



Australian Primary  
Principals Association

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## **Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century**

### **Submission from the Australian Primary Principals Association**

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In response to the following:

On 9 September 2009, the Senate referred the following matters to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee for inquiry and report.

- (a) consideration of the Federal Government's Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century program, with particular reference to:
  - (i) the conditions and criteria for project funding,
  - (ii) the use of local and non-local contractors,
  - (iii) the role of state governments,
  - (iv) timing and budget issues, including duplication,
  - (v) requirements for school signs and plaques,
  - (vi) the management of the program; and
  - (vii) other related matters.

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## **APPA – About the Association**

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) is the national professional association for primary school principals in Australia. APPA represents affiliated state and territory Government, Catholic and Independent primary schools across the nation and has over 7,000 members. The purpose for APPA is to be the national voice for all primary school principals throughout Australia. APPA's constituent associations are the 23 state and territory associations that comprise the Australian Government Primary Principals Association, the Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association and the Independent Primary School Heads of Australia.

APPA is governed by a National Executive Council, which is composed of representatives of the 23 affiliate associations:

- One Government, one Catholic and one Independent principal from each state and territory (23 members - one member represents the Independent affiliates in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory);
- National presidents of the three national affiliates; and
- One elected full-time President.

APPA is the national voice for primary school principals and their schools on national issues related to the education of children of primary school age. It speaks directly to the Federal Government on matters that concern school principals and their school communities.

APPA seeks and receives information and feedback from its members across Australia both:

- through the constituent associations, who conduct surveys in a variety of ways, for example using email networks and surveys at meetings; and
- direct from members, for example using surveys at the national conference.

## **Position of APPA in Relation to the Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century program**

Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century is a \$12.4 billion long term investment to build or upgrade large scale infrastructure in all primary schools, special schools and K-12s. Funding under Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century is being provided to build new facilities such as libraries and multipurpose halls and for major upgrades of existing facilities.

In a press release on 3 February 2009, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard stated, in part:

*“This historic nation building investment by the Rudd Government will not only support jobs – it is also a down payment on the long term strength of the Australian economy. By improving the quality of education received by every Australian child, this program will help deliver the stimulus of today and underwrite higher productivity tomorrow. Building the Education Revolution is a key element of the Government’s \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan to support up to 90,000 Australian jobs over the next two years.”*

On the same day, APPA issued a press release stating in part:

*“The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) strongly applauds the Australian Government’s \$14.7 billion Building the Education Revolution package announced today. Today’s announcement is fantastic news for Australia’s 7,500 primary schools.*

*“APPA President, Leonie Trimper, said of today’s announcement to provide \$12.4 billion in infrastructure funding for primary schools: ‘This is a fantastic win-win for all Australians. The Government’s \$12.4 billion Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century announcement is not only an important economic stimulus to the thousands of local communities around our country, it is also a lasting investment in Australia’s future – our primary school students.’ ... Today’s announcement is acknowledgement of just how seriously the Australian Government takes primary school education and ensuring that primary school students around the country get the best possible buildings and facilities.”*

On 22 June 2009, APPA issued a second press release stating in part:

*“The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) today reiterated its strong support for the Federal Government’s \$14.7 billion investment for Australia’s 9,200 schools. While acknowledging that there have been some recent media reports exposing difficulties with the implementation of the package, APPA today said this has overwhelmingly been the responsibility of individual States and Territories.*

*“APPA President, Leonie Trimper, stated: ‘As I’ve said before, primary schools have been waiting for decades for an investment of this size. Of course we support the right building project for the right school and where this does not occur questions should be asked of the States/Territory’s implementation program, but overwhelmingly this package is helping to ensure that all primary students are educated in quality facilities. We need to keep the problems that have been raised in perspective because, for the majority of principals, this is a really positive initiative and is working well.”*

At the September 2009 national conference of APPA, a survey was undertaken to seek feedback on the element of Building the Education Revolution related to primary schools – Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century. The survey form is attached – Appendix 1.

Three hundred and five conference delegates, representing all sectors, states and territories, completed and returned the survey. The data showed that 85% of respondents strongly supported the program.

In September-October, APPA’s affiliate associations were asked to compile information from their members about their experiences with the projects funded by the Building the Education Revolution program in their schools. The information received from their members showed that the program was strongly supported by schools and their communities across all sectors of primary education.

## Evidence to Support APPA's Position

In the survey conducted at APPA's Annual Conference held in September 2009, conference delegates were asked to rate the program from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest) and to provide comments on the reasons for their rating. The table below shows the distribution of ratings from the survey.

Rating	No. of Respondents
5	195
4	64
3	18
2	15
1	13
<b>Total:</b>	<b>305</b>

The data showed that 85% of respondents strongly supported the program, giving it a rating of 4 or 5. Only 9% gave it a low rating, giving it a 1 or 2. Only 4% of respondents (13 out of 305) rated the program as a 1, while 64% (almost two-thirds) rated it as a 5. This data clearly indicates that the program has been successful in the vast majority of primary schools across Australia.

One hundred and sixty three conference delegates wrote comments explaining why they gave the program a rating of 5. Five comments from the 195 respondents who rated the program as a 5 are indicative of the reactions of principals and their school communities:

- *"It was 5 because the funding was needed, timely and appropriate. The central message is that primary schools are receiving much needed capital resourcing."*
- *"This money has brought forward our plans, hopes and dreams for our school by at least 20 years!!! Our whole school community is alive with excitement and the possibilities our new facilities will give to our school and our students!!"*
- *"We couldn't be happier that we are able to both construct and exciting new multipurpose facility and spend great dollars to renovate, maintain and improve our school. At last we feel valued and have the finances to support the great learning we have always done at our school."*
- *"It has enabled us to build eight new state of the art learning areas, thus replacing old, small and unproductive portables. The excitement of parents, staff and kids is intoxicating. Children and teachers will thrive in these new learning areas, big, bold and beautiful."*
- *"We will receive a hall (multi-faceted) that will provide learning spaces equipped for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Great excitement engendered by this from parents, staff and teachers."*

These comments were echoed by those who gave the program a 4 rating.

The comments from those respondents who gave the program a rating of 3 show that they are basically non-committal at this stage, mainly because their projects have not yet progressed very far.

Two examples are:

- *“Only know that my school is approved for Round 1 but awaiting planning conference.”*
- *“An initial meeting in May and had little feedback until builder was assigned to school. Had my first meeting with builder and at this stage all sounds good and people re saying all the correct things. Wait and see I suppose!”*

However, 17 of the 18 respondents who gave the program a 3 rating made positive comments about the program in terms of what they believed it would deliver to their school when their project was completed. The other respondent did not comment.

All 15 respondents who gave the program a rating of 2 commented on their future projects. Thirteen of those foreshadowed positive outcomes for the children and their school communities. Eleven of the 13 respondents who gave the program a rating of 1 made a comment about the future outcomes of their projects. Eight of those were positive, for example:

- *“The new classroom block will deliver a better teaching and learning environment.”*

There were some negative comments from some respondents. It is very important to emphasise that the number of negative comments, even from those who gave the program a rating of 1 or 2, was a very small proportion of the total number of comments written. Almost none of the negative comments were about the program itself; almost all were about the implementation of the program at the local and/or jurisdictional level.

These comments were about aspects of the program such as:

- Timelines
- Planning and implementation guidelines and processes (local and national)
- Consultation
- Lack of action
- Project costs

Examples of negative comments from respondents include:

- *“Best injection of money but terrible timelines.”*
- A very few respondents commented that the projects would be used to benefit sections of large K-12 schools other than the primary section. The exact comments cannot be shown here, as it would not be possible to identify the individual schools involved.
- *“The funding process severely disadvantaged our school. We are multi campus with 5 sites having primary enrolments. We received funding as one school.”*
- *“We are happy to have 2 new resources – but the process was extremely stressful and had no community consultation.”*

- *“Costs were way over the quotes we obtained.”*
- *“A grant has been made – advertised. A consultant was to visit 3 months ago. Result nil. No consultant. No progress.”*

Again, it must be noted that almost all of the negative comments were not directed at the program. There have been, and there still appear to be, some problems with the implementation of the program at the jurisdictional and local level.

It must also be stressed again that the number and proportion of negative comments were very small in comparison with the very large number of positive comments made by respondents.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence provided by principals across Australia is overwhelmingly in favour of the outcomes from the Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century program. The data from the survey conducted at the recent national conference and from the information provided by the constituent associations supports APPA’s position in support of the program.

It is apparent that, once the local and jurisdictional issues that affect a relatively small number of projects are worked through and some respondents indicated that solutions were already being found for many of those, the outcomes for primary school students, and for the community as a whole, will be positive.

These comments from principals show that will happen:

- *“The facilities at the school have had a real boost and this in turn creates energy and enthusiasm within the community. It also generates a focus on the value of primary education. Many schools could not dream of doing what they are able to under this funding.”*
- *“Community library will celebrate the important place literacy plays in our lives. Enhanced facility enables better use of learning areas to accommodate teaching and learning. Enhanced facility values adds to the staff and students morale and pride in school for community.”*
- *“Great positivity throughout the school staff and positive expectancy throughout the student body leading to whole of community excitement about future possibilities for our school. A chance to review teaching practices with a view towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century focus of the new areas.”*
- *“These improvements fit within our vision to support the future needs of students, providing learning spaces and technology to enhance outcomes for students as well as supporting industries in our neighbourhood to stimulate the local economy. This will cause ripples that will extend to other industries again putting money into the economy which is also important at this time. It has been fantastic to design and plan spaces for learning rather than make the learning fit the space.”*

Guy Mason, President of the Independent Primary School Heads of Australia, writes in a summary of responses from the members of his association:

*“All in all from the independent sector, the response has been a most positive one and whilst we acknowledge there have been hurdles to jump and the report timelines and expectations above what is normally expected, these are understood and considered a small price to pay for such terrific support to primary schools around our great country.”*

Norm Hart, President of the Australian Government Primary Principals Association, writes:

*“Across the nation government school principals are delighted with the facilities they are getting in their schools as a result of this initiative. Questions of value for money have been raised by principals. These have been answered satisfactorily as principals have been provided with more information, which has enabled them to more clearly understand the scope of the program and its effect on supply and demand. Members of AGPPA have given the BER an unqualified thumbs-up.”*

Bruno Benci, President of the Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association states:

*“In discussion with Catholic principals around the nation, there is resounding support and sincere appreciation for the Building the Education Revolution initiative commissioned by the Federal Government. Principals unanimously view the initiatives as a significant boost for our Catholic school communities; in particular, principals are excited about the host of new opportunities which will be made available to further enhance and develop the learning environment from all our staff and students.”*

It has been disappointing that the media focus on the program until now has been on the sorts of issues highlighted in the negative comments from survey respondents. The media does not follow up on their negative stories to investigate the ways that the particular issues have been overcome.

APPA hopes that the media will in the future give a balanced view of the program and its undoubted benefits for Australia’s young people now and for the entire Australian economy and society in the future.

APPA will continue to give strong support to the program and work with the Australian Government to ensure that it achieves the best outcomes possible.

After hearing comments from principals across Australia from all school systems, Leonie Trimper stated:

*“This is very clearly the best thing that has ever happened for primary education in Australia. It will deliver facilities for primary school children that will enable them to learn the skills and knowledge that they will need for their future throughout the 21st century. For many school communities, this has literally been a dream come true.”*

## Appendix 1: Survey Undertaken at the September 2009 National Conference

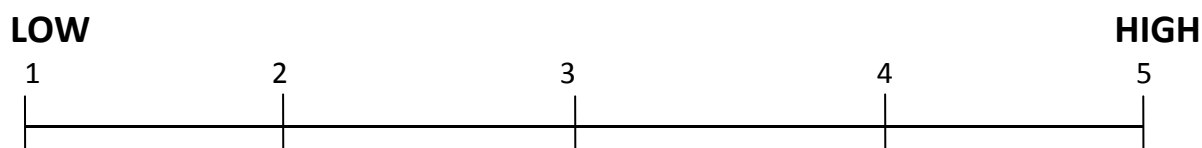
### Building the Education Revolution

#### CONTEXT:

The Australian Primary Principals Association has always maintained and acknowledged that the *Building the Education Revolution* is the best thing that has ever happened to primary education at the Federal level. However, recent stories in the media seem to be suggesting that the money is being frivolously spent on primary and that there are a huge number of issues around implementation.

What is your P21 story? Does it support the media claims or not?  
Please be honest in your response.

#### 1. How would you rate the success of P21 for your school?



#### 2. If your response to Question 1 was lower than 2, could you tell us why?

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#### 3. What's happening as a result of P21 that you believe will enhance the teaching and learning in your school?

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#### 4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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**Thank you for completing our survey.**