

Submission
No 66

INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM

Organisation: Islington Public School P & C

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Building education revolution Program
Submission

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On Behalf of
Islington Public School P&C

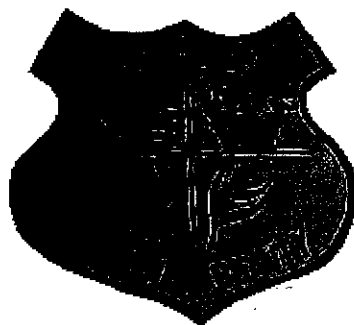
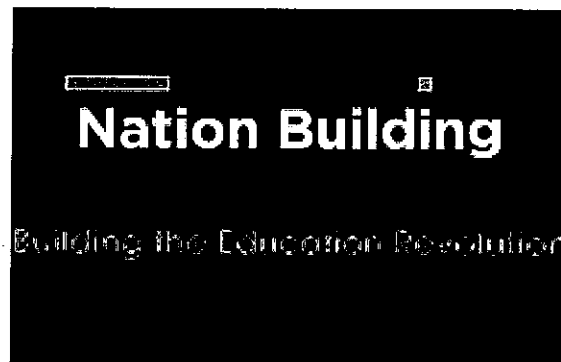


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13-5-10

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

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of Islington Primary school P&C and myself, Rebecca Craig I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present my submission. I am optimistic that my submission will be effective in revealing the success and often failure of the Building Education Revolution for Islington Primary school.

The attached submission outlines the effect the BER has had upon the school. The submission acknowledges the positives and negatives of the BER that I believe many schools have also experienced. The submission has been deemed of great importance to the school and myself due to the ongoing criticism the program has presented within the media.

This submission provides a significant insight into the BER program and the outcomes it has had for the school. The inquiry will enable the Government and Australian citizens to observe the actual success or failure of this program. Ongoing scrutiny has put the program in a negative stance and with this submission it will show that the program was a rush job that has allowed cracks and discrepancies to form in the program.

The submission does to some extent highlight the positives of the program with reference to the Global financial crisis and job creation within the construction sector yet in this case the negatives have outweighed the positives. There have been numerous reports of money wasting and scandals which has pushed the need for this inquiry.

Research into the BER program has resulted in many other schools also dissatisfied with the outcomes of the program. Islington Public school has witnessed this same dissatisfaction with the program going over budget and running behind schedule.

This submission will hopefully raise some key issues that surround the BER and the inquiry may contribute to the Government reforming the program to prevent ongoing scandals and future economic losses that the Tax payer will pay for. This inquiry is vital as it is concerned with the economy and Children's educational needs. It is time for the results to be revealed if this program is ever going to be a success.

Yours Sincerely
Rebecca Craig
On behalf of Islington Public Primary school P&C

2. Executive Summary

Building the Education Revolution is the program developed by the commonwealth Government committing \$14.7 billion to be spent over the next three years to enable the implementation of refurbishments and new facilities such as libraries within Australian Schools.

The program consists of three elements yet this report will focus on the “primary schools for the 21st Century” and the “National School Pride Program” which concentrates on maintenance projects.

This submission will highlight the key points relating to the program with reference to Islington Public school P&C and the implementation of a new school library. The BER has been known for its lack of approval by many schools and citizens as there have been ongoing reports of scandals. This report will highlight the actual dissatisfaction the school has felt with the program as well as many other reports from various schools.

The key argument of this report will be the result this program has had for Islington Primary school P&C, the way the Government has handled this program and the outcomes related to this such as contractor’s rorting the system and jobs finished inadequately.

The Report will conclude with recommendations the Federal Government should to adhere to in order to turn this program around and make it successful as I believe the negatives of this program have certainly outweighed the positives.

3. Introduction

Islington Public School P&C is participating in the BER inquiry as they were not satisfied completely with the program. The BER program was designed to improve schools yet for Islington Public school it has been somewhat of an annoyance as they could not receive what they sincerely wanted to improve the school. The extensive media coverage has only heightened the issue and additional schools are becoming interested as scandals become revealed and Buildings are inadequately built.

Islington Public school P&C has been involved with two elements of the program and finds that the "National school pride program" was more of a success as they received a playground upgrade, plumbing and an interactive whiteboard. These upgrades were required by the school and have genuinely benefited this school as it has limited funding due to its size.

Islington Public school P&C finds the magnitude of this inquiry to be of great importance as what they genuinely required such as a canteen upgrade, COLA and Library refurbishment was not accepted instead they received a new library building that was deemed unnecessary by the school.

The purpose of this report is to make the public and the Government aware of the actual dissatisfaction many schools experienced. Islington Public school was granted \$850 000 and before construction had even begun they were \$58 0000 over budget. This now means the school will not have additional money to actually complete the library or set up anything close to an actual library.

The scope of the submission will stress to some extent the failure this program has presented. \$850 000 for a library seems phenomenal and it had already gone over budget before construction began. The program clearly portrays that it was poorly run and time management was of no concern. The whole process was inconsistent in its application. The push to get these constructions underway has seen compiling evidence of builder's rorting the system as their quotes are not systematically looked at or compared to other quotes. It would seem that many builders have been acquiring jobs via a first in best dressed basis.

To come to this conclusion I have researched many articles written, claims from other schools and submissions that have been sent to the senate. There have been many positive outcomes for some schools but the amount of price gouging has become unacceptable. Interviewing Islington Public school P&C allowed me to witness firsthand what the BER is actually accomplishing and in my opinion, Far from what the Government would have anticipated. The program was mismanaged from the word go and Islington public school is a perfect example of the adverse affects from the BER.

4. Discussion/analysis

To begin the objectives of the BER are to-

- * Provide economic stimulus through the rapid construction and refurbishment of school infrastructure.
- * Build learning environments to help children, families and communities participate in activities that will support achievement, develop learning potential and bring communities together.

How these objectives relate to Islington Public School P&C-

Relating to rapid construction, Islington Public school P&C was rushed and pushed into decisions they would have liked to have more time to consider. Many other schools have experienced the same problem. One submission from the Western Australian Council of State School organisations Inc. stated "With the exceptionally tight time frames involved, it was difficult for full consultation to be employed. Rushed time frames also meant decisions as to what buildings and the locations of the buildings were not given the due consideration they deserved nor did these timeframes meet the standard government procedures for tendering, approvals, etc" (Fry 2010, p.1).

The BER was pushed through quickly due to the GFC and it was positive in providing jobs in the construction sector yet it had only paved the way for price gouging and inflated prices. In an article from the Australian "Education Revolution has become a rout" (2010) Hadley states "that a COLA would cost \$78 000 in 2003 and now \$954 000 in 2010" (Hadley 2010, p.1). Recent Governmental figures released have shown that in NSW alone 40 COLA's have cost more than \$800 000 under the BER program.

Islington Public school P&C initially required a school canteen upgrade, refurbishment of the library and a COLA yet they were told they could not have it as the program required new constructions to be built. The school was told that Julia Gillard would be opening these new constructions and this was part of the reason why Islington Primary school had to have a new library. Yet in the BER guidelines it clearly states on page 7 that "Funding may be used for the fit out of new buildings or refurbishments to the extent that it is necessary to make them operational". So why could they not receive what they originally wanted? In my opinion it is all for Government advancement as the Federal Government would like to be deemed successful and this project to be put in a favorable light via the media.

Within the BER guidelines, page 13 states "there is a requirement to recognise and acknowledge the Commonwealth's contribution". This is via publicity, plaques and road signs. The government has had it planned from the beginning to ensure local media conglomerates are encouraged to take part of the program. The process of it all becomes quite clear that a new library costing more than \$850 000 is all about publicity and self promotion for the Government not for the good of Australian schools. Schools have been receiving unnecessary funding that could have been well spent across a broader spectrum.

Islington Public school P&C agreed on the new library structure and at first they were not allowed to put it where they wanted due to boundary regulations. Once the construction had commenced asbestos was found and this set back the construction with respect to time and money. The new library was to be placed at the back of the school grounds and would sit on a major sewerage system which resulted in more alterations for the construction. The sewerage system had to be relocated and there was concern the sewerage system could break causing major disruption to the school and surrounding industries. Before construction had even commenced the budget stood at \$908 000. The result of this now meant that there would be no solar panels, no rain water tanks and no landscaped gardens. Despite all this the library would be presented as an empty shell as funding would cut short any new furniture or desks to be allocated. The library would not even be of any use to the children of the school.

The construction of the building has been run by Bovis lend lease and according to Graaff "Bovis Lend Lease will share in \$71.5 million dollars in profit" (Graaff 2010, p.12). This would be due to the ongoing report that managers of these programs are charging between 12.5%- 16.5% which is three and a half times the amount that was suggested by the Federal Government. Construction of the Library was meant to be completed in March yet the completion now stands at the end of July. A share in \$71 million dollars seems far fetched when a major construction management company can barely stick to a set time frame that ultimately affects the children's learning environment due to ongoing noise pollution.

How does any empty building help foster a child's learning environment that enables them to participate in activities that will support achievement? The entire program has failed to deliver a huge opportunity that was available to many schools. The outcome of \$16 billion dollars has shown wasteful duplication and such a waste of money that has disenchanted many schools and local communities. The Federal government has gained the public's attention yet in a way that has left many Australians disillusioned and disapproved of the whole system. The Government has failed to deliver what could have been an A+ program in its application.

5. Recommendations-

- Government needed to be transparent, open and accountable at all times.
- More support for schools.
- Proper detailed management.
- Thorough investigations into price gouging.
- Quotes systematically researched.
- Schools encouraged to self manage.
- Efficient time for projects.
- Effective community involvement.

6. References

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