

---

**Re: NSW Implementation of the Building Education Revolution: Primary Schools for the Twenty first Century**

Dear Committee

The Merrylands East Public School Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) along with the Merrylands East Branch of the NSW teachers Federation write concerning the NSW implementation of the Building Education revolution: Primary Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in particular the value for money. Merrylands East is appreciative of the federal Government's funding of \$2.8 Million for a hall and toilet block.

Merrylands East (student enrolment 386) is situated on a small 1.2 square hectare site with teachers parking their vehicles on the adjacent school road due to the limitation of space and to enable children to have adequate playground space. The \$2.8M is appreciated by the school community but at the same time, concerned about the overall management by the NSW Building Education Revolution (BER) Integrated Programs Office (IPO) and the Managing contractor Hansen Yuncken.

Merrylands East P&C sought documentation from the NSW Department of Education and Training on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009. Documentation was not received until Monday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2010. Within the covering letter from the NSW BER IPO to our P&C:

*"HY responded on 4 March 2010 to indicate that they wanted 6 pages exempt in full. A second consultation was carried out in order to partially release the documents. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2010, HY was contacted via telephone and at this time agreed to partial release of the relevant pages. The Department was keen to release these pages in full and as such contact HY again to try to obtain their consent. They agreed to release page 309 in full; however, the other pages were still considered by them to be exempt in part. I decided to agree with their view and consequently, similar information on additional pages will be released in a similar manner."*

HY= Hansen Yuncken (The managing contractor)

The financial details of our school projects and how the managing contractor and the BER IPO arrived at their costing decisions are paramount in the transparency our school projects and to ensure that our community are receiving value for money. As part of our FOI, the NSW Department of Education and Training has released many duplicated email correspondence between our principal and other members of the Department of Education and Training but very little financial information from the NSW BER IPO Office or the Managing contractor.

This withholding of information from our school is in direct contract with the BER Program Director during a 2GB radio interview where he asserted on the 17<sup>th</sup> March that they will

supply the documents if the school asked. This was further reiterated on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010 on the same radio station by the Minister for Education and Training that we only have to ask. Regrettably, this has proven to be untrue as our P&C further requested all the documents on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> April, our P&C finally received an estimate breakdown of costs from the BER IPO Office via our Principal. We are extremely concerned with:

#### **Hall**

- Site services hydraulics to a hall would cost \$118 345 (where the necessary pipework is available only 10 metres away from an existing toilet block) and then a further \$62 603 – this is to a male / female and disable toilet (not a toilet block) to be built as part of the hall.
- Site services electrical - \$182 345 to take power from our main circuit board down to the proposed hall site and to establish power for the contractors' worksheds. This does not include a further \$101 716 for the electrical work for the actual building and a further \$100 000 as a substation allowance. Our P&C feel that the funds associated with the electrical works is well beyond reasonability.
- Even the smallest items such as a fire extinguisher, sign and a blanket will cost \$746 whereas our estimates is that at best it would cost \$450 and two screws to install a bracket.
- Site supervision at a cost of \$131 921. We believe that the site supervisor is not on site full time and works across multiple schools. In other words, the managing contractor is double dipping in costs.

#### **Toilet block**

- Site services electrical \$12 200 to take power to the toilet block and then a further \$61 866 for electrical services within the block. How many lights are in a toilet block?
- Site hydraulic services \$22 160 with a further \$77 445 for the installation of water in the toilet block. Our advice from independent plumbers is that there is an adequate pipe that would have enough pressure for the toilet block. The furnishings such as the toilet bowls and urinals are a separate cost.
- Site supervision \$37 263 for a toilet block is again double dipping as the two projects are only 20 metres apart.

The disappointing aspect of the costs for our toilet block is that existing services are already in place. A demountable canteen currently sits on the proposed site. Also, the site supervision fees vary from one school to another despite the same core 14 hall being built.

The Federal Government cap on 4% managing contractors' fees is appropriate but our P&C believes that the additional fees imposed on the school's project reduce the value for money.

Our school P&C is disappointed at the misinformation that the NSW BER has been providing the Federal Government's BER in relation to our office. We are in receipt of a letter that indicated from the national BER program that indicated that advice was provided by the NSW BER Office that no toilet block would be demolished on our school site. This assertion is totally untrue.

As part of our experience with the BER Office, we were extremely concerned that our nationally award winning landscape would be partially concreted over. This garden has strong sentimental importance to our community and links with other sustainability measures. In our search of NSW BER documentation, we discovered that a NSW BER Officer's used the term "XXXXing garden" in an email correspondence. We believe that any servant of the crown that is implementing the Federal Government Policy has gone beyond acceptability in this form of behaviour. We will be pleased to table this correspondence at any public hearing.

The BER Office consistently sends the message that the costs are only estimates. However, we believe that the estimated costs are well wide of the actual costs in the hope that any surplus would be returned back to the BER Office rather than to the school itself. Any surplus for our school would be invaluable as we experience an asphalt playground that is cracking and dating back to 1928, cracking in rendering of a historic building, landscaping of school grounds and data communication.

The BER office also sends the message that safety is a key consideration for the higher costs. However, this argument is flawed as independent schools and catholic schools would take safety concerns too but their prices are not as high.

The current situation with our school community is that the BER IPO has provided our school with an alternative plan that includes a hall and canteen, and a toilet block that is smaller than previously planned. The new location has our demountable administration and a toilet block on top of it with electrical, hydraulic and telecommunication services attached. This provides the BER IPO and the Managing contractors an opportunity to ensure that the site services and site supervision cost are at a realistic market value, and reflects the true nature of the proposed works, especially since the intended site. We also believe that the site supervision costs can be reduced to reflect what actually happens and the managing contractor does not "double dip" but employing one person to oversee a number of projects on different sites.

Merrylands East P&C welcomes the news of the BER Taskforce and invites Mr Orgill to visit our school to determine whether our community is receiving value for money.