

Tuesday 22nd January 2008

PARENTS NEED TO DO HOMEWORK WITH TUTORING PROGRAMS

With students heading back to the classroom next week, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Jennifer Rankine, is urging parents who are considering buying costly computer tutoring programs to do their homework.

“Parents should research these ‘educational programs’ and take the time to assess what the educational benefits are before purchasing expensive tutoring programs,” Ms Rankine said.

It can be easy to succumb to high-pressure tactics used by some salespeople and potentially spend thousands of dollars on computer tutoring programs that aren’t appropriate or that don’t deliver value for money.

“Most parents want what is best for their child and will try anything to ensure they have the best start to life through their education,” Ms Rankine said.

“Some parents think buying a Maths or English tutoring program will assist their child at school, only to find they lose interest or the program isn’t suitable or isn’t aligned to the school curriculum. This is particularly disheartening when they have paid a lot of money.”

The Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) has received a number of complaints where people felt pressured into buying a computer program that set them back between \$5000 and \$6000, some on high interest finance. People who purchase programs through door-to-door approaches also need to be aware of their rights, which entitles them to ‘cool off’ within 10 days of signing the contract if they choose to.

“Some parents are coaxed into signing the contract at the initial meeting and finance is arranged for those who cannot afford to pay up front. If the sales representative offers a credit contract to finance the sale, it will cost a lot more – often between \$8000 and \$10 000, which is extremely expensive,” Ms Rankine said.

“A computer program is not necessarily guaranteed to be a successful educational tool as children learn in different ways. One program may not be suitable for all students, particularly those with special learning needs and teachers know the best way to educate a child.”

Other issues to consider include:

- The appropriateness of the program and child assessment processes used - the assessment may be done by someone who is not qualified.
- Level of after sales support available, and most importantly
- Will the child benefit from the computer tutoring program?

“Parents should consider speaking to their child’s teacher or an education specialist and seek advice on what is best for them.”

For more information about consumer issues including door-to-door rights, contact the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs at www.ocba.sa.gov.au or telephone 8204 9777 or 131 882 for country callers.