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Parliamentary inquiry pushes sweeping changes to make music a key part of education in schools

- ALAN HOWE
- HERALD SUN

WHILE music is "uniquely important" for students, perhaps even increasing their IQ, many Victorian children encounter only token musical experience during their vital primary years, a parliamentary inquiry has found.

It found that despite music's essential role in a child's education, there had been few improvements to music education in Victoria for 20 years.

There were no policy guidelines for music education, many teachers and school leaders failed to understand its benefits, and too few teachers had the skills and confidence to teach it.

The Victorian Parliament's education and training committee has made some sweeping recommendations to ensure that music is a part of "every young person's education", and as focused on the lack of teaching staff.

There needs to be "increased training and support for teachers, particularly music teaching at the primary school level," according to inquiry chair Jan Kronberg.

Ian Harvey, who convened the National School Music Workshop for the Howard Government, sees the approach to teaching music as vital.

"Normally this kind of inquiry focuses on curriculum and assessment, the two areas of education politicians usually choose to influence," he said.

"What matters, of course, is what happens between the setting of a curriculum and the assessment - the teaching."

Comment: Time for Premier to face the music

Harvey, who helped bring the Musical Futures teaching program to Australia, wants to see whole of class programs as an equitable, affordable start to improving music in our schools.

Musical Futures UK founder David Price, addressed the inquiry, explaining that the teaching system had led to a four-fold increase in instrumental tuition.

"We began with the simple question: why is the most popular cultural activity for young people the least popular subject in school," said Mr Price, who helped establish Sir Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and was its director of learning.

He warned the committee against having music seen as extracurricular activity where every child might not experience music.

The Government has three months to respond to the report, but already a coalition of peak music bodies has announced a campaign calling on the Naphthine Government to fully implement and fund its recommendations.