

**PATIENTS OF A SAINT:** La Santa Muerte is cherished by the underbelly of Mexico, and as the icon of an underground cult she has bedeviled governments and the Catholic Church.  
TRACY WILKINSON **WORLD PAGE 7**

# Parents need lesson on how to claim tax break

By **JEWEL TOPSFIELD**  
EDUCATION EDITOR

**PARENTS** are being urged to keep receipts for back-to-school items including textbooks and computers, after hundreds of thousands of families missed out on almost \$400 million in tax benefits for education expenses.

School uniforms bought after July 1 this year will be included for the first time, following the federal government's 2010 election promise to expand the education tax refund to allow parents to claim 50 per cent of the cost of uniforms approved by the school.

The education tax refund offers eligible families up to \$397 a primary school student and \$794 a secondary student. Parents can claim 50 per cent off education expenses including computers, software, textbooks, internet connection, stationery and tools for trade courses.

But take-up of the refund has been lower than expected, with tax data showing one in five eligible children missed out in 2008-09, presumably because their families were unaware of the refund. The 2008-09 budget papers estimated that the scheme would cost \$1 billion, but it came in at \$400 million under budget.

An information campaign will start this weekend in newspapers, on radio, television and online, to ensure families know what can be claimed.

Parents eligible for the education tax refund are those who receive family tax benefit A, an income-tested payment that varies according to the number and age of children in a family. Independent students and parents receiving some other allowances are also eligible.

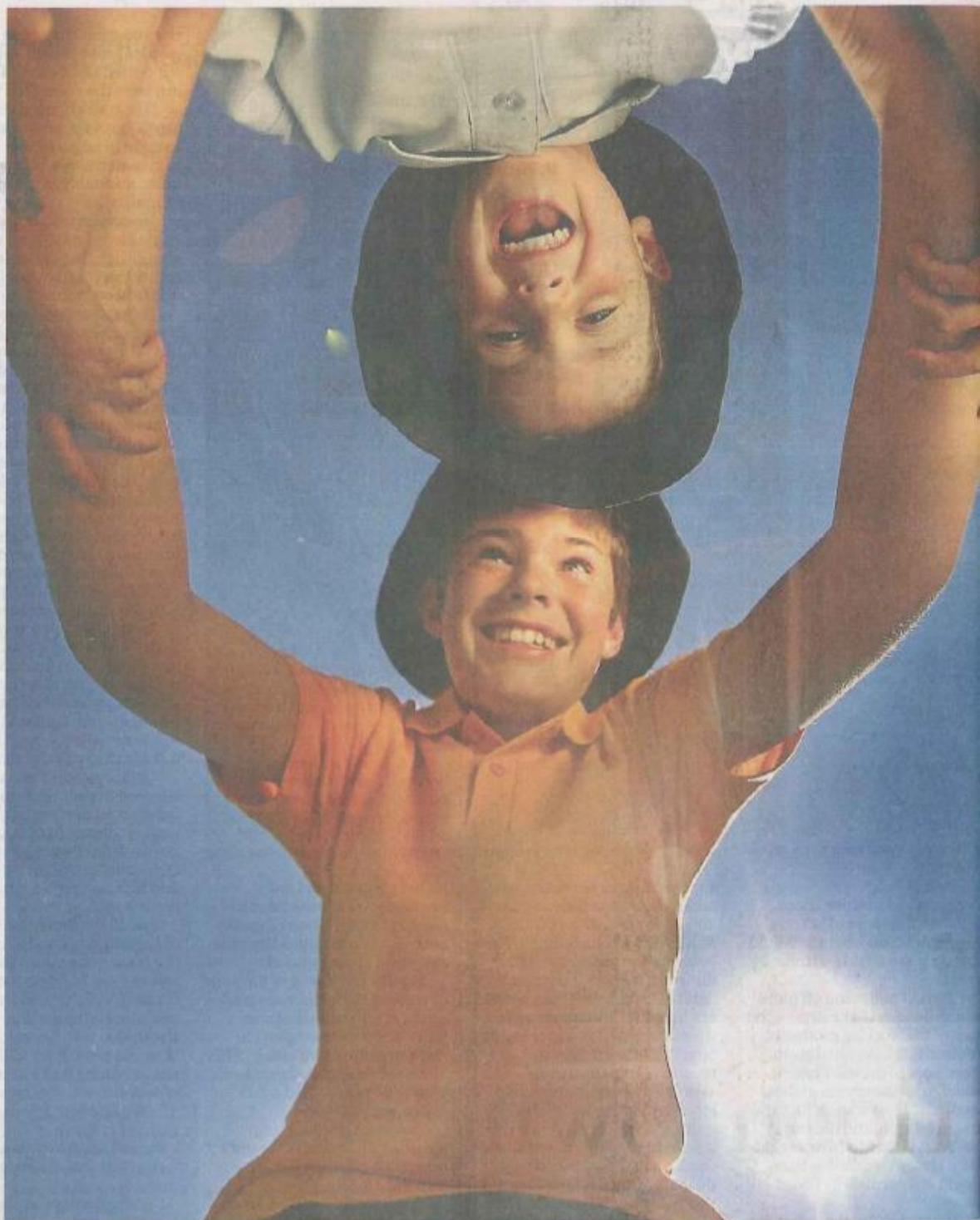
Anne Cassidy, whose son Tom is in year 6 at New Gisborne Primary School, said she was unaware of the tax refund until last year.

As a nurse with an unpredictable income because of shift work, she was unsure if she would be eligible, but vowed to keep the back-to-school receipts for her accountant regardless.

Ms Cassidy will not be able to claim her son's school uniform because it was bought before July 1, when the expanded refund will be introduced. "But there is always next year — they are always growing," she said.

Ms Cassidy said she was attracted to a SunSmart-approved uniform range by Stubbies, because it had an ultraviolet protection factor of 50+, which blocked most of the sun's harmful rays.

"Being a nurse I see the other end of sunbaking — it might be popular in the short term but in the long term it is not so desirable."



Tom Cassidy, 12, and Zach Paterson, 5, try out their new school sunhats.

PICTURE: JOHN WOODS