



Submission to the Education, Employment and the Workplace Relations References Committee

Re: **Inquiry into the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program**

Particular reference to:

- (i) The conditions and criteria for project funding

The implementation of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program has proven to be flawed with inconsistencies and a lack transparency through the entire process.

The manner in which the Federal Government's Primary Schools for the 21st Century program was promoted through the media led the Mt Martha Primary School community to believe the school was to receive building works consistent with the school's entitlement of \$3 million based on an enrolment of 610 students.

Mt Martha Primary School followed the submission process diligently and the principal negotiated application for the appropriate building template with the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development personnel. The ensuing outcome was for the school to be informed the submission was not successful and Mt Martha Primary School would not receive funds through the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program. The principal was also informed of three other schools in the local area that would not receive Primary Schools for the 21st Century program funding.

At least one of these schools initially informed that no Primary Schools for the 21st Century program funding would be accessed has since received close to the school's indicative of \$2 million (combination of credit funding and a portable block) following adverse media publicity.

Mt Martha Primary School community is exceptionally disappointed that through their trust and belief in the honesty and fairness of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development system, the current and future children at Mt Martha Primary School have been disadvantaged by \$3 million as publicised in local press. The current reality for Mt Martha Primary School is that the funds from local sources are significantly less than before the Government's stimulus package. Mt Martha Primary School parents are watching neighbourhood government and non-government schools with existing resources similar to those at their school receive new building works according to their funding, forecast by the school's enrolment.

Mt Martha Primary School Council is extremely disillusioned and disappointed that their faith in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development system was not honoured by the Department's decision makers.

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

Unable to comment as a promised double 5 mod portable block is to be supplied by non-local contractor and this project with a funding tag of \$850,000.00 remains at planning stage.

School Council hopes that this submission to the inquiry will rectify the current situation and at least prevent a reoccurrence of inadequate processes in the future.

Yours sincerely

Judy Beckworth

Principal

Mt Martha Primary School

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Cc: Greg Hunt MP, David Rowlands, Judy Beckworth, Building the Education Revolution, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Jim Miles

Sent: Thursday, November 12, 2009 10:26 AM

Subject: Mt Martha Primary School - BER

Good Morning Hon Julia Gillard,

Please find attached copy of a letter I have sent via "snail mail" to you on October 31st, responding to your letter dated 20th October.

As, to date, I have received no response, I am forwarding this via email also. I am not sure just how long the mail procedure takes to get matters such as these to yourself. I do believe the protocol is to mail hard copy, but this query has now drawn out for such a long time, that I am endeavouring to have this reach you in the quickest possible manner.

Your urgent attention and response is expected.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of Mt Martha Primary School Community,

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President.

31st October, 2009.

The Hon Julia Gillard MP,
Minister for Education,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600.

Dear Ms Gillard,

Re: MT MARTHA PRIMARY SCHOOL (MMPS) - BER FUNDING

Thank you for your letter of 20th October 2009, in reply to my letter dated 6th August, and further email of September. On behalf of Mt Martha Primary School's Community and School Council I must note our complete disappointment at the incredible length of time it has taken to receive a response.

At an extraordinary Council meeting last week, I presented Ms Catherine Wall's reply to my email and informed Council that we were to receive a reply from yourself. This we have awaited with great anticipation since the outset of our correspondence, and the idea that we were finally going to have our query answered did, indeed, raise the spirits of those attending the meeting. In turn, Councilors have informed our community that we are soon to be in receipt of your response.

I then opened your letter on Monday and to say I was gutted upon reading the contents, would be an understatement. You couldn't possibly imagine the devastation I felt reading, virtually word-for-word, the letter we had already received from Ms Wall. And, the most ironic coincidence, is that neither letter ultimately answered our initial question!

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Hon Ms Gillard, both letters skated fruitlessly around the BER Guidelines, how DEECD considers the needs of all schools to meet the requirements under the BER Guidelines, and both alluded to the fact that apparently with

the announcement of the final round of P21 funding, that funding is now fully committed.

May I politely state, on behalf of Mt Martha Primary School Community and our School Council, that we are fully aware of the BER Guidelines and have thoroughly researched and investigated the requirements therein. We believe ourselves to be an intelligent sample of our Community, who would never attempt a plea to be heard in the "volume" we have without validity to our cause.

However, although at the outset we regarded our initial question to be simplistic in nature, *no one* to date has been able to *openly* confront our question and inform our school community just *why* Mt Martha Primary School was disallowed its entitlement of \$3mil under the P21 funding. This clear, concise and direct question certainly appears to have stumped all and sundry.

As I stated in an email to Ms Wall (27/10), I am loathed now to present your correspondence to Council. I know that they are going to feel as disappointed and short changed as I do. I have to be blunt, Hon Ms Gillard, it appears that Mt Martha Primary School (MMPS) has been drawn into a "blame game" between State and Federal. Everyone we have attempted to contact has drawn out this matter, with a level of procrastination I am amazed even exists. Ultimately, it would appear that the games played have ultimately reached the goal intended on State and Federal's agenda, as still to date no one has answered our question. The ambiguity of the 3rd last paragraph of your letter leads us to believe that the error in evaluating our school's initial proposal can now be rectified. We trust that the relevant Department(s) are at this moment investigating the issues surrounding such an error, and we will be notified of the outcome very shortly. Our community finds it unacceptable to continue with the level of procrastination we have had to endure these past months. Please feel free to correct us if we assume incorrectly, but in order to do that our original, simplistic and direct question will finally have to be answered.

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Our community has been rocked to the core with these entire goings on. If the intention of the P21 Funding was to inject confidence in the Government

and the manner in which it is spending available monies, then I am sad to say that here, in Mt Martha's Community, the intention has failed - dismally.

We do realise that mistakes are made - we are all only human, after all. But, even the Government (State or Federal - or both) have to be forthright enough to admit that there was an error made in the administration of this hugely advertised stimulus package.

It is being widely publicised, Hon Ms Gillard, that you are currently touring the country celebrating the openings of the buildings, etc, that this stimulus package has provided. By the same token, our community deserves the opportunity to meet with you to commiserate and be helped to understand just why we were coerced into signing an agreement for a lesser amount, ultimately resulting in our being robbed of over two thirds of our entitlement. Since then, our community has raised its voice in the hope that we can receive some clear, concise clarification as to why. However, all we have been, in fact, is ignored, shunted from Department to Department, and provided information that is already commonly known. It is now plain to us that no one wanted to aid us in this quest, rather had engaged us in a procrastination "game". Why?

So, after the events (or non-events) of the past three months, our community has been forced to change our original question. Hon Ms Gillard, *just what happens now?* We continue to hold out optimistic hope that you are indeed investigating our plight and will soon inform us of the answer we sought from the outset.

Optimism and confidence are now two commodities that are in scarce supply within our community - we do need your help. If that is what it is going to take to have some notice taken of us - please hear us *shouting* out "*help us, please*". We may be categorised as mere constituents, numbers that can be locked away and deflated in the hope that we will give up the fight. But, I can assure you, we are much more than that. We are a caring, feeling community, who are passionate about our children and their opportunities to

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"shine". Equitable, flexible learning spaces was indeed the Government's recent catch phrase. It has been our philosophy for far longer than that.

As our initial proposal for the Multi-purpose template was rejected on the grounds of full entitlement of permanent classrooms (Vic statistics), our existing Library facility* and Gymnasium**, we are able to then utilise the \$3mil to replace old and decrepit portable modules (ones that have been a part of our school since its inception, some 27 years ago). This most definitely falls in the strict and rigid guidelines set to receive our full entitlement under the funding of the P21. We also point out, that many schools have successfully challenged the wording of the BER Guidelines and have been able to utilise their entitled funding to actually benefit the school and be able to bring to life the Government's aim to provide flexible learning spaces for our precious children, giving them the opportunity to "shine".

*Library facility - Mt Martha has an existing library facility that is true. However, our library is put to community use before and after school, as we operate an Out of Hours School Care program. This, in effect, denies the children who attend MMPS access to the library facilities before or after school - hampering their study time to research projects, or access IT facilities and the like. It was for this reason that the initial proposal for the Multi-purpose template was put forward - in effect to gain a facility that could be put to community use, as well as school use.

**Gymnasium - Yes, we do indeed have a full sized gymnasium. This has been made possible only through community involvement. Ten years ago a community cooperative was established and monies borrowed via a cooperative loan. Through the dedicated efforts of past and present parents, staff and community supporters, we have been able to finally pay this loan out (only finished 30th September this year). Our community is outraged that one of the reasons for not giving us our entitlement is that we had the commitment to provide this facility to our school and surrounding community ten years ago!! Why should we be penalised for such a community effort?

Ms Gillard, as you can see we are not just making "waves" and raising our voices - we indeed have a valid reason. We are well aware of the BER Guidelines, the existing facilities we have at MMPS and the urgent need to

replace existing old portable buildings to ensure equitable learning spaces for all of our children can be provided. As I stated earlier, we are an

educated, intelligent community and would not be banging your door down without ensuring we knew our entitlement backwards and forwards.

We also note that many schools have refused to display the boards announcing that works at their school have been funded under the P21. MMPS would be ever willing to display the biggest board advertising the P21 - even after all we have had to endure to finally receive our entitled \$3mil, we would happily support the Government's stimulus package by proudly advertising the same!

We honestly believed that the Government took care of their public schools, before the private schools. But, here we see \$2mil being given to a brand new neighbouring private school, which exacerbates the already existing "taunting" that our children receive from those who consider themselves fortunate to attend a "private" school. Is it your aim to widen the already broad gap that exists between public and private education?

We are sorry to say we will not go away without this matter being ultimately resolved. Our precious children are worth far more to us than that. Your immediate response is expected.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the Mt Martha Primary School Community,

IONA EICHSTADT,
SCHOOL COUNCIL PRESIDENT.

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Building the Education Revolution

Cc: Jim Miles, Judy Beckworth, Greg Hunt MP, David Rowlands, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria

Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2009 3:04 PM

Subject: Re: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Ms Wall,

As noted in your letter dated 8th October, I have indeed received a response from the Hon Julia Gillard MP.

Sadly, it was a word-for-word copy (excluding the paragraph that the Hon Julia Gillard MP would be responding to my letter in a separate correspondence) of your letter! Most disappointing, since Mt Martha Primary School (MMPS) has been eagerly anticipating a response from the Minister since August!

I do feel rather silly, as at an extraordinary Council Meeting last Thursday I excitedly informed the other Councillors that we were finally to receive a response from the Hon Julia Gillard MP. This response was, indeed, a copy of your letter, which ultimately failed to answer our original question - why was MMPS disallowed its entitlement of \$3mil under the P21 funding. As simplistic a question as we (School Council) believe we posed, it appears to have stumped all and sundry as no one can provide a straight-forward answer. Quite the conundrum, it would seem.

I am loathed to present this long awaited correspondence to Council, as I know that they are going to feel as disappointed and short changed as I do. It appears that no one wants to aid us in our quest, rather see the air deflated from our balloon in frustration of playing this "game".

Any suggestions?

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the Mt Martha Primary School
Community,

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President.

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Building the Education Revolution

Cc: Jim Miles, Judy Beckworth, Greg Hunt MP, David Rowlands, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2009 4:50 PM

Subject: Re: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Ms Wall,

Thank you for your letter responding to my email dated 9th September, sent 8th October. Please excuse my tardiness in acknowledging receipt of this email, as I have just returned home after major surgery (I was admitted to hospital 9th October). Clarity is just starting to creep back in, and I feel that only now I am able to lucidly respond to your letter.

Firstly, Ms Wall, I must express disappointment at the length of time it appears to take for response to be made, particularly as you have expressed that the final round of P21 funding has been fully committed under the BER.

My correspondence began in August, now some 2 months ago. Prior to that verbal communications were being undertaken between our Principal and Southern Region. Never at any stage prior to the fully committing of the P21 funding did *anyone* attempt to answer our school community's queries, or offer a clear and concise explanation as to the manner that Mt Martha Primary School (MMPS) was treated.

Instead, all we have been offered is the "blame game" - Federal blames State's management of the BER, and vice versa. I can honestly offer no excuse for my disgruntled tone, as I believe that I have been a pawn in a game of avoidance being played by both Federal and State. At the end of the day, *no one* can answer a *simple* question posed at the outset - *why were we excluded from the entitled \$3mil P21 funding?*

We (School Council) finally bowed to our community's pressure, and allowed our story to be published in The Australian (Pg 5, Friday

September 25th). Even the Principal Journalist of the article became frustrated when researching our plight. She discovered that there was indeed *no reason why* MMPS was not provided with its entitled \$3mil. Also, she was surprised that *no one* could provide a straight forward answer as to why. The same brick wall was run into - Federal blaming State and vice versa.

Our School Council has examined the BER Guidelines thoroughly. We do know what we are entitled to, and that is why our community feels robbed of more than two thirds of our entitlement under the P21 funding. Yes, we initially submitted our proposal to our relevant state/territory education authority (Southern Metropolitan Region). As it has been pointed out by Hon Julia Gillard's office, it appears to be their incorrect assessment of our proposal as to why we have been disallowed our entitlement. In fact, when Melinda Hatton contact me from Hon Julia Gillard's office, she informed me that according to their records MMPS was initially offered \$3mil but turned it down as we stated that we did not require that amount of funding from the P21. An application for FOI of this particular document has been made, which we now anxiously await.

The \$850,000 project under the P21 element of the BER that DEECD subsequently submitted, and was approved by the Minister for Education, is the document which we believe we were coerced into signing. Whilst our community is always ever grateful for any funding we can be granted, it does come as a slap in the face when we see what is transpiring at other schools in our local area - including private schools.

At your suggestion, I have forwarded a copy of your correspondence (and indeed my response to you) to our Principal, Mrs Beckworth, and I have forwarded copies of all relevant correspondence to date to Mr Jim Miles.

I can only be honest and say that I feel that no one is wanting to come forward and admit that there has been an error made when assessing MMPS's entitlement under the BER Guidelines. This is indeed disappointing and has driven our School Council and Community to an

unbelievably high level of frustration and dissatisfaction with the management of the P21. It is sad to lose faith in "the system", but we have been forced into this belief by the manner we have been treated and, unfortunately, ignored. It does indeed lead us to believe as a community, that all our efforts made to have clarification to our plight made have been thwarted purely as a measure of procrastination. Ultimately, it will be devastating and gutting to us as a community if we have ultimately fallen victims to stalling tactics until the funding of P21 had been fully committed and no rectification of the error made would be feasible.

I thank you for the information contained within your correspondence, and further contact in Mr Jim Miles.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the Mt Martha Primary School Community

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President

----- Original Message -----

From: Building the Education Revolution

To: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Monday, October 12, 2009 4:48 PM

Subject: RE: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Ms Eichstadt

Please find attached a copy of Catherine Wall's response to the letter of concern you submitted to the BER Mailbox on, 9 September 2009.

Kind regards

Building the Education Revolution Taskforce

From: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Wednesday, 9 September 2009 14:15

To: Building the Education Revolution

Cc: David Rowlands; Greg Hunt MP

Subject: Mt Martha Primary School

Attention: National BER Co-ordinator

Good Afternoon,

I write as School Council President of Mt Martha Primary School. After discussions with Mr David Rowlands (from Performance Audit Services Group, Australian National Audit Office) recently, I mailed you a copy of a letter that had been sent to a number of Officials. It was recommended to mail, rather than email, at that time (27th August). It has now been some two weeks since I mailed the letter, so thought perhaps an email may be the next step. Apparently the Official holding this particular role has indeed changed, consequently I only have a "title" to mail/email to, rather than being able to personalise with a name.

It would be greatly appreciated if someone could in fact be courteous enough to acknowledge if this has been received, and when it will be addressed/attended to/ responded to - *something!* I cannot apologise if I sound frustrated, as indeed I am.

I originally mailed this letter (you can see whom it was copied to), and the only reply I received was from David Rowlands - who, ironically, wasn't included in my mailing! Apparently, his Department are carrying out the Audit on the effectiveness/efficiency of the handling of the BER. Sadly, although my only contact to date, he can do no more than document our dissatisfaction at being left out of the stimulus package which we were entitled to.

I am imploring, no *demanding*, that someone take our situation seriously. Thankfully, we have our MP, Hon Greg Hunt, in our corner and he is the only other person who is in contact with us - he is indeed genuinely concerned regarding how we, as a school community, feel. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep our school community

appeared as to why no one is bothering to respond. Our invitation for someone to attend our School Council meeting tomorrow has gone unanswered. This makes our task of keeping our school community's spirits bolstered an impossible one. It is not just the absence of someone to explain to our community why we were not included, but the incredible rudeness to just ignore us in the hope that we soon tire, quieten and go away.

Frankly, my patience is wearing thin, and I find it now impossible to defend why nobody is bothering to take us seriously. It is insulting to see boards being erected announcing works going on at neighbouring schools who were included in the stimulus handout; even more so when they are non-government schools receiving huge sums. These are the "private" schools who continuously berate those attending non-private schools as sub standard in education provided as well as facilities. All you are doing by handing huge amounts to them is to widen the already huge "us" and "them" gap, that we are striving hard to fill.

Please understand that we are not asking for a handout for which we are not entitled. Our school community gladly puts their hands in their pockets time and time again to assist our school to maintain its facilities/equipment. As they see other schools receiving and being able to utilise large handouts, it is fostering a culture of uncertainty and dividedness we have never before experienced.

Many of our parents have suggested voicing our situation to the media. As a School Council we are battling to stop this from happening. It certainly seems that there is enough bad press at the moment surrounding the BER. It would indeed be uplifting for all concerned to see something positive happen for a change.

I was really disappointed that Hon Julia Gillard, in her capacity as Fed Minister for Education, has not had the time to reply. Suppose appearing on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader" is of more importance?

Equitable facilities and share of the stimulus package are not alot to ask. A response is expected as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School

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----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt
To: Jim Miles BER, Victoria
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2009 4:13 PM
Subject: Fw: Mount Martha Primary School

Dear Mr Miles,

As per prior email, I am forwarding you a copy of an email sent to Mr Greenwell on 8th October, 2009

Yours sincerely,.

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School.

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt
To: Iona Eichstadt
Sent: Thursday, October 08, 2009 3:50 PM
Subject: FW: Mount Martha Primary School

Please note: BER 3 is a copy of the letter sent to Mr. Peter Greenwell on 6th August referred to in the following email.

From: Iona Eichstadt
Sent: Thursday, 8 October 2009 3:31 PM
To: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria
Subject: Mount Martha Primary School

ATTENTION: PETER GREENWELL

Dear Mr Greenwell,

I email in the hope that I may finally receive a response from either yourself or someone within your department.

I attach a copy of a letter forwarded to you on 6th August. I am told at the time you were just finishing in the position, but have since returned.

A message was left for you on Monday, but I have not heard back.

Needless to say, I feel extremely disappointed that no one is taking our issue seriously, or has had the courtesy to respond - even just to say that the matter was being investigated. To date all we have heard is *nothing*.

I have also forwarded you today an email directed to the BER Co-ordinator on 9th September. I have been contacted by someone from Julia Gillard's office, who advised me that they would be investigating the matter. That was three weeks ago, and still *nothing*.

An article was published in The Australian on 25th September, highlighting the manner in which our school community feels that we have been treated. Whilst they were researching the article, even the reporter become frustrated with the inability to provide a clear answer as to why Mt Martha Primary School as been robbed of two thirds of its entitlement. To be honest, Mr Greenwell, when no-one bothers to respond in any way, shape or form it does instil an air of mistrust and neglect on the Govt's and Dept's behalf. From my conversation with Julia Gillard's office, the Federal Govt is placing the blame of our situation squarely on the State's shoulders.

My request in my correspondence of 6th August, some two months ago, was simple. We need someone to come out and explain exactly why we have been offered the package designed for 50-150 students when we have a confirmed enrolment this year of 609. Now two School Council meetings have come and gone. Tonight we meet again, and I will have to explain to Council just why no one has been interested enough to be present at our meeting to offer an explanation (this was the reason for my telephone call on Monday).

A response of some form or another is required, we as a school community believe that we at least are owed that.

Kindest regards,

Iona Eichstadt
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Jim Miles, BER Victoria

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2009 4:12 PM

Subject: Fw: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Mr Miles,

As per email forward just a few moments ago, I am forwarding you an email sent to National BER Coordinator, 9th September, 2009.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School

From: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Thursday, 8 October 2009 3:32 PM

To: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria

Subject: FW: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Mr Greenwell,

Please find attached email sent 9th September, as per my email sent to you just prior.

Your urgent attention is required.

Kindest regards,

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: BER, DEEWR
Cc: David Rowlands, Greg Hunt
Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2009 2:15 PM
Subject: Mt Martha Primary School

Attention: National BER Co-ordinator

Good Afternoon,

I write as School Council President of Mt Martha Primary School. After discussions with Mr David Rowlands (from Performance Audit Services Group, Australian National Audit Office) recently, I mailed you a copy of a letter that had been sent to a number of Officials. It was recommended to mail, rather than email, at that time (27th August). It has now been some two weeks since I mailed the letter, so thought perhaps an email may be the next step. Apparently the Official holding this particular role has indeed changed, consequently I only have a "title" to mail/email to, rather than being able to personalise with a name.

It would be greatly appreciated if someone could in fact be courteous enough to acknowledge if this has been received, and when it will be addressed/attended to/ responded to - *something!* I cannot apologise if I sound frustrated, as indeed I am.

I originally mailed this letter (you can see whom it was copied to), and the only reply I received was from David Rowlands - who, ironically, wasn't included in my mailing! Apparently, his Department are carrying out the Audit on the effectiveness/efficiency of the handling of the BER. Sadly, although my only contact to date, he can do no more than document our dissatisfaction at being left out of the stimulus package which we were entitled to.

I am imploring, no *demanding*, that someone take our situation seriously. Thankfully, we have our MP, Hon Greg Hunt, in our corner and he is the only other person who is in contact with us - he is indeed genuinely concerned regarding how we, as a school community, feel. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep our school community appeased as to why no one is bothering to respond. Our invitation for someone to attend our School Council meeting tomorrow has gone

unanswered. This makes our task of keeping our school community's spirits bolstered an impossible one. It is not just the absence of someone to explain to our community why we were not included, but the incredible rudeness to just ignore us in the hope that we soon tire, quieten and go away.

Frankly, my patience is wearing thin, and I find it now impossible to defend why nobody is bothering to take us seriously. It is insulting to see boards being erected announcing works going on at neighbouring schools who were included in the stimulus handout; even more so when they are non-government schools receiving huge sums. These are the "private" schools who continuously berate those attending non-private schools as sub standard in education provided as well as facilities. All you are doing by handing huge amounts to them is to widen the already huge "us" and "them" gap, that we are striving hard to fill.

Please understand that we are not asking for a handout for which we are not entitled. Our school community gladly puts their hands in their pockets time and time again to assist our school to maintain its facilities/equipment. As they see other schools receiving and being able to utilise large handouts, it is fostering a culture of uncertainty and dividedness we have never before experienced.

Many of our parents have suggested voicing our situation to the media. As a School Council we are battling to stop this from happening. It certainly seems that there is enough bad press at the moment surrounding the BER. It would indeed be uplifting for all concerned to see something positive happen for a change.

I was really disappointed that Hon Julia Gillard, in her capacity as Fed Minister for Education, has not had the time to reply. Suppose appearing on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader" is of more importance?

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Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School

----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Building the Education Revolution

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2009 3:50 PM

Subject: Re: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Ms Wall,

Thank you for your letter responding to my email dated 9th September, sent 8th October. Please excuse my tardiness in acknowledging receipt of this email, as I have just returned home after major surgery (I was admitted to hospital 9th October). Clarity is just starting to creep back in, and I feel that only now I am able to lucidly respond to your letter.

Firstly, Ms Wall, I must express disappointment at the length of time it appears to take for response to be made, particularly as you have expressed that the final round of P21 funding has been fully committed under the BER.

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Instead, all we have been offered is the "blame game" - Federal blames State's management of the BER, and vice versa. I can honestly offer no excuse for my disgruntled tone, as I believe that I have been a pawn in a game of avoidance being played by both Federal and State. At the end of the day, *no one* can answer a *simple* question posed at the outset - *why were we excluded from the entitled \$3mil P21 funding?*

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\$3mil. Also, she was surprised that *no one* could provide a straight forward answer as to why. The same brick wall was run into - Federal blaming State and vice versa.

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The \$850,000 project under the P21 element of the BER that DEECD subsequently submitted, and was approved by the Minister for Education, is the document which we believe we were coerced into signing. Whilst our community is always ever grateful for any funding we can be granted, it does come as a slap in the face when we see what is transpiring at other schools in our local area - including private schools.

At your suggestion, I have forwarded a copy of your correspondence (and indeed my response to you) to our Principal, Mrs Beckworth, and I have forwarded copies of all relevant correspondence to date to Mr Jim Miles.

I can only be honest and say that I feel that no one is wanting to come forward and admit that there has been an error made when assessing MMPS's entitlement under the BER Guidelines. This is indeed disappointing and has driven our School Council and Community to an unbelievably high level of frustration and dissatisfaction with the management of the P21. It is sad to lose faith in "the system", but we have been forced into this belief by the manner we have been treated

and, unfortunately, ignored. It does indeed lead us to believe as a community, that all our efforts made to have clarification to our plight made have been thwarted purely as a measure of procrastination. Ultimately, it will be devastating and gutting to us as a community if we have ultimately fallen victims to stalling tactics until the funding of P21 had been fully committed and no rectification of the error made would be feasible.

I thank you for the information contained within your correspondence, and further contact in Mr Jim Miles.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the Mt Martha Primary School Community

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President

----- Original Message -----

From: Building the Education Revolution

To: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Monday, October 12, 2009 4:48 PM

Subject: RE: Mt Martha Primary School

Dear Ms Eichstadt

Please find attached a copy of Catherine Wall's response to the letter of concern you submitted to the BER Mailbox on, 9 September 2009.

Kind regards

Building the Education Revolution Taskforce

From: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Wednesday, 9 September 2009 14:15

To: Building the Education Revolution

Subject: Mt Martha Primary School

Attention: National BER Co-ordinator

Good Afternoon,

I write as School Council President of Mt Martha Primary School. After discussions with Mr David Rowlands (from Performance Audit Services Group, Australian National Audit Office) recently, I mailed you a copy of a letter that had been sent to a number of Officials. It was recommended to mail, rather than email, at that time (27th August). It has now been some two weeks since I mailed the letter, so thought perhaps an email may be the next step. Apparently the Official holding this particular role has indeed changed, consequently I only have a "title" to mail/email to, rather than being able to personalise with a name.

It would be greatly appreciated if someone could in fact be courteous enough to acknowledge if this has been received, and when it will be addressed/attended to/ responded to - *something!* I cannot apologise if I sound frustrated, as indeed I am.

I originally mailed this letter (you can see whom it was copied to), and the only reply I received was from David Rowlands - who, ironically, wasn't included in my mailing! Apparently, his Department are carrying out the Audit on the effectiveness/efficiency of the handling of the BER. Sadly, although my only contact to date, he can do no more than document our dissatisfaction at being left out of the stimulus package which we were entitled to.

I am imploring, no *demanding*, that someone take our situation seriously. Thankfully, we have our MP, Hon Greg Hunt, in our corner and he is the only other person who is in contact with us - he is indeed genuinely concerned regarding how we, as a school community, feel. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep our school community appeased as to why no one is bothering to respond. Our invitation for someone to attend our School Council meeting tomorrow has gone unanswered. This makes our task of keeping our school community's spirits bolstered an impossible one. It is not just the absence of someone to explain to our community why we were not included, but the

incredible rudeness to just ignore us in the hope that we soon tire, quieten and go away.

Frankly, my patience is wearing thin, and I find it now impossible to defend why nobody is bothering to take us seriously. It is insulting to see boards being erected announcing works going on at neighbouring schools who were included in the stimulus handout; even more so when they are non-government schools receiving huge sums. These are the "private" schools who continuously berate those attending non-private schools as sub standard in education provided as well as facilities. All you are doing by handing huge amounts to them is to widen the already huge "us" and "them" gap, that we are striving hard to fill.

Please understand that we are not asking for a handout for which we are not entitled. Our school community gladly puts their hands in their pockets time and time again to assist our school to maintain its facilities/equipment. As they see other schools receiving and being able to utilise large handouts, it is fostering a culture of uncertainty and dividedness we have never before experienced.

Many of our parents have suggested voicing our situation to the media. As a School Council we are battling to stop this from happening. It certainly seems that there is enough bad press at the moment surrounding the BER. It would indeed be uplifting for all concerned to see something positive happen for a change.

I was really disappointed that Hon Julia Gillard, in her capacity as Fed Minister for Education, has not had the time to reply. Suppose appearing on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader" is of more importance?

Equitable facilities and share of the stimulus package are not alot to ask. A response is expected as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt
School Council President,

Mt Martha Primary School

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----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Jim Miles, BER Victoria

Cc: Judy Beckworth

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2009 3:50 PM

Subject: Mt Martha Primary School - BER

Good Afternoon Mr Miles,

I write to you as School Council President, and on behalf of the School Community of Mt Martha Primary School.

Your contact details have been provided to me by Ms. Catherine Wall, National Coordinator, Building the Education Revolution.

Today I have emailed a response to a letter emailed to me from Ms Wall, and have included a copy to yourself.

Rather than bombard you with another lengthy explanation of our School's plight, I have attached prior correspondence for your information, and also forwarded you relevant copies of emails previously sent. I trust this will enlighten you as to why our School Community currently feels as disheartened and gutted as we do.

I do hope that we may receive some clarification from yourself. Finally.

Mr Wall, our school community has now reached its maximum level of tolerance to the treatment we have received (or, rather, the manner we have been ignored). We appear to be caught in the middle of a blaming game between State and Federal - an unenviable position to be placed in and one we have been forced into through no fault of our own.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt,
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School.

----- Original Message -----

From Iona Eichstadt

To: David Rowlands

Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2009 3:55 PM

Subject: Re: Mt Martha Primary School [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Good Afternoon, David,

Yes, it is indeed disappointing that we are still awaiting a response.

Thank you for your interest and further seeking of advice from DEEWR.

I have received a response (think it may be automated) that my email has been received. Will keep you posted.

Kind regards,

Iona

----- Original Message -----

From: David Rowlands

To: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2009 3:45 PM

Subject: RE: Mt Martha Primary School [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Dear Iona

Thank you for your further email.

I am sorry to hear that you have not received a response to the letter that you forwarded to the BER Co-ordinator, as I had recommended in my earlier correspondence.

I have also sought advice today from DEEWR on where they have got to in considering your issue. I shall let you know if there is anything further I can advise you.

Kind regards

David Rowlands

ANAO

From: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Wednesday, 9 September 2009 2:15 PM

To: Building the Education Revolution

Cc: David Rowlands, Greg Hunt

Subject: Mt Martha Primary School

Attention: National BER Co-ordinator

Good Afternoon,

I write as School Council President of Mt Martha Primary School. After discussions with Mr David Rowlands (from Performance Audit Services Group, Australian National Audit Office) recently, I mailed you a copy of a letter that had been sent to a number of Officials. It was recommended to mail, rather than email, at that time (27th August). It has now been some two weeks since I mailed the letter, so thought perhaps an email may be the next step. Apparently the Official holding this particular role has indeed changed, consequently I only have a "title" to mail/email to, rather than being able to personalise with a name.

It would be greatly appreciated if someone could in fact be courteous enough to acknowledge if this has been received, and when it will be addressed/attended to/ responded to - *something!* I cannot apologise if I sound frustrated, as indeed I am.

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I am imploring, no *demanding*, that someone take our situation seriously. Thankfully, we have our MP, Hon Greg Hunt, in our corner and he is the only other person who is in contact with us - he is indeed genuinely concerned regarding how we, as a school community, feel. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep our school community appeased as to why no one is bothering to respond. Our invitation for someone to attend our School Council meeting tomorrow has gone unanswered. This makes our task of keeping our school community's spirits bolstered an impossible one. It is not just the absence of someone to explain to our community why we were not included, but the

incredible rudeness to just ignore us in the hope that we soon tire, quieten and go away.

Frankly, my patience is wearing thin, and I find it now impossible to defend why nobody is bothering to take us seriously. It is insulting to see boards being erected announcing works going on at neighbouring schools who were included in the stimulus handout; even more so when they are non-government schools receiving huge sums. These are the "private" schools who continuously berate those attending non-private schools as sub standard in education provided as well as facilities. All you are doing by handing huge amounts to them is to widen the already huge "us" and "them" gap, that we are striving hard to fill.

Please understand that we are not asking for a handout for which we are not entitled. Our school community gladly puts their hands in their pockets time and time again to assist our school to maintain its facilities/equipment. As they see other schools receiving and being able to utilise large handouts, it is fostering a culture of uncertainty and dividedness we have never before experienced.

Many of our parents have suggested voicing our situation to the media. As a School Council we are battling to stop this from happening. It certainly seems that there is enough bad press at the moment surrounding the BER. It would indeed be uplifting for all concerned to see something positive happen for a change.

I was really disappointed that Hon Julia Gillard, in her capacity as Fed Minister for Education, has not had the time to reply. Suppose appearing on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader" is of more importance?

Equitable facilities and share of the stimulus package are not alot to ask. A response is expected as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt
School Council President,

Mt Martha Primary School

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----- Original Message -----

From: Iona Eichstadt

To: Building the Education Revolution

Cc: David Rowlands, Greg Hunt MP

Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2009 2:15 PM

Subject: Mt Martha Primary School

Attention: National BER Co-ordinator

Good Afternoon,

I write as School Council President of Mt Martha Primary School. After discussions with Mr David Rowlands (from Performance Audit Services Group, Australian National Audit Office) recently, I mailed you a copy of a letter that had been sent to a number of Officials. It was recommended to mail, rather than email, at that time (27th August). It has now been some two weeks since I mailed the letter, so thought perhaps an email may be the next step. Apparently the Official holding this particular role has indeed changed, consequently I only have a "title" to mail/email to, rather than being able to personalise with a name.

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Frankly, my patience is wearing thin, and I find it now impossible to defend why nobody is bothering to take us seriously. It is insulting to see boards being erected announcing works going on at neighbouring schools who were included in the stimulus handout; even more so when they are non-government schools receiving huge sums. These are the "private" schools who continuously berate those attending non-private schools as sub standard in education provided as well as facilities. All you are doing by handing huge amounts to them is to widen the already huge "us" and "them" gap, that we are striving hard to fill.

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Equitable facilities and share of the stimulus package are not alot to ask. A response is expected as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Eichstadt
School Council President,
Mt Martha Primary School

----- Original Message -----

From: Building the Education Revolution

To: Iona Eichstadt

Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2009 2:15 PM

Subject: RE: Mt Martha Primary School

Thank you for your e-mail in relation to the Building the Education Revolution (BER) Initiative.

Your e-mail has been received and will be attended to shortly.

Regards,

BER Taskforce

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6th August, 2009.

Dear Mr. Greenwell,

Re: MT MARTHA PRIMARY SCHOOL (MMPS) - BER FUNDING

As School Council President, I write to you on behalf of Mt Martha Primary School Council.

Due to a non-factual article published in our local paper, Mornington Mail, on 17th June, we have been placed in an extremely difficult situation. It was reported that our school received \$3 million from the Government in the stimulus funding package. This is most definitely incorrect and untrue.

MMPS, due to its enrolment numbers, should have been entitled to \$3 million. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in neither the first or second round.

However, our Principal, Mrs Judy Beckworth, was paid a visit by Ken Slater, SMR Representative. The question was posed what the school could accomplish if we received \$850,000 to complete a minor works project. Judy walked Mr Slater around our school property and outlined some of the many minor projects that could be undertaken. Mr Slater returned to MMPS for a subsequent visit, with the offer of a "portable package" (Procurement of two 5 mod relocatable buildings joined via a gallery construction). This would encompass demolition and removal of old, existing portables (some already schemed for demolition) to be replaced by BER Group 2 - Alternative 1 portable package (usually offered to schools with a student enrolment of 0-150). Our confirmed enrolment for 2009 was 609 students.

- 2 -

Council discussed this offer at our meeting held on 11th June. It was agreed that this offer appeared to be a token gesture on the part of the Department, basically tailored to appease our dissatisfaction at the amounts neighbouring schools (including Private Schools) had received in the previous 2 rounds. Disappointingly, it seemed that MMPS was being delivered an ultimatum of "accept this or nothing".

I then received an urgent call from Judy, as my signature was required on a document emailed MMPS, to sign off on the above referred proposal. This was emailed to Judy at 4.54pm on 24th June, with the request that it be returned to the Regeneration Team (SMR) by 12 noon the following day. This was to ensure that it could be lodged with the BER Central Office by COB 26th June.

Given the extremely lean timeframe, of course there was no time to confirm with other Councilors prior to signing off. In fact, due to my own personal work commitments (please remember we perform our duties as School Councilors on a voluntary basis) Judy was unable to contact me until the evening of 25th June, and we met after hours. I must admit that at that point of time, we really felt that our hands were now tied and that we were faced with an "all or nothing" situation. It certainly does not rest easy to be pressured into signing a document, and we both did feel that we were being coerced into accepting this offer. We reluctantly signed the document off, and have since had heated discussions with other School Council members.

Since the publication of the falsely reported \$3 million our school was purported to have received, we are now being barraged by unhappy parents, enquiring why our fundraising efforts are still continuing. It is being questioned why we are not utilizing our "\$3 million stimulus package". Of course, they are disbelieving of our stating that this was not indeed factual, and we now have an air of mistrust within our school community that we have not previously experienced.

- 3 -

Our parent and school community has always given MMPS their full and unending support. Without going into extreme detail, it is solely due to their commitment to our school that we are able to provide our precious children with facilities above the standard of other local schools in the area. With the vision and drive of our current and past School Principals, current and past dedicated Staff and committed parents, MMPS has always strived to deliver our children a high standard of resources and facilities.

Mark Perry (School Council Treasurer) has examined our locally raised funds over the past 3 years and noted that \$560,000 has been contributed to our school. In this financial year we anticipate that a further \$170,000 will be raised. With these funds, we carefully allocate a budget to ensure works are carried out on a timely basis, and that equipment/resources can be purchased and replaced when deemed necessary. We are proactive in our approach. We firmly believe that the learning environment should be equitable for each and every child, however many of our students have no alternative but to pursue their learning in substandard classrooms. It is only due to the imagination of our teaching staff that these substandard learning areas are presented as engaging and inviting.

Some examples of what MMPS has been able to achieve with the assistance of our Parent and School Community are:

- Developed a Co-operative to enable us to contribute extra funds to expand this project to allow a full size gymnasium to be built (this has been contributed to by parents for the past 10 years).
- Provided and replaced playground equipment, facilitating 5 separate areas of play.
- Resurfaced existing basketball courts with Synpave.
- Provided air conditioning units to every class room, library and 4 specialist areas.
- Provided state of the art ITC equipment (interactive whiteboards and computers, laptops, printers and cameras) exceeding DEET recommended ratio.
- Continuous working bees arranged by our Facilities Committee, utilizing parents trade skills and expertise.

- Purchased various musical instruments, for the instrumental/school band program.
- Provide additional resources for specialist and class programs.
- Upgrading student furniture.

As you can see the parent/community support is a lifeline for our school. Without this commitment, we would be unable to provide the standard of education services our community now expects.

Through no fault of our own, we have been placed in an unenviable no win situation. Please assist us so we may be able to help our community understand why our school has been excluded from the Economic Stimulus Package monies being made available to other schools.

The documents provided by the Department outlining the rules and regulations of the BER package have been carefully examined by Mark Perry and myself. We are still at a complete loss to understand why MMPS has been unsuccessful in obtaining the \$3 million we should have been allocated.

This matter will again be discussed at our next School Council meeting, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to "explain away" why our Principal and myself signed off on what appears to be a token gesture on behalf of the Department.

We need your help! We feel it is now necessary that someone comes to visit our school and attend our next School Council meeting to explain the reasons behind the Department's decision to exclude our school. Our next meeting will be held on Thursday 10th September, commencing at 7.30pm.

Contact has been made with the Mornington Mail to publish a retraction of the article, however, despite constant efforts, our requests have fallen on deaf ears. We have now been in contact with another local paper, The Leader, who has offered to publish an article denouncing the validity of the Mail's facts. In addition, we have now spoken with Hon Greg Hunt MP (our local MP), who is aware of our plight and has offered his support for rectification.

Easing our community's minds is now of paramount importance. Once the retraction has been printed, our School Council endeavours to discover just where the reported \$3 million now lies, and why MMPS has been disadvantaged from its entitlement.

Your urgent and prompt attention to this matter is requested.

Thanking you,

Kind regards,

IONA EICHSTADT,
SCHOOL COUNCIL PRESIDENT,
MT MARTHA PRIMARY SCHOOL.

4th August, 2009.

Dear Mr. Greenwell,

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