

Media Release

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Caution Needed when Reading *My School* Website

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Statement by Michelle Green, Chief Executive

All parents need and deserve accurate information so that they can choose the right school for their children and monitor their chosen school's educational outcomes but parents must carefully analyse the material on the *My School* website to be launched tomorrow.

My School does not provide accurate comparisons of schools and the financial data is flawed.

Independent schools report to parents in detail on funding, students' progress and all other aspects of school management. Principals and staff maintain a close dialogue with the school community providing parents with detailed information on a continuing basis.

Rather than just depending on the *My School* website, parents selecting a school should talk to Principals, read schools' financial reports and compare educational achievements. *My School* provides only limited information on schools' educational philosophies and religious, cultural and social values, which are significant factors when choosing a school that meets family needs.

Comparing Australia's almost 10,000 schools and attempting to place them in similar groups through an index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) is a challenge that has not yet been met. There are inaccuracies in the information gathered and short-comings in the way it has been processed.

Independent Schools Victoria believes that government funding for all schools must be transparent and fair. But the financial information on the *My School* website is misleading and does not take into account particular circumstances of Independent schools. It does not reflect the reality of schools backed by governments compared with schools that depend on parents' after tax income.

Victoria's Independent schools get 66.6 per cent of their income from parents, 26.5 per cent from the federal government and 6.9 per cent from the state government. From this income, schools must pay salaries and meet the costs of operating the school, including information and communication technology upgrades, escalating government regulatory and compliance costs, teacher training, curriculum development, debt servicing and the additional costs of providing for students with special needs.

**For more information, or to interview Michelle Green
Contact Brian M. Peck on 0437 515 505**

Additional background information to be used if questioned

- Non-government schools enrolled more than a third of Victoria's students in 2007-08 but received just over one fifth of government funding. It costs governments much more to educate a student in a government school than it does to fund a pupil at a non-government school because parents are paying a share of the cost.
- If parents stop investing their own money in their children's education and pull them out of Independent schools because of lack of government support, taxpayers will face a massive increase in education funding. With just 1000 students moving from Independent and Catholic schools into government schools, the Victorian Government would need to find an additional \$10 million a year. The cost to taxpayers would rise to more than \$93 million annually if 10,000 non-government students moved over to government schools.
- Over ten years Independent schools have increased fees by about the same rate as the general cost of education. During the decade the annual percentage increase in the cost of educating a primary and secondary student in a government school, measured by official figures, averaged 5.5 per cent to 6 per cent compared with an annual increase in independent school fees averaging 5.5 per cent to 7.5.
- Independent schools do not have profits – they have operating surpluses that enable schools to pay off debt, establish reserves for future expansion and contingencies.
- The index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) is intended to be a measurement tool for use in identifying schools having similar socio-educational backgrounds, thus allowing parents to assess the results of national literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN) at their child's school by comparison with results of similar schools. As a measure of comparability among individual schools, the 2010 version of ICSEA is fundamentally flawed, due to inappropriate methodology and a dependence on often inaccurate or incomplete information. Many schools have been awarded scores that fail to reflect their background and circumstances.
- Attacks on the Independent sector aimed at influencing the federal government's Review of Funding for Schooling will not make the pool of funds available for education any larger. We hope that federal and state governments recognise that non-government schools save taxpayers money because of the contribution that parents make and ignore sloganeering, over-simplification and arguments based on the politics of envy.