

Submission
No 78

**INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION
REVOLUTION PROGRAM**

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 7/06/2010

Partially Confidential

THE COAST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL – BENSVILLE NSW
SCHOOL HALL

The Coast Community School is located at 37-39 Bundaleer Cresc., Bensville, and is operated by the Coast Community Church who recently acquired the adjoining site, 83 Empire Bay Drive for the erection of church facilities. The site is in a declared bushfire prone, rural residential area, containing many trees, including an endangered Swamp Sclerophyll Forest, and has a significant slope.

A development application (35742/08) was submitted to the local Council in October 2008 for an enormous church complex, including the now BER Taskforce approved school hall on this site. Due to excessive overdevelopment of the site and significant lack of detail, and non-compliance with various regulations, the proposal has since been amended numerous times and so far placed on public exhibition 5 times.

Following establishment of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan Taskforce the church extracted the school hall from the original DA and submitted it for approval to the Taskforce. This in itself would appear to be at odds with the requirement of the Act that if an application has already been lodged with Council, it must be determined by that Authority.

Various other anomalies were contained in this application including:-

1. Siting of the hall is not in accordance with the approved school master plan (DA17742/01 September 2004). This provided for a school hall, on the school site, as part of the school development.

After the church bought the adjoining land the hall was relocated to this church site, and it was widely accepted that this was to be the interim church, until such time as a 2000m² church (part of their Council application) was needed or could be afforded.

2. Despite assurances from the Hon. Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, and conditions in the BER approval specifically prohibiting use of the school hall for church worship and other church activities, the amended acoustic report exhibited by Council in March 2010 for the church complex (which incorporates additions to the BER approved hall) still highlights that the hall is to be used initially for church worship, and later for school and church youth group activities.

3. A serious concern is that the BER Conditions authorise Council to actually amend the imposed conditions. We fear that once the hall is constructed the church will request the Council (who have been very supportive of the church and even refused to enforce their own previously imposed Consent Conditions), to amend or ignore the BER Conditions of Consent restricting use of the hall for church purposes. This means they will have effectively had a church building provided by Government funding via the school. This is the only obvious reason for relocating the school hall from its approved school location to the front of the adjoining church site, and for requiring such a large hall in a school with current enrolments of 123 (principal's press article 5/2/10), which have

declined over each of the last 5 years. The school already has a large COLA to provide for sporting, cultural and academic activities under cover.

It is noted that part of the church complex DA currently before Council also includes provision to further increase the size of this large hall by some 50%.

4. There were several major deficiencies in the plans for the hall submitted to the BER Taskforce:-

i) The plans showed no trees to be affected by the development (this was an ongoing problem with the original combined Council application, resulting in more than a dozen tree surveys, reports and assessments from 3 separate consultants – and is still not resolved).

The approval highlighted that it did not give permission for removal of any trees, and if necessary, this would be required from Council.

ii) No provision was made for detention or disposal of stormwater from the development (another ongoing problem in the original Council application).

iii) Because of the size of the building, topography of the site and desired floor level to match the other church buildings, a 4m deep cut was required in the NE corner of the hall. This was shown on the submitted plan as being battered. Coincidentally, this batter would extend under a large turpentine tree (not shown on plan) that their own tree report shows as being significant and requiring a 15m tree protection area.

As part of the latest amendments to the hall additions and other church buildings on the Council application, it is now proposed to change this approved batter to a 4m high retaining wall. This depth of cut and retaining is contrary to several Council DCP's.

5. BER funding was approved some 12 months ago and the Taskforce approved the plans (subject to conditions) in November 2009. The school advised local residents that construction would commence in early February 2010, and be completed by July. Recently school parents were apparently advised that the hall would be completed in November 2010. As far as we are aware, the required stormwater drainage plans have not yet even been submitted to Council as required and no application has been made for any tree removal.

6. There are also concerns regarding previous funding approvals, especially in relation to classroom refurbishment.

The only obvious refurbishment occurring at the school was conversion of much of the original school demountable classroom block into church and theological offices, counselling and meeting rooms (including ACOM (Australian College of Ministries) lecture rooms - known as the Bensville Ministry Centre) following completion of the new classroom block in 2006.

It is unclear as to how other costs are proportioned between the church and the school. The school apparently leases the entire site from the church, which then in turn exclusively use much of the front demountable building, the single demountable church playgroup or music room, at times the school library, and share use of the toilet facilities.

Apart from the actual spaces, this usage must impact on other costs such as electricity, cleaning, maintenance and even office equipment and supplies etc.

It would be interesting to know if these costs are recouped by the school or are merely subsidising the church functions and activities.

CONCLUSION - Obviously some of these issues are not related to the BER programme, but as they are all intricately interwoven, and the local residents have not been able to obtain satisfactory explanations to questions previously raised, we see this as an opportunity for all of these concerns to finally be investigated, either by this Taskforce or by referral to other appropriate authorities.

Much more additional detailed information is available relating to each of the above issues, if required by the Taskforce or the other authorities.