

INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM

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SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENT NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
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8 June 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

Attached is a submission in regards to the Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution program. Ashtonfield Public School has received funding through the Building the Education Revolution program, the primary schools for the 21st Century (P21) strategy. This submission will address key terms of reference including:

- Whether outcomes were of acceptable quality and suitable to the needs of each individual school.
- The use of local builders and trades people during the construction of BER projects.

(Legislative Council, 2010)

Information regarding the outcome of the Building the Education Revolution programs view of this submission would be greatly appreciated. This submission has been written by Amelia Peacock on behalf of Ashtonfield Public School.

Contact Information

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1.0 Executive Summary

In March 2007, Ashtonfield Public School was officially opened as a Public-Private Partnership project. The school received funding from the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) strategy. Hansen Yuncken Pty Ltd was tendered to complete the building projects. One million, five hundred and fourteen thousand dollars was allocated towards new classroom facilities including two classrooms and a Technology Laboratory. As this school is growing it caters for nineteen classrooms whilst it was designed for twelve classrooms. The extra classrooms constructed from the BER program allowed two senior classes to move out of demountables. A Technology Laboratory was also gained from this funding providing essential specific space to hold computers of which the school was in need. This room was positioned under the New South Wales codes for special programs and the student enrolment meant that it was smaller than requested however; it will enhance the learning environment. Three hundred and eleven thousand dollars was also obtained for the refurbishment of their covered outdoor learning area (COLA). Ashtonfield Public School had originally submitted an application for their hall to be extended however their enrolment numbers did not equate to this being seen as necessary and the COLA was taken on instead. The COLA allows more shade and an extension to the hall which benefits the school and the local community. The infrastructures were constructed to a high quality, aesthetically pleasing and matching to existing buildings. The BER program provided approximately one hundred jobs over a nine month period employing local tradespeople and Sydney based tradespeople which was a positive for the local economy. Due to the size of the BER program resources such as steel and roofing supplies were in high demand causing unexpected delays. The company was very accommodating and worked with the school to ensure the projects were completed as quickly as possible and in time for important events such as the Easter concert. The BER program was very beneficial for Ashtonfield Public School with a pleasing final outcome.

2.0 Introduction and background on Ashtonfield Public School

Ashtonfield Public School is delighted to be given an opportunity to contribute to the inquiry regarding the Building the Education Revolution program.

Ashtonfield Public School was officially opened on the 7th March, 2007 by the former Minister for Education and Training, the Hon Carmel Tebbutt, BEc MP and the Hon Bob Baldwin MP, Federal Member for Paterson, on behalf of the preceding Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP. The school is located in Norfolk Street, Ashtonfield, a suburb in the city of Maitland, New South Wales. The Hon Francesco (Frank) Terenzini, BLegS, DipTeach MP, member for Maitland and the Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP, the Federal Electoral Division of the Hunter, represents the Ashtonfield area.

The Hunter region has a large number of public schools with the last school built in the Maitland area in the early 1980's (Tebbutt, 2007). Ashtonfield Public School was the first Hunter school constructed through the Public-Private Partnership project with an estimated building cost of six and half million dollars (Tebbutt, 2007). The New South Wales Government and a grant from the Federal Government partially funded the school buildings. Hansen and Yuncken Pty Ltd as a Public-Private Partnership with Axiom Education built Ashtonfield Public School. Spotless Facility Management supervises the buildings on the site, while the Department of Education and Training oversee, and govern the school.

On the opening of Ashtonfield Public School, two hundred and twenty three students had enrolled in classes from kindergarten to year six, with this number expected to grow to three hundred and fifty students within a three-year period. The current student body for May 2010 is four hundred and eighty eight with around five hundred and twenty students expected to enrol for the first term of 2011.

Within the Building Education Revolution (BER) program, the Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) strategy, allowed Ashtonfield Public School with an

opportunity to gain extra resources. Through this program the school received the total of one million, eight hundred and twenty five thousand dollars of approved funding. The school realise the benefits of the BER program and are extremely pleased with the completed projects they received.

Ashtonfield Public School found that two key terms of reference were relevant to the schools experience of the BER program including

- *Whether outcomes were of acceptable quality and suitable to the needs of each individual school.*
- *The use of local builders and trades people during the construction of BER projects.*

The submission will focus on the suitability and quality of the infrastructure, project delays and the effects on the local and national scale of the BER program.

3.0 Infrastructure gained through The Building Education Revolution.

The school applied for an extension to their existing hall, the construction of two new classrooms and a technology laboratory. The funding allocation was determined on specific criteria such as the location and student population of the school. The application for the hall extension was rejected as it would exceed the budget allocated under the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), New South Wales policy (Australian Government, 2009). A larger hall would not be required with the number of students enrolled under the NSW DET census for school enrolment. However, the school could exchange this extension of the hall to extending their covered outdoor learning area (COLA). The two classrooms and the technology laboratory final cost was one million, five hundred and fourteen thousand dollars with a further three hundred and eleven thousand dollars for the COLA upgrade.

4.0 Whether outcomes were of acceptable quality and suitable to the needs of each individual school:

4.1 Suitability of the infrastructure to meeting the needs of Ashtonfield Public School

The two classrooms were very suitable as Ashtonfield Public School is a growing school. The school was initially only designed and constructed to cater for twelve classrooms, however the school has grown and is now accommodating nineteen classrooms, seven classes were placed in demountables. The school was in desperate need for space. When two senior classes were relocated from demountables through the BER program initiative this was a positive development for the school.

The Technology Laboratory grant came under the New South Wales Codes for Special Programs category with the budget for this room being determined by the number of students enrolled in the school at the time of submission. Unfortunately there was no consideration under DEEWR census for school enrolment, that Ashtonfield was a new school and in time the number of students would increase. The

Budget and the NSW DET codes did not allow for the room size that the school would have preferred, with the dimensions of the room being smaller than anticipated. The number of enrolments increased dramatically by one hundred students from the time of allocation which is very disappointing, however having this facility available to students is an asset to the school. The technology laboratory also provided extra space and prior to its construction the school did not have a specific room designated for computers. This room was vital as previously students and staff were relying on office facilities for space to access more computers. This new technology laboratory will allow the school an opportunity to install an interactive whiteboard, which will provide students an enhanced learning environment.

Being newly established, Ashtonfield Public School did not have enough shade for their students and therefore the COLA extension allowed for more covered space outdoors. The hall does not provide the appropriate amount of space; however the extension to the COLA attached to the hall relieves the pressure if the hall is at capacity, as there are large roller doors that open onto the COLA area. The school would have preferred the approval for a full sized hall, though the extension of the attached COLA was an excellent alternative.

Ashtonfield Public School's, Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) have saved, through fundraising, an amount of forty to fifty thousand dollars in three years towards construction of this infrastructure. The extension to the COLA for example would have taken the school another fifteen to twenty years to raise the required funds to build. The school now has an opportunity not to have to wait for these resources with the school benefiting from the modern and high-quality structures.

4.2 Quality of the infrastructure to meeting the needs of Ashtonfield Public School

Ashtonfield Public School was extremely pleased with the quality of the buildings and COLA area on completion. With school projects in the beginning being more expensive than home or business developments, the school recognises the high standard of workmanship will ensure that the structures will be sturdy, long lasting

and this initial outlay will save the school money over many years. The development was checked at each stage with Hansen and Yuncken Pty Ltd constructing the projects at a high standard and with attention to detail, ensuring the facades were matching. High quality workmanship would be in the best interest of this company because they have ownership of these structures for the next thirty years with the Department of Education only leasing them as a result of the public-private partnership.

5.0 The use of local builders and tradespeople during the construction of BER projects:

5.1 Affects of the BER on a national and local scale

Since 2008 the quantity and value of building approvals has decreased (Clare, 2009). The construction industries in Australia employ almost one million workers and with a lack of permitted projects on the pipeline, the possibility of job termination increases (Clare, 2009). The BER program is securing these workers future, generating a substantial rise in building approvals for the sector of education (Clare, 2009). “According to the Master Builders Australia the stimulus is protecting fifty thousand jobs in the building industry that would have otherwise been lost” (Clare, 2009). The new facilities and refurbishment to Ashtonfield Public School was completed within nine months, providing employment in the local community throughout this period. During this time-frame approximately one hundred individuals were employed to work on the site, in various fields such as bricklayers, carpenters, electricians and painters.

The BER program is not only having a positive effect on jobs in the construction industry, it has created a ripple effect on other segments of the economy and securing jobs such as the iron and steel manufacturing and services industries (Clare, 2009). Approximately two million dollars is spent each year by the construction industry on steel before the BER program was introduced and even more on the information technology (IT), legal and financial industries (Clare, 2009). The workforce

employed to carry out the project at Ashtonfield Public School supported local community businesses. Ashtonfield is situated within close proximity to Stockland Greenhills Shopping Centre and food outlets which the school found the workers took advantage of these facilities during their meal breaks.

5.2 Project Delays

Over the construction period Hanson Yuncken Pty Ltd as very accommodating. The company waited some time for materials to arrive, due to the scale and demand for building materials being placed on the industry by the number of other schools under the BER program. Also each construction site was demanding these resources at the same time for their school project. Ashtonfield Public School required the work to be completed within the negotiated timeframe due to the fact that two classes had been combined and their lessons were being held in the hall for the entire first term. While the company could not complete the work due to these circumstances within the scheduled timeframe, they assured that by the following term the classes would be relocated into the two new classrooms, with the company upholding their promise.

Also the COLA addition was interrupted by delays in supply of metal for the roofing, due to demand for these materials from other school projects around the state. The company consulted with the school and together they discussed and recognised the delays involved in the completion of the COLA within the timeframe, with the company ensuring they would rush the project to have the area available for use to coincide with the schools production of their Easter concert at the end of the term.

6.0 Conclusion

Ashtonfield Public School is very grateful for the one million, eight hundred and twenty five thousand dollars from the BER program under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) Program. The infrastructure was very suitable. The school now has two classes out of demountables and a Technology Laboratory which

provides extra space and a more inviting learning environment. The COLA extension gives students more shade area and acts as an extension to the hall. The school found that the quality of the infrastructure was of a very high quality and although there were project delays, the company was very accommodating and worked with the school in ensuring that the work was completed as quickly as possible. The BER program created approximately one hundred jobs during the projects construction which was very positive for the community and the economy.

While media reports and the opposition have focused on a small number of troubled projects with major concerns of inflexibility and inflated prices, Ashtonfield Public School's experience was positive and very beneficial for the school, parents and wider community with exciting and practical results. The new structures are aesthetically appealing and have given the school a genuine boost to keep improving the school. The BER program has allowed the school to develop its education resources.

7.0 References

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