

Claims of state money 'grab' from stimulus package

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STIMULUS package money pledged by the Rudd Government for Victorian primary schools is being siphoned off by the State Government, principals claim.

Two Victorian schools seeking new classrooms as part of the Federal \$14.7 billion Building Education Revolution package say they have been told by state Education Department officials they will not get them.

Despite each school being entitled to up to \$3 million, they say they have been told they have to apply for a gym and a multi-purpose room -- costing an estimated \$1.6 million each.

Asked about the principals' claims, the Education Department admitted to encouraging schools to forgo funding if the money could be better spent elsewhere.

But the *Sunday Herald Sun* has documents showing schools have also been warned they could receive nothing if they went public.

The Federal Government's Building The Education Revolution Guidelines paper states: "The Commonwealth reserves the right to refuse funding to a . . . (school) that releases information publicly about BER projects prior to the Commonwealth's approval of projects."

One principal, who refused to be named, said it was outrageous the State Government was using the money to further its own causes.

"It's like a carrot is dangling there on a stick that we're not going to be able to get a bite of," he said.

The Victorian Principals' Association also claimed some schools had been asked to sacrifice their funding.

The association has released a position paper which demands that each primary school receive a "minimum of 100 per cent" of the Federal Government funding unless an "individual school community has fully agreed".

Opposition education spokesman Martin Dixon said well-maintained schools should not be overlooked for funding in favour of poorly maintained schools.

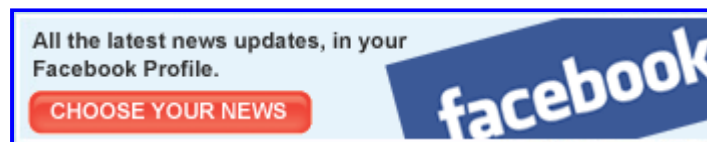
"Schools don't want to see the State Government using Federal Government money to prop up the maintenance that they should have been paying for in the first place," he said.

But Cameron Scott, a spokesman for Victorian Education Minister Bronwyn Pike, said: "To say that needy schools don't deserve funding just shows the Liberal Party and education is a bad mix."

Education Department spokeswoman Karen Harbutt said it was working to ensure money was used in the best interests of children across the school system.

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