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1. GREYMOUTH HIGH'S GARETH TROMPETTER WITH DRUMS TUTOR BRETT PAINTER.
2. REEFTON AREA'S VICKI WOOLHOUSE (LEFT), AISHA WOOLHOUSE AND CLASSROOM TEACHER MARY, WITH CLARINET TUTOR MARK WALTON.

Violin via videoconference

If you're in a rural school, chances are music lessons are not that easy to come by. So, if you have a budding Dame Kiri or Neil Finn growing up in your classroom – or kids who just want to give a musical instrument a try – what do you do? **David Maida** takes notes.

How many teachers at your school know a double-stroke roll from a diddle?* Chances are not many. That's one of the reasons why, last year, the Ministry of Education funded a videoconferencing programme that offered practical music lessons via its Virtual Learning Network.

The trial linked music tutors in central Christchurch with Year 7 to 10 students in four South Island schools – Greymouth High School (drums), Reefton Area School (clarinet), Akaroa Area School (violin), and Amuri Area School (singing lessons).

The initiative's name – E-Mentoring in Online Real-time Music Tuition Project – might be trickier than a high C to get your mouth around, but there's no denying its success.

"With the teacher on the screen it was more helpful because you could see her hand gestures and telling us how to stand and do the breathing with your hand on your stomach and pushing your stomach in to make the voice come out more," said 14-year-old Amuri Area student Claire King.

Claire and her friend Nicole Eastmond said the singing lessons went down a treat and both would like to take more classes via distance learning.

"It was a lot more personalised. You could see facial expressions and then once we started adding movements she could give examples," added Nicole.

The six-week trial programme was run by Merryn Dunmill, project director at Te Puna Puoru National Centre for Research in Music Education and Sound Arts.

"The lessons just went as they would face to face but instead of being able to play together, the tutor would role model and then the students would play," she said.

Given in one 30-minute session each week, the lessons were backed up by face-to-face lessons, the creation of blogs and downloadable website materials, DVDs of actual lessons and, for voice, a CD recording of the vocal warm-ups and songs.

"They'd listen and respond, then model what they'd like the students to do and provide feedback."

One tutor was assigned to each school and the Christchurch School of Music provided the instruments. The videoconference link-up used

the SchoolZone network and although there were some latency issues and slight delays, the real-time direct demonstrations and interactive teaching worked well, according to Dunmill.

"It's not just the fact that the kids from the outskirts or in the rural communities aren't able to access tuition. Even in main centres, there's a real need. Kids would love to be able to learn instruments but can't get access."

Teachers at the four schools were given release time to coordinate the lessons at their end. Some students were even taught about the background and the context of the music they were using. Two of the schools also had local community artists placed with them to promote further development and encourage the students. At Amuri, the singing lessons sparked the formation of a choir.

"The girls became the mentors for a school choir, which developed because of this tuition. They didn't have a school choir but the principal was very excited about what had happened."

Likewise the students were "pretty chuffed" about the programme, as well.

"I think it was huge. All of them wanted to continue. They were in tears at the end. They were very sorry that it had to stop."

The project proved that music could be delivered by videoconferencing rather than putting people in cars. Dunmill is now lobbying for additional e-music mentoring to be funded.

"I think music and dance are probably the hardest, mainly because of the real time-based requirements. They would be a really good testing ground to try wider development for kids who would otherwise struggle to access these kinds of tuition." ▲

More information on the E-Mentoring in Online Real-time Music Tuition Project at: www.merc.canterbury.ac.nz

*Both are percussion terms – a **diddle** consists of two consecutive notes played by the same hand. The **double-stroke roll** is a basic pattern of notes consisting of alternating diddles.