsdale Secondary College. The Select Entry Schools also have extensive music programs. It is interesting that most such schools attract a 'middle class' clientele.

Where to from here

Given the clear evidence that participation in music programs is of benefit to students, should we or can we raise the bar and narrow the gap that currently exists between schools? To provide all schools with the same resources as the best music schools will be a difficult task. It would be expensive, and current governments are generally not seeking ways to increase spending in any area. Although the Gonski report recommends large increases in funding of schools, the rhetoric from all governments is more around improving performance in subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science – subjects for which there is widespread comparative testing both nationally and internationally - than it is around The Arts. However there is considerable evidence to support a high correlation between competence in music and aptitude in mathematics, science and language. The way forward depends to a large extent on the level of resourcing that will be applied.

If funding levels are maintained at the current level

There are two concerns that impact on secondary school program.

1. Currently, programs in primary schools are patchy. If funds currently being spent in secondary schools were transferred to primary schools, there would be a commensurate reduction in what secondary schools could offer. The likely result is inadequate programs at both primary and secondary levels, with neither being able to offer rigorous, effective programs. It would be naïve to think that there could be system-wide improvements with no increase in funding.
2. If all funds are distributed on a whole school per capita basis in secondary schools, rather than on the basis of the size and quality of the music program, there will also be winners and losers. Importantly, if there is an expectation that the same level of funding could be used more effectively to build music across the system, then there needs to be an accompanying statement as to how that this is to be achieved. The danger is once again that good programs will be dissipated in favour of general mediocrity.

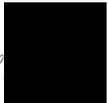
If funding levels are increased

The two ways of allocating resources are on a whole school per capita basis (presumably with a set base level funding) and on a program basis. The latter rewards schools that already have a developed music program, but makes it difficult for other schools to build such a program unless some seed funding is provided.

VASSP Recommendations

1. If there is to be an increased expectation in music education, then it should be accompanied by increased funding to increase the size of programs and reduce the salary gaps that schools need to meet. VASSP does not accept that spreading the current resources even more thinly can lead to better system-wide programs. To progress students' skill level in music, additional classroom music time needs to be allocated. Music rooms and practice spaces need to be provided and need to be sound proofed.
2. To increase transparency of funding, there should a system-wide model for distributing funds. Eastern Region currently uses a model which would be a good starting point as it is fair and it does provide increasing resources to schools that are building their programs (by requiring all other schools to marginally increase the salary gap payments) as growth occurs. A system of 'seeding grants' needs to be available for start-up purposes.
3. As music requires considerable additional resources over and above what can be allocated through SRP budgets, it should be recognised that only some schools will be able to provide the highest quality programs. However, students from all geographic locations should have access to such specialist schools and this should be a priority in resource allocation. Consider clusters of schools.

4. The total music 'bucket' should be automatically indexed for:
 - Salary increases
 - Increases in total secondary school enrolments
5. The availability and quality of teachers is a major issue, especially in the Instrumental Music area. Instrumental Music teachers should be selected by each school rather than appointment by the region or the centre.



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1. Music has been found to boost the immune systems of patients after surgeries, lower stress in pregnant women and decrease the blood pressure and heart rate in cardiac patients, thus reducing complications from cardiac surgery [sources: Lloyd, Wiley-Blackwell].
2. Secondary students who participated in band or orchestra reported the lowest lifetime and current use of all substances (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs). – Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse Report. Reported in Houston Chronicle, January 1998
3. A Canadian research group from McMaster University compared two groups of six children between the ages of 4 and 6; one group took Suzuki music lessons and the other had no musical instruction. The results, which were published in the online journal Brain on September 20, 2006, showed that the children who received musical instruction excelled above their peers in memory skills as well as 'non-musical' abilities such as literacy, mathematics and even IQ.
4. Music students out-perform non-music on achievement tests in reading and math. Skills such as reading, anticipating, memory, listening, forecasting, recall, and concentration are developed in musical performance, and these skills are valuable to students in math, reading, and science. - B. Friedman, "An Evaluation of the Achievement in Reading and Arithmetic of Pupils in Elementary. School Instrumental Music Classes," Dissertation Abstracts International.
5. A ten-year study indicates that students who study music achieve higher test scores, regardless of socioeconomic background. - Dr. James Catterall, UCLA.
6. In a Scottish study, one group of elementary students received musical training, while another other group received an equal amount of discussion skills training. After six (6) months, the students in the music group achieved a significant increase in reading test scores, while the reading test scores of the discussion skills group did not change. - Sheila Douglas and Peter Willatts, Journal of Research in Reading, 1994.
7. The Australian business community wants kids to learn music at school. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) last year delivered its 'Skills for a Nation: A Blueprint for Improving Training and Education Policy 2007 – 2017'. Among its fifteen recommendations for improving children's education in the primary years was: 'There should be an opportunity for all students to learn a musical instrument in primary school.'
8. A research team exploring the link between music and intelligence reports that music training - specifically piano instruction - is far superior to computer instruction in dramatically enhancing children's abstract

reasoning skills necessary for learning math and science. – Dr. Frances Rauscher and Dr. Gordon Shaw, Neurological Research, University of California at Irvine, February, 1997

9. Physician and biologist Lewis Thomas studied the undergraduate majors of medical school applicants. He found that sixty- six percent (66%) of music majors who applied to medical school were admitted, the highest percentage of any group. Forty-four percent (44%) of biochemistry majors were admitted. – “The Case for Music in the Schools,” Phi Delta Kappan, 1994

10. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania School District analyzed its 1997 dropout rate in terms of students’ musical experience. Students with no ensemble performance experience had a dropout rate of 7.4 percent. Students with one to two years of ensemble experience had a dropout rate of 1 percent, and those with three or more years of performance experience had a dropout rate of 0.0 percent. – Eleanor Chute, “Music and Art Lessons Do More Than Complement Three R’s,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 13, 1998