

Submission
No 55

INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM

Organisation: Mary Brooksbank School P&C Association

Date received: 4/06/2010

Partially Confidential



Mary Brooksbank School Parents & Citizens Association

ABN 82 703 813 977

7th June 2010

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000
Fax: (02) 9230 2981

**Re: Federal Government's Building the Education Revolution program
Federal Investigation into Value for Money**

Dear Sir or Madam:

Firstly thank you for providing the opportunity to submit our application towards the Federal Investigation into Value for Money. Our school was grateful to receive BER Funding Projects, including 2 x Cola Areas (1 x Primary area & 1 x Senior area) and a new Special Purpose Room.

Whilst we are appreciative of the projects we would like to express our concern as to the value for money reflected with these BER Projects as mentioned above, especially after reviewing the BER Primary Estimated Project Expenditure report. Our understanding was that \$850,000.00 was allocated to our school to date.

Our P&C Committee are not builders or the like and therefore have no professional qualifications to confirm as to whether the costs charged are accurate or not, therefore have requested of our schools principal Ms Diane Robertson that perhaps an external audit be carried out on these costs charged for goods/services or perhaps even a costing comparison be carried out. I can confirm that this request was forwarded Mr Don Readett Principal Liaison Officer SWS Region and Mr Michael Parks IKO.

1. The levels and appropriateness of fees and charges imposed by various NSW Government agencies.

The variation between the ECS Stage in September 2009 and the Forecast Cost of the May 2010 are in extreme in several categories, this needs to be address and is of concern.

The Estimated Project Expenditure Reports provided to our school The Estimated Project Expenditure Reports provided to our school, did not provide a comprehensive breakdown of figures, which would have allowed us to thoroughly identify any errors in costs or goods received. (please see these attached) A breakdown in this format should be provided to the Principal of the school as this would identify indiscrepancies.

Mary Brooksbank School utilised the BER directorate process for selection of our Special Purpose Room, this was the BER's standard Special programs room, and on our costing we have incurred a cost of \$67,816.00 for Design Documentation, Field Data and Site Management, this would seem extreme being that this was a standard design being used by each school not designed specifically for each school.

The standard contingency of 5% which has been applied to all projects, how is this justified, how is this allocated?

2. Whether cost charged cost charged for construction of BER projects are in line with industry standards.

Whilst the Estimated Project Expenditure Reports provided to our school provides a general overview of costs, we would be unable to determine if these were in accordance with expected costs, whilst this reflects the charges charged to our school it does not represent or reflect the costs that were actually charged by the builders or contractors themselves.

Special Purpose Room:

- The Special Purpose Room is approximately \$9,825.29 per square meter, a cost total cost of \$592,465.00.
- The Site Works initial forecast for September 2009 was \$23,635 then the Forecast Cost of May indicated a cost of \$139,683.00 that is an increase of more than \$100,000.00, yet there were no difficulties experienced at all with this site, in fact it was identified by AMU as being the ideal position, coincidentally this increase took our costs up to 592,465 for the total \$600,000.00 project.

New Cola:

- The superstructure was quoted at \$60,530.00 yet the Forecast Cost of May indicated an increase of \$27,272.00 for no variations.
- Site works also incurred a \$10,000.00 variation with no difficulties experienced at all in either slab.
- The two colas at a total cost of \$235,986.00. A verbal quotation was provided to the school post construction at \$75,000.00 for Two Colas including Slab and superstructure. This is totally unacceptable, concerning and appalling

On both projects the Contingency totaled 42,500.00 which has not been identified or justified.

The exorbitant costs of the Managing contractors incentive fee which was \$12,000.00 on our Special Purpose Room, and \$4,746.00 on the Colas, desperately needs to be reviewed.

3 The effectiveness of government oversight and review of contracts signed between Head Contractors and ;the NSW Government.

Throughout the state every P4 primary school (school classification) with ten classrooms of students received \$2 Million Dollars Mary Brooksbank School is classified as a P4 school and staffed and funded as a Primary School yet unbelievably we were allocated \$850,000.

The factor of need for our students with disabilities was not given consideration resulting in discrimination against students with disabilities.

We will not accept that faults, repairs, failure to comply with standards, incompetence should be paid for out of our BER funds, given the costs incurred under the project forecast.

It is also of concern that there were excess funds that were not utilised even though the school had submitted additional projects as part of the process of application

4. The use of local builders and trades people during the construction of BER projects.

Upon Inspection (Defect Walk) with Hansen Yunchen, IPO and our AMU Manager the following has been identified:

The current defects for the two Cola include:

- The safety reinforcement under the roof was omitted when construction was being implemented, now both roofs need to be completely lifted off.
- The concrete colentt have not meet standards/requirements and now need to be jack hammered out and reconstructed to cope with water overflows. Due to this negligence ground water has crossed the playground and entered a classroom causing the destruction to our new carpet which now needs to be replaced and disruption to this classroom.
- The request for the functionality of the Cola which included the perforated metal to provide for sun shelter and protection on the northern side (where large area is unprotected) was not provided at time of works despite the Principals briefing on these matters. This is now to occur during next school holidays.

- The construction of one of the Coals required the removal of a non functioning ramp in the playground area, the repairs to this earth were to include turf, to date this has not occurred, this is now of an OH&S concern for children with disabilities.
- The senior and primary playgrounds were compacted due to the use of trucks this earth was to be aerated and are receded, this to date has not occur.
- The exposed bank leading into the junior Cola was recede to a very poor level and subsequent rains have now washed all seeding down the bank and into the new Cola area, this bank is required to be turfed, this was also requested by principal.

The current defects for the Special Purpose Room include:

- The Entry door was not constructed to Disability standards, and required significant alterations. The new door erected with specialized hinges is currently warped and buckled and still is not closing properly.
- The security system installed does not have a back to school administration point as is the requirement in meeting with our schools needs.
- A standard inclusion with this special Purpose Room was a Water Tank, in its current location provides no functionality and would require a pump to be functional.
- The area outside the Special Purpose Room was initially turfed and this turf subsequently died and then was replaced by bark.
- The Fencing between Senior and Junior Playground was damaged by a delivery truck; this still remains damaged and needs to be repaired.

Of concern where there have been errors in construction or defects, this financial liability should not fall back to our school.

5. Whether outcomes were of acceptable quality and suitable to the needs of each individual school.

Our outcomes for the BER were not of acceptable quality and suitable to the needs of the individual school. We are aware the school submitted requests for five projects and we received approval for two being the Cola's and the Special Purpose Room as deemed priority by the governing board. We would like to enquire as to what grounds were used to determine the priority of the projects; we are trying to comprehend as to why our principal and respected represented member of our school and our children had no contribution to this priority process or decision. Our P&C Association feel that panel needed to contextualize the projects they selected with the specific of a complex ground of students. Whilst this panel perhaps is qualified in understanding the needs of a main stream school it would appear that this may not have been the case with Special Needs Schools.

The **Special Purpose Room** nomination provided by our school community clearly requested "the construction of an ICT laboratory with specialized ICT access for students with disabilities.." this was further reflected in the justification "we do not have a computer room, we are forging excellence in ICT for students with complex disabilities.....". Undeniably based on this nominated we would have assumed that consideration would have to been given to our students with physical and intellectual disabilities such as; appropriate furniture (adjustable table, workstations, allowing for wheelchair access), sufficient data points, compliance with OH&S concerns relevant to a special needs environment. The room now referred to by our students as the "Doll House" is well below our expectations for size, our teachers at time find it difficult in managing several wheel chairs and student in this space.

The Special Room had an **Electronic Whiteboard** included in its structure, it must be noted that when installation of this whiteboard commenced it was identified the wall did not comply with building standards to accommodate the whiteboard therefore this needed to be removed and reconstructed to facilitate this whiteboard.

Mr David Whiting of the BER Project confirmed via email on May 21st 2009, our request for a **covered walkway** to the Special Purpose Room would be included in this project, please note that this has not been provided.

We also wish to note that during construction we had **solar Panel** Provider arrive at the school to install the respective paneling, and advised that they were unable to provide this paneling as the roof on the Special Purpose Room was facing the wrong direction. At this time we were advised that this could be installed elsewhere within the school in an appropriate location and fed

back into the grid, to date we have received no consultation regarding this. We are concerned if this cost has been incorporated into our expenditure.

The scope for the Special Purpose Room was to include a Fire Hydrant which is still not been provided.

There was no opportunity for Principal / Builder consultation with forward planning and clearly defined schedules which would have allowed for further consultation. The overwhelming task of implementing BER impacted significantly with the workload with the school and the appropriate level of consultation with the school community. This was further complicated with the role of the principal in leading and managing an extremely complex school environment where no further release for staff was available.

Although we were provided with a general layout/plan of the Special Purpose Room, at no point in time was our school provided with any plans or details regarding the Coals. Our principal pursued the Coals providers verbally making them aware of our requirements and wishes.

6. Any other related matters.

Of particular concern to our P&C Association is the rejection of the Special Learning Environment/Playground submission, this has been a high priority to both the school and the P&C Association. In the last few years our school population has increased burgeoning population of students with severe Autism, and is continuing to do so. As a result of this growth we have currently divided our junior school playground into two areas one being for Infants and the other for Primary. Currently our primary playground is without any form of play equipment, with the exception of 2 fixed basketball hoops, so understandably we wish to pursue the rejection of this in particular submission, given this extremely disadvantaged condition of playground facilities.

As a special needs school playground play is an imperative and integral part of the development and learning of our children. Many of our students are Autistic and in great need of opportunities to have their many sensory needs met in the playground. Meeting these needs means that our children are much happier and calmer when they return to the classroom which, in turn, assists them to focus on their classroom based programs and we would have thought that consideration should have been given on these grounds. We currently have no Primary Playground equipment

In summary as a P&C Association we were delighted with this wonderful initiative from the government, clearly intended to support our schools, children and the community. It seems a few areas need to be reviewed and consideration perhaps given. We would be appreciative if you would review these concerns you have our full support to pursue this on our behalf.

Kind Regards,

Mary Brooksbank School
Parents & Citizens Association

Attached: The Estimated Project Expenditure Reports
provided to our school

Ms Diane Robertson - Principal Mary Brooksbank School
Mr Brad Orgill - BER Investigation Team
Julia Gillard - Federal Minister of Education
Verity Firth - State Minister for Education
Mr Don Readett Principal Liaison Officer SWS Region
Mr Michael Parks IKO