Dear Parents,

The following information has been provided to me by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Newton, School Council President

19/09/2014

RE: CHANGES TO THE EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE

From 1st January 2015, the government will provide extra financial support directly to Victoria’s neediest schools instead of providing the Education Maintenance Allowance directly to parents.

Parents will not be able to apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance in 2015.

The money will be allocated to eligible schools through schools’ core operational funding mechanism, with the neediest schools receiving the most funding. Not all schools will be receiving funding in 2015.

This change to how the money is distributed was required by the funding agreement with the Commonwealth government to make sure Victorian schools receive increased funding that will benefit all students and, in particular, those from schools with concentrated disadvantage.

The majority of parents who receive the EMA payment already elected to provide the money directly to their school.

If you are experiencing financial hardship, you can speak to your Principal about how you can access assistance from the State Schools’ Relief Committee for clothing and uniforms.

The end of the EMA direct payments to parents will not affect any other payment you may be receiving such as the Schoolkids Bonus, which is provided directly to eligible parents to assist with education costs.

If you have any questions about this change, please speak to your school Principal.
PRINCIPAL’S COMMENTS ON EMA CHANGES

I note the material provided to School Council Presidents above and make the following comments:

- Parents who received EMA at Gleneagles did not “elect to provide the money directly to the school”. Parents who elected for the EMA to go through the school account did so after reaching an EMA agreement on how their EMA payment would be used to support their child’s education. The plan could include electives, camps, excursions etc. To suggest parents provided this money to the school is misleading.

- I note that not all schools will be receiving funding to help families that would have received EMA assistance in the past. How or if a school can provide assistance to families experiencing financial difficulty is very much an open question at the time of writing this response.

- How to determine whether a particular family is indeed experiencing financial difficulty is also a significant challenge for schools. In the past, EMA was linked to a Health Care Card and we had the capacity to check whether the person with a card still qualified for the benefit. We no longer have this capacity.

- Essentially, the Government is moving from a transparent and well understood system, to a system that will vary from school to school and one that makes the school responsible for trying to develop some sort of system to replace it. The last sentence asks families to speak to your school Principal if you have any questions.

- Why should the Principal explain a political decision? The Government is responsible for explaining their decision in my view. In 2014, Gleneagles had 347 families who received EMA – that’s a lot of explanations.

- I am very concerned about the comment about receiving assistance from the State Schools’ Relief Committee for uniforms. The State Schools’ Relief Committee (SSRC) does a wonderful job with limited resources. They would not have the financial capacity to help every family that would have received EMA in the past. Applications for assistance through SSRC also have to be processed through the school and the order is sent from and received at the school. This is a very different experience to going to the uniform shop and selecting your own items. The SSRC is a not for profit, charitable organisation. The DEECD is asking them to take on a significant and growing responsibility as a result of the Government’s change to EMA. We fundraise at this school to support the SSRC.

Where To From Here
We will shortly receive notification about our 2015 Budget. Council will need to examine the details and consider what is possible and practical to put in place in response to EMA no longer being available to support families in our community. This will be discussed in details at our 20th October 2014 meeting. Schools in the Casey North Network will also discuss this significant issue. We already know that some schools in Casey North will not receive any funding in the future – one Principal of a school in this category told me they had 140 families on EMA this year and literally they didn’t know how they would be able to help them in the future.

I understand how concerning this will be for many families. We see this as a significant challenge and will keep you informed as we move through the issue.

Sue Peddlesden
Principal
19/09/2014