



20 September 2010

Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program

FINAL REPORT

The Chair of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, the Hon Robyn Parker MLC, today released a report on the Building the Education Revolution Program.

Ms Parker said: "There is no doubt that the Building the Education Revolution (BER) Program has injected an enormous amount of much-needed funding into school infrastructure across Australia. Schools throughout the country were elated when the Program was first announced, buoyed by optimism of what they could achieve with their unexpected capital grants."

"However, for many NSW public schools involved in the Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) element of the Program, this excitement quickly dissipated as they witnessed their funding disappear into overly inflated building costs and management fees."

Ms Parker commented that the NSW Government has acknowledged that building costs in NSW public schools are higher than building costs in NSW Catholic schools, and that they have attributed this to higher building standards. However she noted: "Preliminary findings by the Commonwealth BER Implementation Taskforce indicate that there is no significant difference in the quality of facilities in the two systems."

"Not only are costs under P21 overly inflated in the NSW public system, but many schools have received buildings which they did not want, or which are not fit for their purpose. Fitness for purpose issues are a direct result of the NSW Government's inflexible management of P21, which failed to consider the needs and priorities of individual schools. This has been particularly frustrating for schools that wanted to self-manage their projects, but were actively dissuaded from doing so by officers of NSW Government agencies."

Ms Parker said: "School communities have expressed their frustration at seeing money wasted by the mismanagement of the Program. It is clear that the NSW Government placed too great an emphasis on the rapid delivery of P21 projects, to the detriment of the quality and cost of these projects. The result is that value for money has not been achieved in numerous NSW public schools."

"Witnesses from NSW Government agencies emphasised that complaints were only raised in approximately four per cent of NSW public schools, however inquiry participants noted that 'one should not confuse gratitude with satisfaction'. While all schools are clearly grateful for the investment, many are unsatisfied with the outcome, and not all of those schools chose to voice their complaints."

Ms Parker acknowledged that the majority of P21 projects have commenced or have been completed, however noted that "there is still a considerable amount of work to be done." She stated: "It is essential that the problems that have beset the Program to date are not repeated. The Committee has therefore made a number of recommendations for the remaining projects, which are aimed at ensuring that the NSW Government take a more flexible approach to project priorities and templates, that it allows school communities to be more involved in decisions regarding their facilities, and that there be a renewed emphasis on value for money in terms of quality and cost, rather than time."

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In regard to future capital works projects beyond the BER Program, Ms Parker said: "The Committee has recommended that the NSW Department of Education and Training explore delivery options that better involve school communities in design and development decisions, and managing project delivery. A recommendation has also been made for an independent inquiry into the Department's delivery of school capital works projects, which includes comparing the NSW Government school system with other education authorities and their achieved costs and outcomes."

Copies of the report can be downloaded from www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc2
or are available from the Committee Secretariat by calling (02) 9230 2412.

*For further comment please contact the Hon Robyn Parker MLC,
Committee Chair on 9230 3332 or 0427 015 049*