

Government Promises New, Upgraded Buildings for Every Australian School

The Rudd Government recently announced that its \$42 billion economic stimulus package would include a \$14.7 billion provision to build or upgrade buildings in every one of Australia's 9540 schools.

The executive director of the Australian Parents Council Ian Dalton attended a briefing on the education component of the package that was given by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Treasurer Wayne Swan to key schooling authorities and stakeholders in Canberra on the February 6.

According to the Prime Minister, the Government had two primary objectives in mind when considering strategies to confront the global economic downturn: how best to stimulate the economy; and how to best build value for the future.

The objectives and possible strategies were considered within what Mr Rudd described as his Government's "ongoing vision to develop the best educated, skilled and trained workforce".

Mr Rudd added that the quality of teaching and teachers and the quality of the infrastructure of schools were seen to be fundamental requirements in fulfilling that vision.

He went on to say that the implementation of the economic stimulus package through schools was an urgent undertaking of the Government that will require all hands to be put to the pump.

"You'll have to do things more quickly than you have ever done them before," Mr Rudd said. "You can consult with local and school communities, but there has to be a limit to how long it goes on ... People will have to engage in a level of activity at a rate they will not have been used to."

However, at the same time, the Prime Minister said that the Government wanted local school communities to buy into the process of identifying projects and determining priorities.

"We might ask departments and BGAs (Block Grant Authorities) to call at least one special meeting of every P&C or P&F in the February-March, March-April timeframe to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say and a decision can be reached. Teachers could also be involved through this process," he suggested.

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard added: "We aim to work very cooperatively with state and territory governments and BGAs to get proposals in and assessed quickly and things happening on the ground ... I know from my visits to schools that (they all) have lists of the things they would like to do, this is about how we tap into those lists."

In responding to a question from the floor about how much of the stimulus package will make it onto the ground, in light of the past tendency of some state and territory governments to charge administration fees and other charges in respect of such

Commonwealth Government undertakings, the Prime Minister stated: "Let me make a decree here. A decree. There will be no administration fees charged. None."

Mr Rudd has appointed Mike Mrdak - a Deputy Secretary within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet - as Commonwealth Coordinator General for the rollout of the \$42 billion economic stimulus.

A new structure is being established within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), led by Dr Carol Nicoll, to oversee the \$14.7 billion education component.

How the Government Plans to Build the Education Revolution

- \$14.7 billion will be distributed equitably across both government and non-government sectors.
- To commence in 2008-09 and be rolled out over the next three years.
- \$12.4 billion will be invested to build or upgrade large scale infrastructure, such as libraries and multipurpose halls in every primary school, special school and K-12 school in Australia. There are funding caps for these projects depending on the number of students enrolled in those schools:

0-50	\$250,000
51-150	\$850,000
151-300	\$2 million
301-400	\$2.5 million
401+	\$3 million
- \$1 billion will go towards building about 500 new science laboratories and language learning centres in high schools with a demonstrated need for upgraded facilities. Schools will need to demonstrate need, readiness and the capacity to complete construction by 30 June 2010. (DEEWR will determine the 500 neediest schools on the basis of applications received.)
- \$1.3 billion will provide up to \$200,000 to every Australian school for maintenance and renewal of school buildings and minor building works. Grants will be based upon school size.
- Schools will not be required to co-contribute to projects, though they may choose to do so providing they can still meet the fast track timelines.
- The Minister for Local Government will work to ensure that local government planning instruments do not unreasonably impede progress.