

From: "Boekel, Tracey T" [REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

Please find attached my submission for the Parliamentary Enquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of Music Education in Victorian schools.

Kind regards,

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Submission for the Parliamentary Inquiry into the extents, benefits and potential of Music Education in Victorian schools

When receiving an education in music, students are essentially learning a new language. They learn how to speak, write and read music. They learn how to translate notation to their instrument when playing music, which requires a high level of concentration and coordination.

Students who learn this language have a world of opportunities open up to them. They meet with other like minded people (usually peers) to create music. They learn how to work as part of a team and communicate non-verbally by reading the gestures and body language of their ensemble members or ensemble director. They learn how to manage their time effectively when practising, and when juggling their practise with their other commitments. Students who are involved in active music making (the actual playing of a musical instrument, not passively listening to music) have shown to perform higher academically than their peers, as music engages both sides of the brain. However, unlike most other subjects students learn during their schooling, music (along with the other arts) allows students to express themselves non-verbally. Through music, students speak of their happiness, anger and sadness. My school's music students are encouraged to think creatively, be proactive, express themselves, take ownership of their work, be committed, and learn effective ways to clearly communicate their ideas. These are skills and attributes we want in students going through our schools, and music promotes and develops these in a way very few other subjects can.

From experience both as a classroom teacher and instrumental teacher, the most effective way to teach music is through learning an instrument. When learning an instrument, students are not only acquiring the skills to make music, but also all the theory associated with music. By actively teaching students how to play an instrument and read music, you are effectively eliminating the need for theory classes, as they learn all their theory as they learn to play the instrument. When students learn music as an extra curricula activity, they learn all the necessary music theory within their lessons, and are more likely to retain this information as they are using it practically every time they play their instruments. Students who learn an instrument as an extra curricula activity from a qualified teacher (not including those who are self taught or taught a few tunes by a friend or relative) consistently outperform all my students in classroom music, both at a compulsory level (Years 7 and 8) and in the elective subjects (Years 9 and 10).

There are schools who have the facilities and resources to run programs where every student has the opportunity to learn an instrument in Year 7 as part of their classroom music curriculum. They are set aside timetabled time to have group lessons once a week on their chosen instrument, and students are able to rent their instruments from the school for the year to take them home to practise. Due to lack of resources and space, my school can only offer it to one Year 7 class a year – the High Achievers class. If the government is serious about improving music education in Victoria, then every child in their schools should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument in Year 7 for a semester or the entire year. It is not enough to simply have them come in once a week, learn to play "Ode to Joy" on the keyboard or "Seven Nation Army" on the guitar. Without being able to take their instrument home to practise (just as in most subjects students are expected to take work home and revise the day's work) students forget most of what they learn in class the previous week. Every week they are effectively starting again. Resources need to be available in every school to allow students taking music as a subject to be able to take their instrument home (most schools who successfully run these programs stick to brass, woodwind or string instruments, as they are more portable and do not take up space when practising).

To ensure equal distribution of resources between schools, the majority of a school's music program needs to be funded by the Government. The school I am currently teaching at is in a low socio-economic area, and many parents could not afford to pay lesson fees as well as instrument hire. If the Government were committed to ensuring every student has access to teaching and instruments (e.g. pay the instrumental teachers salary and the initial purchase of the instruments) then it would not be unreasonable for schools to ask parents to pay for the instrument hire for the year. This way, even if parents could not pay the hire fee, the child still has access to lessons and an instrument, which still puts them ahead compared to the music education most are receiving.