

MEDIA RELEASE

19 October 2009

Bilingual School Up and Away

The Building Education Revolution initiative from the Rudd government's recent Stimulus Package, puts the Italian Bilingual School in line to receive \$586,000 to refurbish its existing building and expand its resources.

Federal Member of Grayndler Anthony Albanese made the announcement recently, advocating the benefit of 21st Century facilities to local primary schools. With this funding, the Italian Bilingual School will be constructing two new classrooms, installing new carpet, new air-conditioning, extra furniture and repainting some of the building. The school library will expand with new shelving, books and software and a range of technological equipment. The school is also going to have a partially enclosed Covered Outdoor Learning Area and an Interactive Whiteboard in every classroom.

"This funding could not have come at a better time," said the school's Principal Robert Ruggeri. "Our school has been growing each year and we need more space and resources to accommodate the students in 2010."

The Italian Bilingual School was established in 2002 and has grown from 7 to 133 students in 7 years. There are currently 34 students in line to join the preparatory program and 25 to join kindergarten in 2010.

The current offices of Co.As.It. (Italian Association of Assistance) will move out of Casa d'Italia to make room for the expansion of the Italian Bilingual School. The head office and Community Aged Care Package division currently based at Harris Park will move into offices within the Norton Plaza Business Centre in Leichhardt by the end of this year.

Works to the current building will be completed for the start of the school term in February. The Italian Bilingual School hasn't, however, given up its long-term plans in relation to new premises. "We are still evaluating the feedback received from the Land and Environment Court and aiming to prepare a revised Development Application with Ashfield Council to secure the Yasmar site for our school in the future," said Mr Ruggeri. "But it's business as usual here in Norton Street and students are getting everything they would expect from a school."

The students' parents also see the news of the building expansion as a step in the right direction. "We are heartened by the news of the extra space and the new resources," said the President of the school's Parents and Friends committee, Daniel Bretag. "Of course we want a permanent home for the school with its own grounds eventually. But I don't feel that a small outdoor play area affects my child's education in any significant way. The benefits that I have seen from the bilingual education and small class sizes outweigh the current limitations on space."

The school's European-influenced program has just seen its first group of eight students go to Italy for a three-week overseas study tour. Together they visited central

Excellence through Bilingualism - Il bilinguismo per eccellere

Casa d'Italia 67 Norton Street Leichhardt NSW 2040 Tel 02 9572 9077 Fax 02 9572 9080

Email info@ibs.nsw.edu.au Website www.ibs.nsw.edu.au

Italy, Siena, Assisi, Perugia and Spoleto and joined the students at the Scuola Elementare Antolini at Ponte Valleceppi, Perugia in all their lessons and excursions.

In between touring the Colosseum and Forum they met with the Australian Ambassador to Italy Amanda Vanstone in Rome and visited the Parliament of Italy, accompanied by its Australian representative, the Hon. Marco Fedi.

The students proudly gave all of their special hosts a memento of the Italian Bilingual School, a rotating crystal globe on an engraved cube boasting the school's motto: "Il bilinguismo per eccellere" (Excellence through Bilingualism).

This opportunity came about through the work of the teachers in establishing connections with this school in Italy some years ago. In light of the international nature of the school, they exchanged work and discussions with each other from which the idea of an overseas study tour evolved. An invitation has been extended to Scuola Elementare Antolini to reciprocate the visit to Australia.

"The kids are privileged to have this access to key political figures and educational experiences in Italy," said Mr Bretag. "The influence this has on children of that age cannot be underestimated."

The fully bilingual curriculum at the school is essentially its most significant feature. "We're non-Italian speaking parents so it's a big challenge for our daughter Lola to learn a second language," said Mr Bretag whose child is in Year 2. "But the other day, she talked to the merchant at the local fruit market in Italian, and he was astounded at her ability. We, as parents, get a big buzz out of that."

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Media contact:-
Felicity Fedele
Marketing Coordinator
Ph: 02 9564 0744
Email: felicity.fedele@coasit.org.au