

# **Lake Charm Primary School**

## Submission for the Inquiry into the Primary Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program

The following submission is a synopsis of the events that have occurred in relation to BER funding at Lake Charm Primary School over the last year. It concerns timing, budget issues and management of the BER funding allocated to Lake Charm Primary School. Full details of documentation and photographs are filed at the school.

We are highlighting the lack of information and communication surrounding the project, the poor planning, administering and application of the building projects. The continuing daily disruption to school routines, student learning, teacher and community wellbeing, has been damaging to the education of our students. The additional workload of having to keep daily records of communication with builders and consultants, sorting through resources which have been misplaced, lost or damaged, has also caused undue stress on all school community members. There has also been a total lack of community development and interest in the school, its history and values by the state government.

We question the constantly changing priorities and timelines and the length of time it has taken to complete a small amount of building works. Through this submission we seek clarity on how the funds have been distributed throughout our school refurbishments. The ongoing incompleteness of any building works to a satisfactory standard creates a compounding sense of misfortune for the Lake Charm community.

Lake Charm Primary School staff, students, parents and school councillors have suffered a difficult, demoralising and extremely disruptive experience due to the allocation of funds, building processes and management of the Building the Education Revolution program and we strongly urge the Standing References Committee to investigate our submission.

The initial contact, in April 2009 was made through a telephone conversation by Bruce Corrie (Resource Manager DEECD) to the School Principal, Morgen Alexander. Mr Corrie asked if the school community would object to the demolition of the existing school building to be replaced with a Demountable School. Mr Corrie stated that the project would attract \$300,000 funding and that a Demountable School was the most appropriate choice of building as the future of Lake Charm Primary School was uncertain and if necessary, the building could be transported to an alternative location. When Miss Alexander suggested that she gauge community consideration and interest in this project before a decision was made, Mr Corrie responded that the timeline was too short for any discussion and that Miss Alexander was not to mention it to the school community or discuss it with any other person, including school staff members, under any circumstance.

With no further consultation, planning for the demolition and replacement of the school began with the School Bursar, Mary McGregor, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 2009. This meeting took place in the absence of all school teaching staff. Bruce Corrie had been advised prior to this meeting that there would be no teaching staff present on this day due to a school excursion to Melbourne. School teaching staff were only alerted to these plans via an email from the Bursar summarising the planning that had occurred between herself, the Project Management Company (Alex Barnard – Incoll Management Services Pty Ltd), Bruce Corrie and an architect, Salvatore Chine. The plan included demolition of the entire school including the main building which encompasses two classrooms, a library, kitchen/staff room and office as well as an auxiliary building which is used as an art room. The plan also included replanning and relocation of an existing building project that was at construction stage, the school having undertaken all necessary preparation procedures including the removal of trees, soil testing and obtaining permits on the site.

The informing email from Mary McGregor stated that the school would be allocated \$400,000 of BER funding, topped up by State Government funding. This summary is confirmed by Bruce Corrie the following day in a reply email.

Once school teaching staff were aware of this situation, School Councillors were instantly informed. They immediately held a community meeting due to the serious nature of the negotiations to demolish their 96 year old school building that had already been made. Community support to maintain the existing building was extremely widespread, passionate and conclusively indisputable. Not only were community members upset by the lack of negotiation and the process in which any negotiation had taken place, they were vehemently resolute that no decision to demolish the school building could ever be made without any kind of documentation or evidence to support this proposal.

As the community and the School Council so passionately objected to the demolition of their school, a further meeting was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June with Bruce Corrie and Gary Weir, DEECD Regional Network Leader. They were unable to convince School Council of the validity of replacing the existing school with what the school community felt was an inferior building with fewer facilities. Mr Corrie informed the School Council that once the project was approved, opportunities for building

facilities could be negotiated. He also told the School Council that if they chose to have the existing school refurbished, the funding would be reduced from “\$400,000 to \$50,000 or \$60,000” and that it was imperative that we sign off for the Demountable Building as this “had to occur by the 24<sup>th</sup> of June as building construction was to start before July.” School Council had two days to make a decision with little consultation and no documentation or supporting evidence.

Also of concern to the school community was that all plans for the Investing in Our Schools Multi-Purpose Building, which was at construction stage, were completely disregarded. The proposal for school replacement dictated that the planned IIOS building would have to be totally relocated, solely at the expense of the school. Demolition of the existing school building would have caused considerable delay in the IIOS project beginning by at least four months and would have increased the cost by an estimated 2.5%.

The information presented by Bruce Corrie at this meeting was confusing and lacked detail, therefore, the School Council decided not to enter into an agreement of demolition and replacement with a demountable building. They agreed to have the BER funds redirected into refurbishment of the existing buildings and negotiations began between Morgen Alexander and Alex Barnard (Incoll Management Services Pty Ltd) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July with a request to have a list of 10 priorities for refurbishment in order of importance. This was emailed to Mr Barnard on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July.

Our original list of priorities, which had been decided upon with teacher and School Council consultation included the installation of new and efficient heating and cooling. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, the school received an email from Mr Barnard which stated that Incoll had “made minor amendments to the original list as the heating and cooling items can’t be included in this refurbishment funding.”

No further correspondence was received until the 27<sup>th</sup> of October when Mr Barnard emailed a set of plans and a new priority list. This email stated “The allocated DEECD budget will not enable all items to be complete but with the schools priority list we can concentrate the funds in the right areas.” We wonder why then had Priority 1 been the only priority to have stayed the same from our original list of priorities? Why, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, were we informed by Mr Barnard that “the funding can only be used for classrooms and on the main school buildings...and not on external equipment or buildings” when the details of refurbishments to be undertaken that we received on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October included the replacement of the existing rain water tanks, demolition of existing gas heating, the installation of new split system air conditioning units and the relocation of an existing split system unit to the school office?

The results of these emails suggest huge discrepancies in the planning and management of our project. Why was our list of priorities, in order of importance, barely considered and then changed?

The school teaching staff then met with Mr Barnard on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November as the project was apparently over budget by \$70,000 and we needed to reprioritise. When teaching staff reminded Mr Barnard that we had been told that heating and cooling cannot be included so our priorities had changed, he suggested that if we took the new refrigerated air conditioning units and take replacements off the priority list then that would most likely bring the works back into budget. Staff, School Councillors and the wider community are concerned as to how installing four new air

conditioning units and removing the existing heating, cooling facilities and four tanks could possibly cost \$70,000.

We had little consultation with anyone until Greg Fox the Project Manager from Contract Control Services visited the school in December, 2009. Mr Fox explained to Morgen Alexander that they would begin refurbishing the kitchen and library during the Christmas holidays and that one classroom would be completed at a time to allow us to always have a teaching space available once the students came back to school. As we were informed by Mr Fox that work was to begin in another area of the school, classrooms would not need to be decanted until after the Christmas holidays.

It was during the week beginning Monday the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, 2010 that Mr Fox contacted Miss Alexander by telephone to inform her that the builders had to move some classroom items to allow the carpets to be laid. Miss Alexander then arrived at the school on Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> of January to find the school in complete disarray. The "few things" that the builders had to shift were the entire contents of both classrooms, the only two teaching spaces in the school. There were bare walls and floors in both classrooms, valuable resources had been randomly thrown into the school office, corridor and art shed or stacked on top of computers which had been moved without any thought or consideration. There were holes in the walls and on the floor and both interactive whiteboards had been dismantled. Dust was thickly spread across every surface in the school and nails protruded from the floor. The school was an unsafe worksite and teaching staff worried as to how it could possibly be repaired in time for classes in two weeks time.

As this is the time when teaching staff would normally be at school to prepare for classes to begin at the start of the year, teaching staff felt severely unprepared for the school year, but also helpless to do anything to alleviate the situation they faced. Between January 27<sup>th</sup> and January 29<sup>th</sup>, all teaching staff are expected to attend three professional development days. However, no teachers were able to attend due to the confusion and disorderly manner in which the school had been left in.

Teaching staff requested to meet with Gary Weir at the school, the Regional Network Leader on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> of January to decide the best possible outcome for this situation. The site as it was, was definitely not safe for any children to be in attendance. Both full time teachers worked vigorously over the next five days, with assistance from school council members, to attempt to have at least one classroom in some kind of order, contending all the time with tradesmen who were yet to finish work inside the school buildings.

A timeline was emailed to the school by Greg Fox on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January which stated that the kitchen extension would take 2 weeks to complete and would be finished by the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, with the new tank and pump to be installed the following week. This did not occur. Teachers were left without any access to rain water or a kitchen/staff room until the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, the beginning of Term 2. It was completely demoralising for teaching staff to effectively do their job when faced with conditions such as these and for such a long period of time.

It was also stated that classrooms would be ready for teaching on January 29<sup>th</sup>. The email said, "*We may still have some paint touch ups and awning sash windows to complete out of hours.*" Carpet did not begin to be laid until Friday 29<sup>th</sup> of January and was not done properly with carpet tiles throughout both classrooms continually lifting from the floor surface.

Greg Fox also wrote *“New canopy is being designed and will start mid February, complete by end of February. Art room will follow new kitchen and take 2 weeks to complete by 22<sup>nd</sup> of February.”* It is completely unsatisfactory that building works continue to this day with neither of the latter two projects having even begun (as of 22<sup>nd</sup> of April).

As a consequence of the state of the school by Friday 29<sup>th</sup> of January, the School Council President, Claire Gillen contacted Gary Weir to request the closure of the school for the first day of the 2010 school year, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> of February. The school was still a worksite, builders would only be working for a short time on Saturday morning and therefore, it was impossible to ensure that the school building and grounds were going to be safe for students to return to. Our request was accepted and Lake Charm Primary School did not open until Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> of February.

Our school community felt angry and disillusioned with the process and wondered why the school could not be prepared in time to begin the school year. Teaching staff were left to deal with the accusations that travelled throughout the community, resulting in the BER process creating a possibly damaging situation for our school.

Many times throughout the building process priorities were changed without any consultation with school staff members or school councillors, claiming that there was no longer any provision in the budget for items such as a door in the kitchen extension or for the painting works, which were clearly outlined as a priority in the plans. However, there were times when we were verbally offered extra items such as a new oven and extra shelving in the art shed, by Greg Fox.

After having to field many questions from the wider community and as a result of conversations such as the ones above, teaching staff and school councillors requested several times that a full list of costings be obtained to ensure that there would be no other cancellations of priorities. We had asked Greg Fox for this information who had said there would be no problem with getting this and that we just needed to contact Alex Barnard. Mr Barnard did not supply us with any costing information. During a meeting with the teaching staff and the School Council President, Campbell Williams from Incoll was again asked to supply the school with this information. He, however, stated that Incoll had an agreement with DEECD that no costings of any BER projects were to be disclosed to the public. Our school community is fervently questioning the monetary value of the works that are completed and anticipated to be completed. The community feel the lack of transparency of this project is misleading as the school was allocated \$265,000 of BER funding from the Federal Government and there is little physical evidence and no documentation of this having been spent.

Timelines are continually changing and work which was initially stated as due to be completed in February, has not even begun. Work is often of an unsatisfactory condition and aesthetically unpleasing. The disruption that this project has caused Lake Charm Primary School is completely unacceptable and continues to be an ongoing problem. During the Term 1 holidays, teaching staff and the School Council President were again left to fight for the school to be reinstated as a safe place for children to return for the beginning of Term 2 due to the works which had taken place over the holidays.

The following is a list of the concerns that have come from teaching staff, school councillors and the school community throughout the course of the year that we urge the Senate Committee to investigate:

- The secretive nature that the initial contact was made with the school principal by Bruce Corrie.
- The initial negotiations that took place between the School Bursar, Alex Barnard, Salvatore Chine and Bruce Corrie to demolish the existing building and auxiliary buildings and replace this with a Demountable Building – inferior to the already existing building. This should never have occurred without any teaching staff or school councillors present.
- Why media releases and the BER website stated that Lake Charm Primary School was to receive \$265,000 for 'refurbishment' yet discussions had already taken place to demolish the existing building and talks of 'refurbishment' were only ever entered into through the persistence of school councillors and teaching staff.
- No community development or community consultation occurred throughout any stage of the BER project.
- The fact that there was little information or official documentation given until very late into project discussions and only after the insistence of the school.
- The frequency of changing time frames and schedules on building works causing major disruption to the school, students, staff and parents and the inconsistency of these time frames.
- The state of disrepair and disarray that teaching staff returned to just prior to commencing the 2010 school year causing undue stress and immense workloads on staff and school councillors to ensure the school was safe and prepared for students to return.
- The extra cost to the school to employ Casual Relief Teachers so staff could have time to re-sort resources and belongings.
- The ongoing issues that the school staff and School Council President have been dealing with since building works began. These include but are not limited to the unpleasing aesthetics of the workmanship throughout the school, electronic learning resources being unusable due to lack of consideration for warranties and unprofessional people working in a professional roles on this equipment, equipment left in a dangerous and unsafe state (projector and electronic whiteboard), carpet tiles lifting from the floor surface, paint spills on new and existing flooring , surfaces and equipment, the lack of available teaching spaces throughout Term 1, no access to rain water or kitchen/staff room for an entire term.
- The concern with many items not being completed according to the written plans, delaying work further each time.
- The extra work loads placed on school staff and councillors on a daily basis, affecting the education of the students at Lake Charm Primary School.
- There was no choice in builders given, even though the BER project aimed to stimulate the local economy.
- The allocation of funds and the silence surrounding this.

- Independent and Catholic schools were given their allocated funds to source their own builders and their own projects. Why were Government schools not given this choice?
- The fact that there were workmen on site at many stages who were found to be in areas of the school without having first identified themselves to any staff member and without wearing any identifying information.
- The generic quality of the building materials used in the building works.

Lake Charm is a strong and passionate community, with a compelling sense of pride surrounding our historical school. School teaching staff, school councillors and community members are disheartened and angry by the process in which the building works have taken place since the initial stages of the BER project and we strongly urge that the Senate Committee investigate this submission so that our community can finally be given answers and our school can continue to be the great place that we have worked so hard on achieving.