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# Tax refund eases costs of new school year

**Jewel Topsfield**

PARENTS are being encouraged to keep receipts for back-to-school items such as 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 also be included for the first time, after the federal government promised during the election to expand the education tax refund to allow parents to claim 50 per cent of the cost of uniforms approved by the school.

The refund, which was announced as a flagship policy during Labor's 2007 election pitch, offers families up to \$397 each primary school student and \$794 each secondary student.

Parents can claim 50 per cent of certain expenses, including computers, software, textbooks, internet connection, stationery and tools for trade courses.

Take-up of the refund has been poorer than expected. Data shows 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 the scheme would cost \$1 billion but it came in \$400 million under budget.

An education campaign will start this weekend in newspapers and on radio, television and online, to ensure families know what and how much can be claimed and remind them to keep their receipts.

"We know that many families haven't made claims even though they are eligible," the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, said. "There are around 1.3 million eligible families, so please, this year when you are shopping for back to school, keep your receipts and at tax time you will be able to claim the education tax refund."

Parents who receive family tax benefit A, a payment which is income-tested and varies according to the number and age

of children, are eligible for the education tax refund.

Independent students and parents who receive some other allowances are also eligible.

Anne Cassidy, whose son Tom is in year 6 at New Gisborne Primary School in Victoria, said she did not know about the refund until last year.

As a nurse who has an unpredictable income because she works shifts, she was unsure whether she would be eligible, but will keep receipts for her accountant.

Given she has already bought Tom's uniform, Ms Cassidy will not be able to claim it on the refund as uniform expenses are not covered until July 1.

"I've just bought this year's, but there is always next year – they are always growing."

Ms Cassidy said she was attracted to a new SunSmart-approved uniform range because it had an SPF factor of 50+ and blocked more than 97 per cent of the sun's harmful rays.

"Students are out and about, so it's an added peace of mind that the sleeves are a bit longer and the sun cannot penetrate as much as it can with lighter materials," Ms Cassidy said.

## ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

**Buying, establishing, repairing and maintaining:**

- ▶ computers and laptops
- ▶ computer equipment (printers, USB drives, etc)
- ▶ internet connections, education software
- ▶ textbooks and other printed learning material
- ▶ stationery, tools for school trade courses