

**Submission
No 115**

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

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Director Ms Beverly Duffy
General Purpose Standing Committee No.2
Parliament House
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Please find enclosed my submission based on -- The Building and Education Revolution Program Inquiry.

The intent of the BER program was to provide essential building construction work that would fulfil the needs of the both public and private school communities around Australia. This would be made possible by the input of \$14.7 billion from the Federal Government. Unfortunately as with everything the Federal Labor Government does, nothing is handled with experience such as consideration for above board handling of tax-payer funded money. The cost of the BER has blown out excessively, the results are not as portrayed by the spin from the Federal Government. Certainly not for the Public School system whereas the Private school system, being allowed to handle their own building needs, have benefited from the tax-payer funded money they received.

The BER is just another example of a Federal Government incapable of running a "chook raffle" and yet expecting the Australian public to accept and thank them for the bad results they continue to provide.. Added to the cost of the BER there is the "Roof Insulation Program" deaths and fires that resulted, The "Solarhart hot water" program, "Solarhart Electricity program, all used up to excess the tax-payer funded money then cancelled because of the rorts involved in those programs.

(1) As far back as September 2009 the Sunday Telegraph in an article by Glen Milne, "Stimulus sums aren't adding up" "The costing of the Building Education Revolution Fund has blown out by \$1.5 billion, the sloppy accounting exacerbated by repeated reports of money going to schools for things they'd never asked for, or didn't need - in one case, a \$250,000 grant to a school with just four students that was slated for closure"

(2) - March 16, 2010 - Anna Patty, Education Editor - "Teachers want audit of spending on new school buildings" - Teachers are asking for a NSW audit into the waste and mismanagement of the Federal Government's stimulus spending on new school buildings. Since the announcement on issues such as capacity for a school to determine and meet its particular requirements and priorities, over pricing of building cost before and after BER programs and wasteful duplication constructing new buildings instead of renovating and refurbishing existing buildings; public schools receiving trucked in prefabricated buildings while private schools are able to build permanent bricks and mortar buildings at much greater value for money".

- (3) - April 1, 2010 - The Daily Telegraph - "Country school cans \$600.000 canteen" - by Bruce McDougall, - A country school community is refusing to sign off on its \$600.000 education revolution canteen, claiming it is smaller than a single car garage and unusable. Parents are incensed that the canteen, built with Federal funding is so under sized that two people working inside it will not be able to pass each other safely. The original canteen was twice the size, with large serving and preparation areas. A sports complex being built in the town for \$415.000 included showers, toilets, stainless steel benches, ceiling fans, a meeting room, undercover barbecue and a veranda. (Tottenham Central School in the Central West.)
- (4) - New South Wales Teachers Federation - "Seeing through Gillard's agenda" From the moment the politicians and bureaucrats set to work to implement the BER, the problems began. School communities were pressured to accept pre-determined plans, designs, building works and time lines. Public schools were told they would get trucked-in, prefabricated buildings, while private schools were able to negotiate directly with builders to get permanent bricks-and-mortar construction .
- (5) - The Australian - May 10, 2010 - "One in seven schools get prefab buildings under BER". - Demountable or prefabricated buildings are being installed in one in seven public schools through the \$16.2 billion federal school rebuilding program. NSW will roll out 475 modular buildings for schools in the state, but a NSW Education spokesman said it was wrong to describe them as "demountables". "Modular buildings are constructed on permanent piers and foundations ; they also come with the same fixtures and fit-outs as standard school buildings.
- (6) - The Australian - May 15, 2010 - "BER library 'three times manufacturer's price" - "Parents at a NSW school are furious that the cost of a new library funded under the Rudd government's Building the Education Revolution program has blown out to be almost three times the manufacturer's price. Last year, Catti Public School, in the Hawkesbury region north of Sydney, was told it would be given a \$678.000 library and a \$202,000 shade structure under the federal government's \$16.2 billion school stimulus program. At the time, Parents and Citizens Association president Helena Bark raised serious concerns over those costings, as the pre-fabricated "cookie-cutter" designed library cost just \$341.000 from the manufacturer. Further the school had 18 months earlier built a covered outdoor learning area, or Cola, twice as big as the proposed new structure for \$70.000, just one third of the proposed price. Now not only have the school's concerns gone unanswered, but they have been told the cost of the library has blown out to \$920.000 - more than the school's entire original budget - and plans for a new shade structure have been scrapped.
- (7) - The Australian - May 19, 2010 - "Unhappy NSW principals "muzzled" by government" - The NSW government actively discouraged schools from self-managing projects under the \$16.2 billion stimulus program and then muzzled principals who spoke out against government waste and mismanagement. Fronting a Senate inquiry into the scheme yesterday, NSW Teachers Federation president Gary Zadkovich said NSW school principals who had spoken out against the scheme were "pressured into silence" and told they were required to be "positive advocates for public education". "The principals who spoke out about problems with the program were pursued by department officers and pressured into silence by the use of the department's code of conduct, Mr Zadkovich said".

(8) - The Australian - May 19, 2010 - "Catholic canteens five times cheaper" School canteens built by the Catholic school system under the \$16.2 billion stimulus scheme are up to five times cheaper than those delivered by state governments. Bill Walsh, executive officer of the NSW Catholic Block Grant Authority, which is handling \$1.03 billion of funds and delivering architect-designed buildings at a fraction of the cost of the public sector, said the authority set maximum construction rates for all Catholic schools, to prevent price gouging and rip-offs. Mr Walsh told, the Australian school libraries, classrooms and halls were delivered at a maximum rate of \$2451 per square metre, \$2426 per square metre and \$3500 per square metre respectively. By contrast the NSW Education Department estimates school libraries, classrooms and halls cost \$5400 per square metre, \$4271 per square metre and \$5800 per square metre respectively.

(9) - Radio 2GB during the morning session the NSW Department of Education Director-General Michael Coultts-Trotter passed the remark that the buildings being built for the public school system were double-brick buildings that would last for 80 years. It would seem the Director-General of the public school system did not even know the truth concerning the BER program when it was being implemented for the public schools.

Questions need to be asked concerning the waste of the money provided to the BER. Criminal charges should be laid not only against those who have charged such disgraceful fees for so little value for what was provided, there should be exposure of the callous disregard of the politicians in control of the BER program.

Questions must also be asked why the public school system has been treated so badly, why restrictions were placed upon principals of public schools, why the private schools were given so much freedom to obtain everything they needed from the BER program.?

Questions must be asked why the public school system had to accept what the State government decided they needed and not what they knew they needed. Not only must questions be asked BUT THERE MUST BE ANSWERS to those questions. Those who made such heavy handed one-sided decisions must be exposed and made answerable to those decisions that have cost the tax-paying public of Australia so much for so little in return for the public school system.

Mrs Patricia Wagstaff

P. Wagstaff.