

Senate Committee Enquiry – Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century

Dear Committee Members

We are concerned members of the Black Springs School Community including past and present P&C members and executive. The Black Springs Primary School received a grant of up to \$250,000 under the Building Education Revolution and was told by the NSW Department of Education that the only applicable spending under that program was for either a new hall or a Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA). Since the school population is under 20 pupils, a hall was not seen as an appropriate structure to meet the needs of the school and students.

It was made clear to representatives of the Department of Education that the most urgent needs of the school were as outlined in the attached letter, furthermore an existing small COLA already meets the current needs of the school and students.

We got a new COLA – no further options or discussion was entered into by the Department on this.

To that end, we submit the attached documents outlining the perceived shortfall in value and usability of the recently constructed COLA (which was built on the school's soccer field).

The school is in a very small rural community with no reticulated potable water supply and a very old fibreglass water tank providing all the water for toilet flushing and drinking. The priority for this school should have been to provide a safe, adequate, non-freezing water supply to meet the present and future needs of the school. Additionally, since Black Springs is at an elevation of 1210 meters above sea level (ASL), our winters are long, subject to substantial snow falls and very cold temperatures that can occur anywhere from May until November. This means that all plumbing facilities need to be insulated against the cold, buildings need to be constructed taking into account snow load and wind strength factors. We don't see any evidence of this in the construction of the new COLA as water and drainage pipes are unlagged, the concrete slab floor is below street level and is subject to flooding from both the street and inadequate roof drainage.

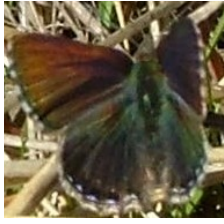
Furthermore, the existing toilet block at the school is in a separate, uninsulated brick building that is well past its useful life. This toilet block is separate from the main building, on a different level and cannot be seen or supervised adequately by the one teacher at the school. Due to the inadequate and substandard fencing around the school grounds, this poses a potential danger to the students who have been terrorized by stray dogs, snakes and strangers. The children will only use this facility as a last resort, preferring to abstain from drinking water and using the toilet until they get home after school. This can be a considerable length of time as some of them endure a bus trip of close to an hour both before and after school. A new toilet block attached to the existing classroom block at the same level and heated for both winter comfort and to prevent the pipes freezing would have been a much more useful building addition to this school.

We would be pleased to provide more information should you require it, as the above and attached only highlight some of the most important issues affecting the school, its' pupils and the community.

Yours Sincerely;

Alistair Ross
Alexandra Tuson
Antonia Maguire
Jill Ross
Patricia Slovacek

April 22, 2010



19 April 2010
Mr Gerard Martin
Member for Bathurst

Mr Bob Debus,
Member for Macquarie

Subject : Schools - Education Revolution – Stimulus – Balance of Grant Monies

Dear Mr Martin and Mr Debus

Members of the P & C and others in the community have urged me to write on their behalf to express their concern about the recent spending of Federal Grant money.

Black Springs Public School P & C and other involved citizens of the district were delighted to receive the news of \$250,000 grant for upgrade works to the school. The NSW Government s' apparent "one size fits all" solution to the spending of this money has not addressed the needs of the Black Springs Public School, and we are concerned that some \$200,000 has been syphoned off to other ends.

Black Springs is located 26Km south west of Oberon at 1210m above sea level and experiences average annual rainfall of 890mm, roughly half falling as snow in winter when overnight temperatures fall as low as -5°C and occasionally the school is closed when the local roads are deemed unsafe due to icy conditions. There are children from 7 families attending with a total enrollment of 18 children, and one gifted teacher.

In November 2009 my husband and I had a double garage and double carport 12m X 6m erected on a reinforced concrete slab including 2 roller doors and a personal door, which cost under \$16,000 all up - site preparation, engineers' certificate, slab, supply and erect. At about the same time a new COLA was erected at the school, slightly smaller in area, connected to the main building by a walkway, and a path to the front entry of the school with cover was constructed. The COLA has a stainless steel sink, and aluminium furniture.

Even in our most generous costing, the works carried out could not have totalled more than \$50,000, given that temporary fencing was erected around the works. The building works appear to be competently carried out, however they do not take into account the climatic conditions of Black Springs, or the actual needs of the school.

In summary these needs are:

1. Water tanks to provide adequate potable water as there is no reticulated potable water available in the village, only a soon to be terminated leaky connection to the Forestry Headquarters bore. There is an old fibreglass tank which has leaked and is breaking down on the outside, and is too small to provide drinking water as well as toilet flushing etc.
2. Proper fencing with gates for pedestrians and access for emergency vehicles.
3. A toilet area which is heated in winter so that the water does not freeze enabling flushing and drainage, and provision of warm water so hands will be washed.
4. A cover over the sand pit to keep out unwanted cat and dog faeces and that snakes cannot slither under. A shade sail for summer play would be appreciated here.



The Main Entrance to the school, showing the construction of the fence and the disconnected strainer. Approximately 80 meters of fence is in the same or worse condition, and should be replaced. Vehicle and pedestrian gates are needed to facilitate entry to the playground area for emergency vehicles - ambulance or fire brigade for example. Emergency services would have to knock down a portion of the rickety fence to gain access to the playground. A gate can't be attached to that post!

The south west corner of the COLA. The rain water discharges to an extremely shallow spoon drain with 2 shower-size inlets to an underground drain. The catchment area on the uphill side of the COLA is without any drainage, and in the event of heavy rain the road drains indirectly onto the COLA floor and will flood it. In the normal winter weather of nightly frost this will resemble a skating rink, and render the COLA unusable and dangerous for our children. The roadway (Avoca Street) above has no gutter formed, and is not kerbed. Clearly no one has thought about drainage or frost or wind at the 1210m elevation of Black Springs Public School.



The stainless steel sink is a thoughtful inclusion in the COLA, however during the summer it is unlikely to have water available should no extra tanks or rainfall be available.

You will note that there is no lagging provided to the water inlet or to the drain from the sink. From mid May until October the sink will not be in use owing to frozen inlet and/or outlet pipes. Soil is frozen to 200mm in winter.

In the existing toilet block the water pipes were replaced last year. The water supply pipes embedded in the walls had split during winter frosts (as low as -18°C) as they weren't adequately lagged and saturated the fabric of the walls which were also repaired. The replacement pipes are not lagged and are attached to the walls in the interior of the building. Ideally the toilet block should be re-built, elevated above ground level, and heated with the rest of the school, encouraging the children to use the facilities and not "hang on" until they arrive home - some children travel more than 50Km.

An accurate map of the existing drains and wiring should be maintained at the school, for future reference, and to avoid violating the aboriginal artifact site within the grounds. This has not been forthcoming. An engineers certificate for compliance to snow loading and wind resistance has not

been sighted by the members of the P & C.

I am enclosing a copy of the letter sent in this mail to the Federal Minister of Education, which was endorsed at the P & C meeting held yesterday during the wood chop where parents and citizens prepare firewood for fund raising raffles over winter to support the school.

A letter identical in content has been mailed to Mr Ray Hadley of radio 2GB and mr Peter Harvey, Director of School Education Bathurst.

I have no particular axe to grind politically, but I share deep concerns with many in this community about the spending of this grant money. I am a grandmother of former pupils at Black Springs Public School, and 2009 President of the P & C Association.

Yours sincerely,

Alexandra Tuson

Black Springs Public School
Avoca Street
Black Springs NSW 2787
19 April 2010

The Honorable Miss Julia Gillard,
Minister for Education
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the \$250,000 grant. We would like to show you how it has been spent.

This our new COLA. It is nearly as big as the double carport and lock-up garage just built nearby, which cost under \$16,000.



The roof drains do not connect to water tanks which is a pity as any rain will be wasted.

The seats are very cold to sit on after a frost, and we won't be able to use it when it snows, or when it rains heavily as the floor floods from the road drainage.

The sink is a good idea, but the pipes are not lagged and will freeze and burst in winter.



This is the main entrance to our little school. It shows our new path and covered walkway to the front door.

We would like to have a gate to keep out stray dogs, but the post is too rotten, and it would be nice to have a new fence with a big gate so that the fire brigade and ambulance could get to the playground and buildings from the other side.

With the rest of the \$200,000 or so that must be left over, could we have:

- 1) A toilet block that is warmed in winter so they can flush when it is freezing?
- 2) New water tanks, as the old one leaks and there is no town water?
- 3) Enough water tanks to provide drinking water and water to flush the toilets?
- 4) Fences that work?
- 5) Gates to let emergency vehicles into the grounds?
- 6) Gutters along Avoca Street so the drains don't flood our COLA?
- 7) Screens to shield us from the winds and snow - at 1210m above sea level?

Sincerely,

Black Springs School Community