



Dear Sir/Madam

**PRIMARY SCHOOLS FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY
INFORMATION FOR THE INQUIRY
AVOCA PRIMARY SCHOOL, 118 Barnett Street AVOCA VIC 3467**

Further to your request for information regarding concerns about waste and mismanagement of projects under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century Program we wish to submit details of our experience to date.

1. With regard to the conditions and criteria for project funding, the funding allocated was determined based on the size of the school and no consideration was given to the amount of maintenance or new facility funding received in the past. In our case, our school has been entitled to permanent classrooms for many years but are only now receiving the four classrooms and library to which we are entitled. We are very pleased to be receiving the classrooms etc now, but had these buildings been constructed in the past, then we would have been able to apply for a multipurpose area for school and community use with the current funding. We believe that this Program has enabled State Governments to avoid their responsibilities to provide funding for permanent classrooms etc, and as such we are still missing out on really benefiting from this Program. All schools received funding regardless of whether they required new buildings, so that schools such as ours which were struggling for facilities are only being brought up to the level to which they had been previously entitled and not actually improved.
2. Contracts are let centrally to contractors in larger centres who do not employ local subcontractors. Our building contractor is based in Ballarat which is 1 hour south of our town and to date all his subcontractors have also been based in Ballarat. This is disappointing as we do have a number of local contractors capable of completing relevant work.
3. As stated above we believe that the announcement of the Building Education Revolution has enabled the state government to reduce their responsibility to provide adequate facilities to schools and just rely on the Federal funding to take up the slack.

4. With regard to timing and budget issues, we had initial meetings in February 2009 with architects and project managers through the Better Schools Today Project (Victorian government funding) where plans were drawn up for four classrooms and a central resource area. Once the Building Education Revolution program was announced this was put on hold on the promise that we would receive greater funding if we held off. Even though we were not going ahead with the initial plans we were required to pay almost \$15,000 in architect and project management fees for which received a set of preliminary drawings, a visit from and to the architect and a visit from the project manager. Very little communication was received until the end of 2009 when we were advised that we would now receive four classrooms and a separate library. We have been advised that even though the cost of the project will be greater than our entitlement the work will be completed but it also means that some work on refurbishing existing buildings will not be undertaken. Work has now started on the project with the removal of our library last week (which was a temporary building) and the relocation of four portable classrooms to enable the building work to commence.

5. The main issue that our school has encountered is the inflexibility of the plans that have been drawn up for the new classrooms. We have been advised that our classrooms will be provided with gas heating and no air-conditioning. Our area experiences large extremes of temperature, with summer and autumn temperatures often around or over the 30°C mark but still with cool mornings. In winter our overnight temperatures are around 2°C, often falling below 0°C, and the daytime temperature average being 12°C-14°C. With the variation of temperatures the area experiences it is entirely inappropriate to exclude any form of air-conditioning in the plans for the new classrooms and library. Our town does not have access to a natural gas pipeline so it would be necessary to use bottled gas. The cost of heating an area this size would be astronomical and our school would definitely not be able to afford this within our annual budget. Our school also has installed Solar Panels, with the assistance of both Federal and State Government funding, which are capable of generating 22kWh of electrical energy each day. It seems ludicrous to us that we should have to incur the astronomical cost of LPG when we could be using the energy effectively generated from our solar panels to fund the cost of heating and cooling. In addition, the project manager has advised us that if we wish to continue with the desire for installation of reverse-cycle air conditioners then we must pay \$2,500 for an engineer's report to advise us that it is possible to install the systems. The engineer's report would not advise where the units would be placed or the cost involved but just that it is possible to put the units in the buildings. Obviously, in the normal business world you would just approach a few air-conditioner retailers and request that they come to the site and quote on the cost of the required units and installation. In addition we have been advised that the air-conditioning units would have to be funded at our own expense. Our current portable classrooms are fitted with air-conditioning so effectively the new classrooms etc would not be up to the same standard as that which we currently enjoy.

Yours faithfully

Sally Koerner
Council President
Avoca Primary School