



Staffing survey

The second Staff in Australia's Schools (SiAS) survey is about to hit schools this month. The Australia-wide survey, commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research, collects information from teachers and school leaders about their background and qualifications, work, career intentions and school staffing issues.

The SiAS survey 2010 will build on information about the teaching workforce from the first survey conducted between 2006 and 2007, to assist in workforce planning, particularly to identify career and retirement intentions, and current teacher shortages, and to identify trends and changes since that first survey.

The voluntary survey involves randomly selected samples of government and non-government primary and secondary schools in all states and territories.

The first SiAS survey found evidence of 'out-of-field' teaching in primary specialist areas like languages other than English and special needs. It also found evidence that the majority of teachers teaching secondary mathematics, physics, chemistry or information technology have at least three years of tertiary education in the relevant area.

LINKS:

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Senates investigates the BER and NAPLAN

MEMBERS OF THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION HAVE PLENTY ON THEIR PLATES, AS STEVE HOLDEN REPORTS.

The Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution (BER) – Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) program tabled its interim report in June.

The Senate inquiry is addressing the conditions and criteria for project funding; the use of local and non-local contractors; the role of state governments; timing and budget issues, including duplication; requirements for school signs and plaques; and the management of the program. 'In particular,' according to the Senate Committee website, 'the Committee is currently seeking information directly from P21 managing contractors or builders that addresses claims being made in submissions and at hearings regarding inflated costings and failure to achieve value for money for P21 projects.'

The Senate Committee, dominated by Liberal senators, made a number of majority recommendations in the interim report, including that:

- all quarterly reports on maintaining state spending on primary school infrastructure be made available immediately
- remaining P21 program funds be provided directly to those government schools choosing to manage their own projects to completion

- all state and territory education authorities and block grant authorities be required to publish breakdowns of all individual P21 project costs
- accountability mechanisms for oversight of state expenditure of Commonwealth money be strengthened, and
- further BER funding be delayed until the BER Implementation Taskforce reports to the Commonwealth Minister for Education.

In their dissenting report, Labor members of the Senate Committee, Gary Humphries, Gavin Marshall and Catryna Bilyk, suggested that 'centralised management decreased the visibility of some elements, such as costings, to the schools, and parents and citizens associations. This has perhaps fuelled the perception, further encouraged by the media, that the program is not achieving value for money.... A lack of access to costing details may have...led to assumptions being made about lack of value for money.

'Government senators note the extra challenges facing the government sector, where schools are managed in a system. In many cases the knowledge and skills to run large projects...did not exist.'

Among the submissions are two from primary schools, Hastings Public School, located in Port Macquarie, New South

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cross section of key learning areas and support the curriculum.



Wales, and Berwick Primary School, Melbourne, both of which have been the subject of considerable media attention.

Back in March, the *Australian* reported on a cost blowout in the construction of a covered outdoor learning area (COLA) at Hastings PS. According to the submission by the School Council of Hastings PS, 'The cost of the COLA has blown (out) from \$400,000 to approximately \$954,000 with no explanation given for this huge increase.' Hastings PS eventually persuaded the NSW Department of Education to build four classrooms instead of the COLA.

A cost breakdown provided by Hastings PS Principal Grant Heaton at the request of the Senate Committee indicates the actual structure would have cost \$471,156, with the remainder going on a 'managing contractor's incentive fee' of \$12,709; a 'managing contractor's project management' cost of \$38,127; 'design documentation, field data, site management' costs of \$111,076; 'preliminaries' of \$107,805; a 'substructure' cost of \$16,869; a 'site works' cost of \$61,592; a 'site services' cost of \$57,913; and a 'design and price risk' cost of \$77,024. A local contractor provided the *Australian* with a dummy quote for the COLA for about \$100,000.

According to the Berwick PS submission by School Council President Jason Barlow, Berwick PS apparently comes out \$2.25 million short. Barlow told Mike Munro from Channel 7's *Today Tonight* in April, 'We've requested the breakdown for our building and it's been denied three times. (The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) won't give us the figures. We had it independently valued at \$750,000.... Who's getting the

money?' Barlow claims the school opted for a multipurpose hall without receiving advice that this option would result in a \$1 million reduction in funding.

Questions about value for money are being examined by the BER Implementation Taskforce led by Brad Orgill, the former chairman and chief executive officer of UBS Investment Bank Australasia. The Senate Committee's majority recommendation is that the BER Implementation Taskforce report be made publicly available. Commonwealth Minister for Education Simon Crean has said, 'We will make that report available when it is made available to us.'

The Senate Committee has its work cut out, with another inquiry underway into the administration and reporting of testing from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The inquiry received 266 written submissions when submissions closed last month – from higher education and research organisations, professional, subject and industrial associations, education systems and state departments, and from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, which is responsible for NAPLAN, but predominantly from teachers and principals either representing themselves or their school.

See page 22 for a version of the submission by Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing.

Australia votes

If this month's federal election focuses on education, don't hold your breath waiting for either major party to point out differences in education policy: the main game is likely to be an attack on and defence of the Commonwealth government's Building the Education Revolution (BER) program.

Expect the Coalition to hammer Prime Minister Julia Gillard on her management of the \$16.4 billion program in terms of claims of inflated costings and a failure to achieve value for money. Also stand by for the Coalition to mention debt. The Coalition wants unspent BER funds to go directly to government schools to manage their own projects to completion, with schools to use any savings to fund other needs.

Labor and the Coalition otherwise share plenty of common ground on education policy: the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy was conceived during the Coalition government of John Howard; former Commonwealth Minister for Education Julie Bishop pioneered a national curriculum; and Howard himself propelled history into the national curriculum alongside English, maths and science.

Julia Gillard may well have neutralised school funding as an issue when she announced the Commonwealth government's review in April, saying 'no school will lose a dollar of funding, in the sense that their school budget per student will not reduce in dollar terms.' The Coalition has guaranteed the current level of funding in real terms for every school.

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