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Independent Schools of
New South Wales Limited

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Federal Election

With the Federal Election taking place on 21st August and the *Review of Funding for Schooling* having commenced, the AIS has been actively lobbying the Government for greater certainty around non-government school funding arrangements beyond 2012. We are pleased to advise that the Government has agreed to extend the current funding arrangements, including indexation, until the end of 2013. In addition the Government will allow AIS Block Grant Authorities to commit forward capital funding to 2014, instead of 2012 as originally determined. These decisions followed lengthy negotiations between the independent sector and the Government and are a significant win for independent schools. More information about the Government's announcement is available from the 'News' page of the AIS Election 2010 website at www.aisnsw.edu.au/election2010

AIS Election 2010 website

AISNSW has developed the 'Election 2010' website at www.aisnsw.edu.au/election2010 to provide useful information that schools can use in communications with parents and the school community. It includes details about school funding and related issues that can also be used in discussions with local members of parliament and election candidates when seeking their support for independent schooling. It contains maps of each NSW federal electorate showing the independent schools in each electorate, the margin the seat is held by and the proportion of students in the electorate attending non-government schools. We encourage all schools to use this valuable information.

Election 2010 also contains information about the election commitments and education policies of each of the major parties. Questions, comments and enquiries about 'Election 2010' can be directed to Malcolm Hunt at mhunt@aisnsw.edu.au

Amendments to the Child Seating and Restraint Rules

The NSW Government has implemented a small number of practical amendments to the rules relating to the restraint of children under 7 years of age. The *Road Amendment (Child Seating and Restraint) Rules 2010* are an amendment to the *Road Rules 2008* and commenced on 12th July 2010. The amendment:

- ensures that drivers of small buses providing a public passenger service (9-12 seats) will be treated the same as taxi drivers in respect of the restraint of passengers under 16 years old;
- allows passengers 4 years or older, but under 7 years old, to use an additional seat (commonly referred to as a “dickie seat”) without a child restraint or booster seat on the condition that the passenger be correctly restrained on the additional seat by a lap and sash type seatbelt; or a lap belt together with an approved child safety harness. The additional seat must be suitable for the size and weight of the passenger;
- clarifies that a passenger 4 years to under 7 years old may sit in the front seat if an approved child restraint or booster seat cannot fit between two other child restraints or booster seats; or the back row of seats in the vehicle is not designed for fitting a child restraint or booster;
- allows parents and carers to choose to place a child 4 years or older, but under 7 years old, in the front row if the only available seating position in the back row or rows are additional seats;
- allows a passenger under 7 years old to sit in the front row of a vehicle if the driver is carrying a medical certificate stating that, in the opinion of a medical practitioner, the passenger should be in the front row because of the passenger’s medical condition.

The amending legislation can be found at <http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/sessionalview/sessional/sr/2010-370.pdf>.

ASIC Changes to Financial Reporting Obligations

On 28th June 2010 the Australian Government introduced changes aimed at reducing unnecessary red-tape and regulatory burden on companies, improving disclosure requirements and implementing a number of other important refinements to the corporate regulatory framework. These changes will take effect for financial reports lodged after 30th June 2010.

The key changes were:

- the introduction of a three-tiered reporting framework that will reduce the reporting requirements for certain companies limited by guarantee (excluding charities with a tax-exempt status), which typically have a not-for-profit purpose;
- improving disclosure of non-financial information in the directors’ report of companies limited by guarantee;
- replacing the requirement for parent entity financial statements with reduced disclosure;
- a new statement of Compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards in the directors’ declaration; and
- new provisions for changing year-end dates.

The three tiers are defined as:

- Tier 1 – companies limited by guarantee with annual revenue less than \$250,000 which do not have DGR status;
- Tier 2 – companies limited by guarantee:
 - Annual revenue less than \$250,000 and have DGR status;
 - Annual revenue over \$250,000 but less than \$1,000,000 (irrespective of DGR status)
- Tier 3 – Companies limited by guarantee and have annual revenues over \$1,000,000.

Depending on which tier your school is in, the Act allows either exemptions from preparing certain reports or the ability to streamline some reports. Please note that these changes were made to reduce the reporting burden with respect to Government, but there may be other government authorities who will still require detailed financial statements in order to make decisions about grants or funding. Schools should seek professional advice from an accountant, auditor or lawyer in considering the impact of these changes to your school. Additionally, you may also need to discuss the depth and scope of your reporting with the Board and/or the Members of your company.

For more information visit www.asic.gov.au and search for ‘financial reporting’.

Unflued Gas Heaters

The NSW Government recently announced its response to a report by the respiratory specialist organisation, the Woolcock Institute, on the use of unflued gas heaters in schools. The Minister for Education, Ms Verity Firth, has signalled that the Department of Education and Training will phase out the use of these heaters in schools over a number of years.

As a result of the Woolcock Institute report and the intended actions of the NSW Government, any independent school either currently using or proposing to install these heaters should consider the possible implications. Member schools can contact the AIS Risk and Compliance Unit for further advice. A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.woolcock.org.au

National Solar Schools Program

The Australian Government has announced that all primary and secondary schools across Australia are eligible to apply for funding for solar panels and rainwater tanks under new funding for the National Solar Schools Program.

Under the program grants of up to \$50,000 (\$100,000 for multi-campus schools) are available to primary and secondary schools to install solar and other renewable power systems, rainwater tanks and a range of energy efficiency measures.

Applications for the new funding round are currently open and close on 20th August 2010. Important information about the program includes:

- to help manage demand, funding will be capped each financial year and annual application rounds will be held;
- applications will be assessed using merit-based criteria, meaning schools will have to demonstrate value for money, environmental and educational benefits in their applications;
- to address potential duplication, schools that have been approved to receive funding for solar power systems under any other Australian Government program since 1st July 2008 will now only be eligible for funding of up to \$15,000.

For the remainder of 2010-11 the program will continue to be delivered to individual non-government schools under funding agreements between each school and the Department of Climate Change. However, from 2011-12 onwards it is expected that AIS Block Grant Authorities will be involved in delivery of the program. More details will be sent to schools at a later date.

Schools can contact the NSSP hotline on 1800 703 831 for further information about the program or view the program guidelines at www.climatechange.gov.au/government/programs-and-rebates/national-solar-schools

Education Tax Refund

Schools are reminded that parents can claim the Education Tax Refund for the 2009-2010 tax year for a range of education-related expenses. The ETR allows for claims of up to 50% of the costs of:

- laptops and home computers
- computer-related equipment such as printers, USB flash drives and disability computer equipment for students with special needs
- home internet connections
- computer software for educational use
- school textbooks and other paper-based school learning materials including prescribed textbooks, study guides and stationery.

Not eligible under the 2009-2010 ETR are school fees, school uniforms, cost of attendance on school excursions, tutoring costs, sporting equipment and musical instruments, and other school-related fees and levies. A range of other eligibility criteria must also be met. More information is available from the Australian Taxation Office at www.ato.gov.au

Energy Audits

The NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) is offering a subsidy to schools who undertake an Energy Audit under its *Energy Efficiency Strategy* which aims to help save energy and reduce carbon pollution. DECCW provides subsidised energy audits for as little as 20-50 per cent of the original cost. They will send out qualified energy auditors and identify opportunities for schools to save energy and provide business cases with payback periods. To be eligible for an energy audit, your school must:

- use between 160MWH and 10GWh of electricity per year
- commit to paying 20-50% of the audit cost
- collect pre-audit energy data and develop a resource consumption baseline
- develop an active resource efficiency team
- undertake the Sustainability Advantage Resource efficiency module
- be willing to implement cost effective energy efficiency recommendations
- commit to reporting on resource savings at 6, 12, and 18 month intervals.

For further information send an email to Julia.lipton@environment.nsw.gov.au or phone (02) 8837 6094, or visit <http://savepower.nsw.gov.au/business>

Assistance for early childhood teachers

The Australian Government has announced that early childhood education teachers who are working in disadvantaged areas can apply for the Early Childhood Education HECS-HELP Benefit through the Australian Taxation Office to reduce their university debt from July 2010.

The HECS-HELP Benefit provides eligible early childhood teachers with a reduction in their debt of more than \$1,600 per year for the equivalent of five years of eligible employment. The Benefit is aimed at early childhood education teachers working in regional or remote areas, Indigenous communities, or areas of high socio-economic disadvantage based on postcode location.

More information about the HECS-HELP Benefit is available from the Australian Taxation Office at www.ato.gov.au.

Gutsy Challenge

The GI Cancer Institute at the University of Sydney has developed a range of teaching resources for primary schools to assist teachers with lessons on nutrition and the digestive system. The program then builds towards a campaign in September where children are encouraged to take responsibility for their eating by challenging them *"Can you eat 2 fruit and 4 veg each day for a week?"*

Students taking the challenge will seek sponsorship for eating their fruit and vegetables to win prizes with the money raised going to digestive cancer research. Resources and information for students, teachers and parents is available from the website at www.gutsychallenge.com

PLEASE REMEMBER TO ADVISE THE AIS OF ANY CHANGES TO YOUR SCHOOL'S CONTACT DETAILS, INCLUDING CHANGE OF PRINCIPAL, BUSINESS MANAGER AND CHAIR OF THE SCHOOL COUNCIL. CHANGES CAN BE EMAILED TO admin@aisnsw.edu.au

Dr Geoff Newcombe
Executive Director
4th August 2010