

**Submission
No 124**

INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM

Organisation: School Council for Jindabyne Central School
Name: Mrs Heather Emery
Position: Chairperson
Date received: 7/06/2010

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

Dear Director,

Jindabyne Central School School Council representing the parents, students, teachers and the broader community of the region around the school wish to register our concerns and strong objections to the manner in which the Commonwealth Building the Education Revolution funding is to be utilised at JCS.

We have been fortunate enough to secure funding under two of the BER programs:
> \$200,000 under the National School Pride that carried out minor upgrade and maintenance work on the outdoor learning area, corrected a number of drainage issues, provided some outdoor seating for students and provided some soundproofing in the library. (confirmed June 2009 and expenditure complete)
> \$2,700,000 under the P21 program to construct a new building with administrative space and some classrooms that will go some way to alleviate our current overcrowding problems that will continue to get worse as our student community is expanding at a rapid rate.
(Allocation confirmed in Feb 2010 and construction commenced end of May 2010 - despite strong community objections).

Whilst there is no doubt that the funds will improve facilities at the school in the short term, our concern is that the expenditure of the funding under the P21 program does not represent value for money as the development perpetuates investment for a site that is no longer fit for purpose.

The Snowy Region achieved a significant breakthrough with the agreement in 2002 that Jindabyne Public School would expand from a primary school to a K-10 central school. The actual opening of the Jindabyne Central School in 2006 was quickly followed by the announcement in October 2007 that we would expand to include Years 11 & 12 from 2009. This year sees our first Year 12 at Jindabyne Central School.

Significant infrastructure development has occurred on the current school site and as a community we have realised the benefits of having a quality public secondary education option in the town. So much so that the student numbers are increasing at a rate that is exceeding the growth forecasts on all counts and the infrastructure now breaches a reasonable footprint on the site, making it more and more unmanageable to accommodate such a diversity of student ages and needs on the one site.

Recently released Dept of Planning figures confirm that this trend is not likely to change and that the Snowy River Shire is the fastest growing inland shire in NSW.

As of November 2009, Department of Education and Training representatives indicated that we would not be provided any allocation under the P21 program as the school had so recently received infrastructure development with the opening of the Central School. Teacher and parent representatives argued strongly at that time, that DETs planning forecasts were incorrect and after an actual tour of the site, DET representatives conceded the veracity of our claims of overcrowding and agreed to reconsider the appropriateness of BER funding for development on site.

DET confirmed there was no strategic or forward planning to accommodate the forecast student increase at the school. Basically they refused to accept the demographic figures being provided by the school, even though they were strongly supported by the local Snowy Shire council figures. As a result of the refusal to engage in genuine planning dialogue with the school and community, DET developed a plan to utilise BER funding to provide some additional primary/middle school classrooms and expansion of administrative facilities on the basis that this would alleviate current overcrowding.

Whilst the school management were 'consulted' in this process, any suggestions for consideration of other options or challenges to the notion of spending more money on a site that was no longer fit for purpose were ignored or staff were virtually gagged with statements such as "If you don't accept this option, you'll get nothing"; "We've already spent too much money on this site, there is no option to move, so be thankful you are getting any more"; "Student numbers will never exceed 600". (Our current enrolments are 588 and with winter enrolments we will be over 600 for 2010 and forecast for over 700 by 2014).

As such the school management determined there was very little they could do to alter the course decided by DET and with the decisions being taken over the 2009/2010 Christmas break, there was no opportunity for the school community to discuss options. The process of appointment and the subsequent commencement of a new Principal at the school for 2010 further distracted the school community from pursuing the issues as vigorously as they could. Not only was the appointment process drawn out over a period of seven months and quite contentious but the changeover meant a significant loss of corporate knowledge of the specific considerations for the school site.

The erection of the contractor's safety fence around the worksite in early May dramatically demonstrated the significant impact that this construction project will have on the school. With the level of demountables already on site, the fence has now effectively removed any option to separate the student body, so very young children have no play areas other than those shared with all other age groups – conversely senior students have no capacity to undertake their more sporting type activities in the open for fear of injuring a smaller student.

There is no doubt, the BER funding is a windfall for all schools across the nation but the lack of DET strategic planning based on current, validated demographic information supported by community consultation with the immediate and broader stakeholders means the funding is being utilised as a 'knee-jerk' reaction rather than as an appropriately transparent and justified use of public funds to improve the educational facilities in conjunction with the economic stimulus to local businesses.

As the construction has only just commenced, we are not in a position to comment on whether the actual structure will be value for the \$2.7million. Given the appalling results of the Berridale School library managed by the same contractor, we are understandably very anxious about the end result. The School Council has only recently been provided an indication of the cost breakdown of the project and we are very perplexed as to why more than half of the costs are assigned to various planning and contingency factors. Initial presentation of possible draft plans just prior to the end of 2009, highlighted concerns about the design when a two storey building plan is presented with no stairs between the floors and no consideration at all for disabled access. These early blunders made all the more distressing when we are now aware that over \$500,000 of the project cost is attributed to design and planning costs.

In summary, our school community and the broader regional stakeholders are extremely concerned at the poor planning applied to the BER exercise. Whilst we clearly have some considerations that are unique to the Jindabyne situation, it would appear that we are not alone in our frustration at DET's incapacity to engage in genuine community and stakeholder communication and specifically concerned at the lack of strategic planning for infrastructure development on our site. Our recent public outcry has led the Minister to direct her department to commence a working group with the school community but this is clearly well after the horse has bolted on the BER funding.

We are now endeavouring to secure documentation regarding the decision making process behind the current BER proposal that unfortunately we could not obtain in time to meet the submission deadline. However we should be able to provide more detail in the not too distant future, if the Inquiry required the School Council to provide more evidence.

Thankyou for your time and consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Heather Hunter
Chairperson, School Council
Jindabyne Central School
7 June 2010