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The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP

Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
Budget Estimates 2011-12
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By: *Senator MASON*
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10 MAY 2011

The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Member for Sturt
429 Magill Road
ST MORRIS SA 5068

Dear Mr Pyne

Thank you for your email of 22 March 2011 concerning an issue referred to you from Mr Scott Morrison MP on behalf of his constituent, Mr Ken O'Dowd and regarding St Patrick's College in Sutherland, NSW, charging a fee to cover insurance costs for a laptop provided to his daughter. I apologise for the delay in responding.

3A

Through the National Secondary School Computer Fund (the Fund) the Australian Government is assisting schools and schools systems to provide new computers and other information and communication technology (ICT) equipment for students in Years 9 to 12. The aim of the Fund is to achieve a computer to student ratio of 1:1 for students in Years 9 to 12 in Australian secondary schools by 31 December 2011. As you are aware, the Government does not support the charging of a fee, levy, co-contribution or bond to parents or carers for a computer provided under the Fund. The Fund is specifically designed to improve access for students to computers and the Government does not support the application of mechanisms which may inadvertently disadvantage students, such as those whose parents cannot afford to pay a fee.

3B

There are limited circumstances however, where schools may be justified in charging a fee for computers and other ICT equipment. Before the Fund commenced, some schools charged parents a fee for student access to ICT. Prior to the Fund, it was estimated that 30 per cent of the computer fleet required to reach a computer to student ratio of 1:1 nationally was already in existence. As such, the Government committed to fund the remaining 70 per cent. This funding ratio will remain in place for the sustainment of the program with education authorities continuing to maintain their existing 30 per cent investment in ICT equipment for the future. This approach to sustainment is normal for Government programs in schools education.

3B The Government acknowledges that in order to maintain schools' existing investment in ICT, they may continue to charge a fee and levy it across the entire parent body, including parents of students in Years 9 to 12. The school, in consultation with the parents and the education authority, should determine the manner in which the fees are charged across the parent body, while making it clear that the fee only covers the purchase and maintenance of ICT necessary to meet the school's maintenance of effort obligation.

3C Additionally, some schools have decided to implement a computer to student ratio across the entire school population, including Years 7 and 8. To do this, some have elected to charge the entire parent body for computers not funded through the Fund. Again, the school, in consultation with parents and the education authority, should determine the manner in which the fees are charged across the parent body, while making it clear that the fee is for the purchase and maintenance of computers for students not eligible to benefit directly from the Fund.

The Catholic Education Commission (CEC) NSW has advised that St Patrick's College, Sutherland has implemented a laptop program for students in Years 7 and 8. Costs for computers provided to students in Years 7 and 8 are not covered by the Fund. Insurance fees for these laptops are being levied against the entire school population at St Patrick's College.

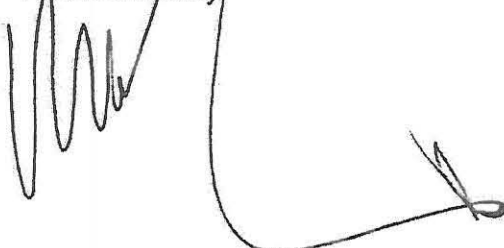
Therefore, if Shae is in Year 7 or 8, she is not eligible to benefit directly from the Fund. If Shae is in Year 9 to 12, her laptop is funded through the Fund but the \$123 fee has been charged to cover insurance costs for computers provided to students in Years 7 and 8 who are not eligible to benefit directly from the Fund.

I am further advised that the Principal at St Patrick's College will be pleased to meet with any parent who is concerned about the fee. Alternatively, Mr O'Dowd may wish to raise this matter with the CEC NSW directly. Contact details for the NSW CEC are:

Mail	Catholic Education Commission NSW PO Box A169 SOUTH SYDNEY NSW 1235
Telephone	(02) 9287 1555
Email	cecnsw@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. I trust the information provided proves helpful in responding to Mr Morrison and Mr O'Dowd.

Yours sincerely



Peter Garrett