



11 October 2009

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**SUBMISSION TO SENATE ENQUIRY  
'Primary Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'**

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) has welcomed the opportunities offered to the Primary Schools for the Building Education Revolution 21<sup>st</sup> Century (P21) under this Federal Government Initiative.

The provision of new libraries, multipurpose halls, classrooms, refurbishments/renovations to existing buildings and early learning centres will substantially improve the educational environments available to students in Catholic Schools in Western Australia.

The building projects being undertaken under P21 will provide important additions and improvements to school building infrastructure. This has occurred at a time when it was becoming increasingly difficult to fund the capital building programs and meet the requirements of Catholic schools to satisfy the increasing educational demands of an ever changing environment. In Western Australia, 142 Catholic Schools have received funding to commence 225 building projects. The total value of these projects is approximately \$282.7 million. An undertaking of this size would have been well beyond the financial resources normally available to the CECWA.

**In response to the Terms of Reference:**

- (i) The conditions and criteria for project funding

Each Catholic School in Western Australia has a Capital Development Plan (CDP); which has been prepared by the School Board and approved by the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA).

The criteria for P21 projects gave ample scope for the provision of facilities that would improve the educational environments in schools. It was found that there was enough flexibility within the Building Education Revolution (BER) guidelines to serve the needs of almost all Schools eligible for this funding.

The approval and application process for West Australian Catholic Schools was to allow School Boards and Principals the flexibility to submit proposals most suited to each of their individual school's needs.

The Principals engaged their own Architects that were part of the CECWA panel and submitted their proposal to the CECWA. All the proposals were vetted by the Resources section of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, which is the executive arm of the CECWA, and they were then recommended by one of two School Resources Committees before being approved by the CECWA. Whilst this extensive consultative process involved additional effort on the part of school Principals and the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), school Principals together with their School Boards were very satisfied that they were able to have significant input into the planning and development of their schools. At the date of this report, no complaints have been received by the CECWA from the school Principals or school communities.

The CEOWA had also contracted three Architects to prepare a number of architectural building template drawings; in accordance to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) requirements. The CEOWA made limited use of the templates for halls, libraries and early learning centres but shared their templates with DEEWR so that other schools (Government and Independent) in Australia were able to utilise the opportunity if needed. In Western Australia, the schools that were able to use them did so in their exact form or alternatively, engaged with their own Architects to prepare plans that were based upon the templates. This approach allowed schools to feel they had considerable input into the design of the 'final product' whilst also having the security of established guidelines and estimated building costs.

(ii) The use of local and non-local contractors

Wherever possible, the CEOWA encouraged the use of local contractors in projects. In all cases, Architects tendered the projects with the intent for local builders to be able to participate whilst retaining 'value for money'.

There has been no attempt to engage building contractors on a State-wide basis.

(iii) The role of State Governments

At the commencement of the BER, the CEOWA met with the State Government BER Coordinator to make enquiries if an alliance could be established to share best practices and information. However, it was determined that the time frames were too short and the risk involvement in planning the alliances was too high.

The CEOWA has on occasions, had communications with State Government staff, particularly David Smith, the State Co-ordinator for BER and Warren Hill from the Office of Premier and Cabinet. Otherwise, there has been little contact with the State Government in relation to the P21 component of BER.

(iv) Timing and budget issues, including duplication

There was some apprehension that the timelines set out for the commencement of projects were challenging. Effective capital building planning takes time, as does the process of gaining local government approval site surveys, geotechnical reports and traffic audits. Most Local Councils require the proposed developments to be advertised and nearby residents invited to respond. This process also delayed the commencement of a building program.

However, there is an acceptance that whilst some projects, even if not commenced on time, should be completed on time. The CEOWA would perform its best endeavours to ensure that this occurs.

It should be noted that Catholic schools in Western Australia did not have access to the same rapid approval process with Local Councils as State Government schools.

However, there were only difficulties in some instances and generally Local Councils were very helpful and understood the BER and its urgency.

In some regional areas, Architects had suggested delaying the tendering process for some projects to 'stage' the commencement of building so as to avoid 'delays' where there were a limited number of building companies operating in an area. However, this suggestion was not accepted by the CEOWA.

The greatest area of concern with regard to timelines has been in situations where schools with a small primary student cohort; specifically small remote schools and secondary schools with a small year 7 cohort. These projects worth \$250,000 and \$850,000 are due to be completed within 7 months. In a number of cases this timeline will be difficult to achieve, particularly in the north of Western Australia when tropical rains make roads impassable and building impractical.

There should also be recognition that the employment being generated by the BER initiative does not simply impact on builders and labourers. Other employment sectors such as Planners, Quantity Surveyors, Architects, Electrical Engineers, Hydraulic Consultants and clerical staff have also played important roles in the preparation and planning of these projects and consequently, the need for people in these sectors has created new employment.

DEEWR have always been supportive in every aspect with regards to submissions and cash flow matters.

With regard to the issue of duplication, careful planning and co-operation between the schools and the CEOWA has enabled the WA Catholic System to avoid the replication of existing facilities.

(v) The requirements for school signs and plaques

For many years there has been a requirement for signs and plaques to be erected in order to recognise the contribution made by Governments toward school building projects. There is no objection to this occurring in the case of BER projects and this has always been welcomed by the CECWA and school communities.

(vi) The management of the program

The DEEWR staff who oversee the non-government sector projects in Western Australia are to be commended for the manner in which they have assisted the CEOWA. Responses and outcomes to submissions have been professional, prompt, competent, courteous and helpful. This assistance has been given in an environment when all concerned have been transacting under prescriptive timeframes for this new program that has had deadlines that are challenging.

The CEOWA has prepared a comprehensive project plan for the management of the BER. All payments for the BER have been centralised to the CECWA to increase the quality assurance in governance and compliance in accordance to DEEWR requirements.

**Conclusion:**

The CECWA has welcomed this Federal Government Initiative to improve the capital building facilities in its Schools. The CECWA also supports the Federal Government's initiative to stimulate the economy in providing employment for people that have lost their jobs due to the global financial crisis.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Dullard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ron Dullard