

**Submission
No 96**

INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM

Organisation: Pleasant Hills P&C
Name: Mr James McRae
Position: President of the P&C
Date received: 7/06/2010

Pleasant Hills P & C

25th May 2010
The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Parliament House

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into the BER Program

Dear Sir / Madame

Our P&C Association representing Pleasant Hills Public School, situated in the Riverina, NSW would like to raise our concerns with the controversial use of BER funding.

To give a background with our school;

A funding allocation of \$250,000 was assigned to complete 10 minor works as listed below;

1. A partition in a classroom to form a storage area – COMPLETED
2. Widen and heighten the opening between the two main classrooms – COMPLETED
3. Three blinds in the kitchen – COMPLETED
4. Four outside awnings on the western side of our library building – COMPLETED
5. Two screen doors – COMPLETED
6. Concrete paths and widening a short section of the driveway – COMPLETED
7. Soft fall under our two sets of playground – COMPLETED
8. New surrounds for the sandpit – PENDING
9. Opening up our weather shed and install a sink for art work - COMPLETED
10. Replace railings to the classroom and provide railings to the Library / Kitchen veranda – COMPLETED.

The total quote came to \$249,437.

Whilst the quality of the work is exemplary, and to date we have been funded for the works requested, we as the P&C association strongly question the value for money in this project.

Our concerns are substantiated when considering the cost of this BER project with other recent projects in the past 12 months. That is;

- The entire septic sewerage system was replaced, including absorption trenches and renewal of all rain water down pipes to create a “charged” system of rain water collection was achieved via the State Government funded Principals Priority Funding of approximately \$65,000. This project also included a new tank and a pump attached and new underground piping lay to 4 watering points in our grounds.
- The Federal Government funded BER aspect called National School Pride saw \$50,000 allocated to our school. This funding was used for an electrical upgrade to our kitchen, including a new electric stove, another new water tank, a new general assistant storage shed (6m x 4m) on a concrete floor, a 3 car carport and a gravel driveway of approximately 30 metres – connecting the original driveway with the carport, and removal of trees to facilitate construction of these structures.

Combined these two projects totalled \$115,000, less than half of the money allocated to our school for the BER (P21) project, and with vastly more structural involvement. The published costing breakdown for this current project, as attached, we feel does not display good value for money, in particular allocating \$77,787 for “Design documentation, field data and site management”.

To address the key criteria as outlined in the Parliamentary Inquiry into the BER notice:

Complaints:

An unfair discrimination between public and private schools in regard to autonomy in managing individual funds. i.e. control over prioritising independent school needs, sourcing suppliers / builders in regard to balancing the best quality and economics – noting that employing local contractors would not only assist in local economy, but also would provide a commitment to good workmanship by virtue of requiring a good “word-of-mouth” to continue in business.

Also whilst the requested works were approved at the commencement of this BER project, on near completion, the required inspection deemed that the soft fall under one of the play grounds was not sanctioned, and that the new surrounds around the sandpit was also not sanctioned. We are now uncertain if the latter works will proceed.

Concerns:

As demonstrated above, there is a definite concern relating to value for money. Whilst we acknowledge that we will get what we have requested (Sandpit surrounds pending), and the quality of workmanship is fine, the total cost is exorbitant, especially when compared to other government projects completed in the past 12 months.

Small local businesses also we feel should have had the opportunity to tender for the jobs, not a contractor as deemed by the government.

Examples:

As stated above two previous government funded projects which provided good value for money outcomes. It is important to note that both these projects were carried out by local contractors.

Recommendations:

Future incentive funds directed to schools should be managed by the P&C associations. We feel this would provide a basis for sound management for the funds provided as parents dedicated enough to be on the P&C associations, have the schools best interest in their actions. The successful “Investing in Our Schools Program” initiative by the previous government was managed in such a way.

For your information, we have tabled these concerns on previous occasions. Firstly, with our local member Mrs Susan Ley MP on the 4th March 2010. Mrs Susan Ley MP then raised this in parliament on Monday 15th March at 2.52pm.

Again, a formal written complaint regarding our concern for value for money was sent again to Mrs Susan Ley MP and to Mr Michael Coultts-Trotter on the 22nd April 2010. We hope that this will be of assistance in your inquiry. Also that it will help improve the management of future incentive funds directed at schools.

Yours sincerely,

James McRae
President of the P & C