

Submission  
No 67

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

**Organisation:** Scotts Head Public School Futures Group (P&C sub-committee)  
**Date received:** 5/06/2010

---

Thank you for this opportunity to present concerns with regard to the implementation of the Rudd government's BER stimulus package in our small school community (with 60 students enrolled). From the outset it must be acknowledged that the interior layout and fittings of the Library / Administration building provided are impressive. Nevertheless this should not detract from the concerns that remain regarding the degree of intimidation experienced (in the guise of the DET "Code of Conduct"), inefficiencies in project management, apparent refusal to acknowledge the uniqueness of the school community and curriculum and the incredulous cost breakdown provided on the NSW BER web-site.

However more basic concern relates to the politics surrounding the outcomes of this initiative. The feeling of this community appears to parallel the feelings expressed across the nation. All political parties seem to be engaged in political point scoring conducting inquiries governed by "Terms of Reference" limited to party positioning and not to the interests of the students, their learning curriculum and their school community.

Scotts Head Public School has a unique curriculum based on social inclusion and cultural / social / technological capacity building. The school has a quality, detailed and affordable master-plan to provide for this. Unless an inquiry is conducted in terms of these "values" a community dis-service is being promoted. All that will result is an incomplete project with a political justification of spending in excess of 1.3 million dollars on a system determined building way overpriced even at the budgeted \$850,000.

Scotts Head Public School is a P5 school (60 students) situated in the socio-economically challenged Nambucca Valley. The school received an allocation of \$850,000 for building works to stimulate the local economy. Over a period of twelve months the school community witnessed its unique curriculum based BER project reduced to a prefabricated building, transported in from Sydney that is now estimated to be over 1.3 million dollars.

The school's BER project grew from a master-plan developed in 2007 by a sub-committee of the P & C. With the announcement of the Rudd BER initiative the sub-committee set to work refining the master-plan in terms of the BER guidelines and circulating leaflets to local subcontractors and suppliers encouraging them to register with REED (the project managers) so that work may come their way.

However it didn't take long for compromises to occur. The system hadn't yet designed a suitable building template but one was about to be released. The advice was to accept it and its location or run the risk of missing out. It was also felt that this would provide the \$75 000 needed for the refurbishment of a 1950s decommissioned weather-board building, arguably the centre-piece of the school's BER project in that it would become a Life Long Learning Centre for the students and community.

However the "need to compromise" become progressively challenged. REED employed a Coffs Harbour group to complete the building. Local builders and suppliers would not be employed. More and more building features were to be "de-scoped". The underfloor storage area and service driveway together with things like a rainwater tank, solar panels and a section of covered walkway were removed from the plan. Despite this by January 2010 the BER NSW website indicated that the estimated finishing cost of the building was over 1.3 million! The important Life Long Learning Centre had no chance.

As mentioned the school is quite unique in terms of the curriculum offered students and the wider community. The school recently became one of only four bilingual schools in the state. Indonesian language and culture is now featured throughout the curriculum. Special ties have been created with Indonesia including visits by Indonesian teachers and officials. This together with the many technology initiatives the school is involved in, from a FM radio station to the development of a Virtual Sports Community (assisted by Athletics Australia and involving a network of isolated small schools, primary schools, high schools and indigenous communities)

adds credence to the need for the provision of the Life Long Learning space indicated in the master-plan.

Yet these important elements of the school's BER project have been apparently ignored by the IPO and the REED Group. The school community's biggest worry now is that the actual cost of the BER building will preclude any consideration of the refurbishment of the 1950 decommissioned classrooms by the Department both now and well into the future!