

**Submission
No 105**

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

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Date received: 7/06/2010

7 June 2010

The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Parliament House

Sydney 2000.

Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program

I wish to commend you on your initiative in conducting this inquiry and trust that your findings will lead to some rational decisions being made on this program.

In relation to the terms of reference for this inquiry I wish to comment particularly on: the effectiveness of government oversight and review of contracts signed, the use of local builders and tradespeople and whether outcomes were of acceptable quality and suitable to the needs of each individual school.

I have a son that attends Tottenham Central School, the site of what has become the notorious smallest white elephant quite possibly in the history of public works construction.

Tottenham Central School had applied for funds under the BER to allow for a refurbishment of Primary classrooms, a new science laboratory, and, as an opportunity item, a new school canteen.

The refurbishments were approved, and have proved to be of a high quality and provided a much improved learning experience for the students.

Without any consultation with our Principal or the Parent's & Citizen's Association the new science laboratory was scrapped and approximately \$600,000 was allocated for the canteen.

At no stage were site plans made available to the Principal or the P & C for consultation, some discussion was allowed for the location of the canteen to avoid having useful areas of the school demolished, but no other input was allowed.

Building commenced, not without some drama, and eventually completed. For the princely sum of approximately \$600,000 we have a 25sq metre – yes **25** sq metre – building that is not air conditioned, has no cooking facilities or food preparation areas, was not sealed for dust and insects, has no toilet facilities for the canteen staff, and measures approx 8metres x 3metres – barely enough room to fit the fridge and freezer from the old canteen in.

According to information obtained by the P & C some \$200,000 was allocated for preliminary and site preparation expenses, \$50,000 for demolition, and an amount of money apparently allowed for furnishings and data capability upgrades.

One of the interesting facts about Tottenham Central School is that it is extremely flat, there were little preparations required prior to commencement of building, there were no demolition works required, and the canteen had installed one fan affixed to the wall and no computer connections at all.

All of the building materials used were delivered to the site for the subcontractor, they were not allowed to source materials from their usual suppliers, so the quality of the materials also needs investigating so see whether value for money was achieved there.

There is a lot of anxiety within our community that a project that could have delivered a much needed upgrade in the educational facilities for our school has been so badly mismanaged that we have ended up with a glorified dog box not suitable for anything.

This \$600,000 should have delivered the desperately needed upgrade to the science lab (apparently the Bunsen burners need to be turned on and off with a pair of pliers – so safe for teenage students) and a much bigger and better canteen than the one currently in use at the school.

This whole scheme reflects poorly on the entire chain of command – from the Federal Government who has paid out all this money, the NSW Education Department or Public Works that have administered the scheme, the Contractors that have robbed the Australian taxpayers blind, and the builders that have stood by and let a substandard building be erected without saying a word.

Who, in all conscience, could sign off on plans for a canteen that is only 25sq m but is projected to cost \$600,000? According to The Australian Newspaper of 21 May 2010, the Catholic Education system can deliver a canteen and amenities block TEN times as big for the same amount of money.

The canteen as it stands now is an absolute waste of money, is of no use to the school as a canteen and represents the biggest rort of taxpayer's money in our modern history.

There has been no transparency in any of the proceedings for the allocation of projects, the costing of said projects, the project management, no consultation with the school or community, no capability for anyone to save our school from such a gross waste of money. In a community that has been struggling from the direct impact of years of drought, this is yet another issue that defies explanation.

I wish you well in your deliberations and trust that your inquiry can uncover the dirty dealings that have gone on in the implementation of this scheme.

Yours sincerely

Gabrielle Holmes