

Submission from
Network of Community Activities
Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century.

Information About the Submission

This submission is provided by;

Network of Community Activities

66 Albion Street Surry Hills NSW 2010.

About Network

Our organisation represents approximately 700 Out of School Hours Services (OSHC) in NSW services and ACT, both community based and private. Network is the peak body for OSHC services in NSW and the NSW member of the National Out of School Hours services Association (NOSHSA).

Established in 1974, Network provides resource, support, training and advice to communities and OSHC services throughout NSW.

Introduction

Network has welcomed the investment by the Federal Government into the development of improved facilities for schools across Australia. We believe that investment in schools has a flow on effect to the community and had anticipated based on earlier policy statements from the Australian Labor party prior to their election to office, that Out of School Hours Services would be considered and accommodated within the planning .

In this submission Network of Community Activities intends to comment from a NSW perspective on;

- **The conditions and criteria for project funding**
- **The role of State Governments**
- **Timing and budget issues, including duplication.**
- **The management of the program**

Network would welcome the opportunity to appear before a Senate hearing to discuss the issues raised in this submission in greater detail.

Network of Community Activities as the NSW peak body for OSHC has increasing concerns regarding the implementation of the Building Education Revolution funding in NSW. Community based membership makes up at least 90% of our membership and as a result a number of parents committees have contacted us with their concerns. The concerns we have been alerted to are illustrated in the following case studies provided by our members.

We are aware that a number of other states and territories, most notable being WA and SA, are also experiencing difficulties with the BER, however the following paper is NSW based and covers only NSW issues.

The program vision of developing facilities and increasing the provision of “Community hubs” for the whole community was enlightened and visionary.

However the vision falls short in that there was inadequate consultation about what a school in the 21st century actually should look like.

The approach to the delivery of the program was to effect immediate change and whilst this is understood it is of concern that the rushed approach to the roll out has caused divisions between school communities that are damaging to the whole community.

It is disappointing that the project has in some instances become derailed by an emphasis on expediency rather than a considered and consultative approach to what schools in the 21st century really need to be effective and functioning.

It is disappointing that a program decided to be an economic stimulus has not made provision for guaranteeing that it is also inclusive of the needs of working families.

The conditions and criteria for project funding

In the implementation of the Building Education Revolution reforms there appears to have been no attempt to safeguard the security of tenure for the OSHC services occupying school premises. Many of these services are operating in disused classrooms and surplus buildings now earmarked for demolition under the reforms.

Case Study 1

The Principal arrived & informed us that we could “possibly” be offered two joined rooms, with “possibly” storage & “possibly” a shared use of the canteen & “possibly” office space but all this would only be to the end of 2010.

When queried further we were told that it would be up to the P&C whether we could use the canteen & up to a teacher who has behavioral problem children, whether we could share her office space.

We were told quite bluntly that they had been offered funding for a new school hall & the best place to put it would be where we currently are situated

It appears widespread across NSW there is limited consultation with OSHC services about the impact of the building works on their services. Many services are currently not aware of how major capital works will impact on service provision however initial cases brought to our attention highlight that improved communication processes are essential. In many cases long term services that have been operating in schools for over 20 years have been relegated to new environments that contravene government requirements for safe workplaces and environments that do not consider the needs of the children in attendance. Whilst we acknowledge with any new initiative there will be inconvenience the lack of security of tenure or communication with service providers makes the situation intolerable for many families.

Case study 2

The school is commencing building its new hall next week. OSHC service not advised, nor Council who sponsors the service on site. This means access to the OSHC will be reduced; limited to nil access to the outdoor area, which means 60 children will be crammed into an impossibly small room; and the works to enclose the outside area in order to expand the OSHC will be unable to proceed while the hall is being built – a period of at least 6 months.

The issue of maintaining service provision during the building works is problematic with concerns regarding the suitability of environments being offered to services that meet the needs of school age children. OSHC services in Australia come under the National Quality Assurance system. Services not able to be temporarily accommodated in suitable venues will be disadvantaged in the Accreditation process. The result will be an increase in services not accredited and a decrease in the quality of service provision for school age children. We are confident that the Federal Government did not plan on this flow on effect from what is a long overdue and worthwhile initiative. Network has been advised by Julia Gillard in a letter dated 20 October that despite these issues “ Children in government approved OSHC services are entitled to receive quality care in safe environments at all times”, yet provides not criteria within the funding guidelines that supports this principle. In the same letter Ms Gillard informs us that there will be no exemptions to the Australian Government quality assurance system and all services should be expected to undergo a spot check visit. The assumption that any service can perform to the standards expected in the quality assurance system during a period of relocation or building works demonstrates a complete lack of understanding about the complexity of the OSHC sector.

Case study 3

*The Parent Committee has been invited to attend a P&C meeting next week as they want to discuss the potential relocation of service to the vacant Sydney Water site across the road. The problem with the site is that it has **lead and other contaminants** and hence the reason for it being vacant!
Apart from the \$100-\$300k cost estimate provided in 2001 to decontaminate there is certainly no upside in doing so.*

The role of State Governments

Network has an excellent relationship with the NSW Education Minister and her advisers as well as several senior management members. We have had ongoing communication with the Ministers office in regards to our concerns but believe that nationally that there are unresolved issues arising out of the program funding that have potential for enormous impact on the wellbeing of children and families.

The role of State Government has been highlighted as the determining factor in the success or challenges faced by OSHC services in the program. In NSW we have had a number of OSHC severely impacted upon with the permanent loss of venues or reduction in venue sizes that impact on the provision of OSHC for families. The Federal Government response to the encouraging local solutions to the local problems is honorable however unrealistic when there is no guidelines around the management of one of the single biggest users of School facilities in Australia- the OSHC sector. OSHC services are dependent on the goodwill of schools and the local community.

The facilitation of the process at a local level has ranged from exemplary to appalling. There are reported cases across NSW where services have been effectively eliminated from any consultation or discussion regarding the building housing the OSHC service. In short the NSW Education Department has three templates being used for the planning of school halls. The designs are inflexible and lack aesthetic appeal. In short they are applying a fast food approach to the development of facilities in order to accommodate what we believe to be unrealistic timeframes set by the Australian government. The current information on the plans available for use under the funding remain inaccessible on the NSW Government website. There is an overall lack of clarity around the process and organization.

It should be acknowledged that in NSW the Catholic Education Office has provided sound leadership in monitoring of the provision of the new facilities and ensuring they are able to accommodate OSHC services in former classrooms or the new accommodation. Network has received no reports to date of issues arising within the Catholic Education Office.

Timing and budget issues, including duplication.

The allocation of funds for the Building Education Revolution does not cover the increased costs for the relocation of services. Many services through parent contributions have upgraded buildings to make them suitable to accommodate the OSHC service. This includes the installation of new

kitchens, storage and ventilation. OSHC services operate traditionally on limited budgets and no provision is made for the high cost of relocation.

Case Study 4

Our problem will be who will pay for the relocation costs approx \$25,000 ?

In a sample financial plan provided for Network, a service located in the eastern suburbs of Sydney has identified that the cost of relocation of their service across the course of the building works will amount to \$207,200.

In the main services relocating within the school on a temporary basis are averaging around \$25,000 in relocation costs out of the venue and back to new accommodation when complete. Services do not have the capacity to absorb these costs without increasing fees for families using the service.

Whilst it is a small number of services in NSW affected, with a maximum of around 5% of services reported to date the impost on these services is considerable and to the detriment of the families and children using the service.

The management of the program

The close relationships between OSHC and schools has resulted in many services hoping to negotiate a suitable outcome for the school community and reluctant to speak out for fear of escalating the conflict. The lack of Australian Government policy direction in this regard has the potential to escalate the conflict within the community.

Case study 4

We were told quite bluntly that if we make it difficult for the school to have the new hall built where we are, then they would build it elsewhere & simply demolish us to make more playground space.

As evidenced through all the case studies, OSHC services are attempting to negotiate their way through the situation. For this reason our organization has refused to provide media with the names of schools or services involved in this process and experiencing difficulties. The delicate nature of the negotiations and the need to build long lasting and respectful relationships we understand requires confidentiality and empathy. We have already heard of good stories that come out of working together and we would like to see these repeated across NSW.

Case study 5

Our hall, which we use every day, will be demolished soon. However, we are very fortunate having a Principal who believes it is important to have a quality OOSH onsite, unusual I know. She is happy for us to utilize the staff room for afternoon tea and the Library and attached AV room and computer lab while the building program is taking place. Just wanted you to know some Principals do understand the importance of our service although I know there are a lot of services not so fortunate. Thanks for getting our voice to be heard out there for those services having difficulties. The Principals should realise their numbers would drop significantly if it was not for our service to their community.

The Federal Government has promoted the development of a National Quality Agenda that is inclusive of OSHC services. The Quality systems identified the importance of the environment in which the service is based. The result of the two policy directions from the BER funding and the Quality Reform is a paradox that needs resolution.

Network recommends the following amendments to the current reforms:

- 1. Incentive funding for schools that include in their proposal a multipurpose room for designated use as an Out of School Hours Service.**
- 2. Opportunity for schools not requiring new school halls or classrooms to apply for funds to build an Out of School Hours Service for community use.**
- 3. Consultation with the OSHC service and parent community included in the requirements for the funding.**
- 4. Funding agreements include a requirement for the OSHC service to be accommodated in a suitable venue for the duration of the building works.**
- 5. State and Territory BER Implementation working groups to include a representative from the relevant State/ Territory OSHC Association.**
- 6. One off funding for OSHC services incurring relocation costs due to the impact of the building works.**
- 7. NCAC Spot checks and validation visits to services affected by the relocations be modified to take into consideration the impact of the school building works on the OSHC service.**

Network wishes to work with Government to resolve the problems constructively and to ensure that no child or family suffers as a result of a policy initiative intended to benefit the community in which they exist. Whilst only a few services are affected the impact is enormous for those communities experiencing the difficulties.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee.

Thankyou.