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MEDIA RELEASE

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WARNING ON TUTORING SERVICES

NSW Fair Trading Deputy Commissioner Steve Griffin is warning parents considering tutoring for their children to avoid being pressured into signing contracts and make sure any service they pay for fits their child's needs.

Mr Griffin said research was the key to informed decision making.

"The right tutor can complement the excellent education provided by schools, but parents should check tutoring services carefully," he said.

Do your homework. These are the key questions to ask:

- How long has the tutoring service been in business?
- Does the service belong to a relevant industry association with an enforceable code of conduct eg. the Australian Tutoring Association?
- Can the service give you the name of any other parents that you can talk to about the quality of its tutoring services?
- Have the tutors been interviewed face-to-face by the tutoring service?
- What are the qualifications and experience of the tutor who will be tutoring your child?
- Are the tutors trained specifically in the subject area in which they are tutoring?
- Is the form of proposed tutoring relevant to the NSW Education course requirements?
- Have reference checks been conducted on the tutors?
- Have relevant child protection screenings been performed on the tutors?
- If the tutoring service is at a specific location, is there an opportunity to visit the location?

Mr Griffin said parents should be wary of overseas or interstate institutions promoting services on the internet.

"Read any contract carefully before signing and be aware of any cancellation conditions," he said.

"Ask how 'guarantees' of success can be substantiated and be careful of companies that rely on web-based communication and don't offer telephone numbers or office locations."

Mr Griffin said NSW Fair Trading received 398 complaints about education services in 2010, mostly relating to refunds, cancellations, fees and unsatisfactory service.

“In November last year, Fair Trading ran checks on a number of businesses selling tutoring software through direct commerce in the Sydney metropolitan area,” he said.

Investigators examined contracts to make sure they were compliant with unfair contract term laws and paid particular attention to ensure consumers were receiving appropriate cooling off periods.

No breaches of consumer protection legislation were found.

Mr Griffin said Fair Trading would continue to work with the industry to ensure consumer protection.

“By law, consumers may be entitled to cancel any contract and seek a refund if any aspect of their child’s tutoring service is wrongly described or misrepresented,” he said.

“The new Australian Consumer Law, which commenced on 1 Jan 2011, allows people to claim compensation when a service does not meet a consumer guarantee.

“You may be able to claim compensation for your costs in time and money because something went wrong with the service.”

A *Tutoring Tips for Parents* fact sheet is available on the Fair Trading website at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au or by calling 13 32 20.

“I strongly recommend parents read this factsheet before signing up for any tutoring service.” Mr Griffin said.

The fact sheet is available in English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hindi, Korean and Arabic.

The Australian Tutoring Association’s (ATA) Mohan Dhall said parents had a right to expect high quality standards of service and accountability.

“Parents should ask tutors questions before they sign up to any contracts,” he said. “They can also call the ATA for advice.”

Further information is available at www.ata.edu.au or call 02 9704 5724. The ATA may also assist in conflict resolution through mediation and negotiation.

Parents experiencing problems with tutoring services can also contact NSW Fair Trading on 13 32 20 or lodge a complaint at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au or at any Fair Trading Centre.

Mr Griffin recommended the report: *Shutting the Gates: An analysis of the psychology of in-home sales and the film, Shutting the Gates*, produced by the Consumer Action Law Centre Victoria and Dr Paul Harrison, Deakin University and available at www.consumeraction.org.au

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