



Schools Plus

**Australian Schools Plus submission to the Productivity
Commission's review into Philanthropy**

May 2023

Australian Schools Plus - Productivity Commission Submission into Philanthropy

Australian Schools Plus welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the Productivity Commission's Review of Philanthropy.

About Schools Plus

Schools Plus was established nine years ago with seed funding and bipartisan Federal Government endorsement to connect philanthropy to school communities to enable greater equity for children experiencing resources and performance gaps in their education. Since then, Schools Plus has raised about \$60 million to support those communities, positively impacting over 500,000 children and young people. Our model is place-based, providing investment and resources as well as providing influence at a systems level.

Schools Plus proposes three key recommendations to the Commission.

1. Removal of the Schools Plus Fundraising cap to respond to the growing need.

The past few years have seen a dramatic increase in support required for school communities. Bushfires, floods, the pandemic, and socioeconomic challenges have led to increased disadvantage and inequity for many children across Australia. We could serve over 4600 schools below the threshold of advantage (ICSEA ranking) but currently Schools Plus can service only a small percentage of that need.

Schools Plus has seen an increase in demand for support rising over the past three years. As an organisation, we have attempted to respond to the rising need in these communities, but our capacity to respond is limited by the fundraising cap that was placed in our constitution by Treasury when we were established in 2014. The current fundraising cap sits at \$15 million, but we estimate that we will need to raise nearly \$18 million per annum to meet the needs of disadvantaged school communities over the next three years. Our projections suggest that by 2026, there will be a demand for us to support up to 150,000 children per annum in low ICSEA schools to address learning gaps and support wellbeing: with a specific focus on First Nations, Rural, Regional, and Remote children and in response to crises.

Schools Plus has demonstrated nearly a decade of highly effective project implementation based on partnerships with some of Australia's most respected philanthropists. Our model does not support individuals or families within school communities, which was a concern raised in the 2013 sector reference group into DGR. Rather, our place-based approach has fostered innovation and the incubation of some very effective interventions that have delivered extremely positive outcomes for children and young people. Some of these have been endorsed by and adapted and scaled by

Departments of Education across the country. Our work with schools is making a significant impact at a systems level.

Schools Plus has built a trusted network of High-Net-Worth Philanthropists as well as Trusts and Foundations who are committed to supporting education more broadly. Through this well-respected network, Schools Plus has invested funding, coaching, and resources into hundreds of strategic interventions in children's learning gaps, and wellbeing, across metropolitan areas, in First Nations and Rural, Regional, and Remote communities as well as responding to crises. These strategic projects are comparable to delivering programmatic work; however, our facilitation of single and multi-year projects, rather than a one size fits all programmatic approach allows us to enable true community-led development; because we respect that school communities know how their children need additional support. This does not, however, mean that schools have access to lax management of funds that can be used for individuals or families to garner tax deductibility. Rather, our projects are selected with the assistance of a highly capable panel of experts through a submission and interview process and supported by some of the most experienced and respected educational professionals, throughout the life of the project.

The removal of the fundraising cap will enable increased equity and fairness for all Australian children, and we believe that this is an extremely important step forward for a more equitable Australia. With Independent schools enjoying uncapped fundraising capability, we know that this is one of the key drivers to tackling inequity towards a fair and level playing field for all Australian children.

2. An increase in Public-Private Partnerships and improved processes to support Government engagement with NFPs.

Effective public and private partnerships between the government and the not-for-profit sector can have a significant positive impact on education in Australia. The sector brings unique expertise and innovative approaches and community connections that can complement government efforts to improve education outcomes.

Schools Plus supports *Philanthropy Australia's* proposal for the doubling of structured giving in Australia by 2030. However, we believe that achieving that goal requires a more transparent and accessible process between Government, Philanthropy, and the NFP sector to reach this goal. As an organization, we have experienced some positive partnerships and collaboration with the Government in some states and territories, but we see an opportunity for the sector to benefit from a more streamlined and uniform approach.

Currently, Government engagement is driven largely by individual networks and relationships rather than a publicly transparent and accessible process. Schools Plus recommends that there is a more aligned approach with greater consultation, visibility, and transparency. This would include but not be limited to:

- Increased interest in and engagement from the Government regarding the value of public and private partnerships across education
- An appetite for partnering – less bureaucracy, command and control approaches, and reducing red tape
- An opportunity for showcasing success and knowledge sharing
- Clear and transparent guidelines, with key Government personnel knowing Philanthropy and as key points of contact for engagement with the NFP sector
- Transparency around decision-making
- An increase in the opportunity for corporate philanthropy and government engagement

Case Study – Public-Private Partnerships Schools Plus partnered with the South Australian Department of Education to pilot a tech-based early years literacy intervention in 2019.

We secured \$100,000 in philanthropic support to co-fund a trial of an integrated literacy model in five schools/pre-schools in Port Augusta, a region with a high Indigenous population. The schools trialled the use of a range of scientifically-designed apps (delivered through personal tablets) and a comprehensive professional learning package to support teachers and parents in the use of these apps at preschool (as part of the curriculum) and at home. The RAPP (Reading Apps) Time project was enacted within the context of curriculum frameworks (the Early Years Learning Framework, the Preschool Literacy Indicators and the Australian Curriculum and TfEL) and was aligned with the Department’s and local Partnership’s strategic objectives. Other stakeholders included La Trobe University and Edith Cowan University – academics from both joined the project as mentors, while a La Trobe University professor also conducted a formal research project on the trial.

The apps used in the RAPP Time project were later included in the Department’s Learning@Home website, developed for families in response to Covid. The project also helped inform the Department’s Early Years Learning Strategy developed in 2021 and subsequent professional learning in the region.

3. Support for Philanthropy Australia’s strategy to double giving.

Schools Plus supports Philanthropy Australia’s commitment to double giving by 2030. We believe that Philanthropy helps to meet unmet needs in society and that it plays a critical role alongside Government to fill unmet needs and to transform society in ways that Government is unable to do. Schools Plus sees this every day in all aspects of the work we do with school communities. Through social innovation and the piloting of new ideas, society is transformed in positive ways.

Since Covid – there has been a fundamental shift in the way we approach helping others. Australians are becoming more familiar with and trusting of community-led development and change. The one size fits all ethos pre covid has become less reliable with communities needing to innovate and pivot to support their own bespoke needs more than ever before. A new social model has become more mainstream.

Our work with Philanthropists and intermediaries has helped with advocacy around the importance of well-being measures in our community. Philanthropists are now not only interested in the value of education but since covid, also better understand the challenges for our society without it. Two years

of lockdowns highlighted the fragility of mental health and well-being in families and children and philanthropy understands the economic and social cost of loss of learning hours, and social connection.

As an organisation, we believe there are some key quick wins to doubling philanthropy by 2025.

We support the recommendations of Philanthropy Australia to build a framework that supports ease of structured giving. These include:

- **The ability to gift bequests through superannuation.** Given the balances of superannuation are to be significant over the next 30 years, this is an easy and accessible way for people to give to the NFP sector
- **The opportunity to donate at tax time** could be an effective and easy method to encourage giving
- **A national giving campaign** that would foster awareness of the importance of giving and provide a variety of personal and workplace giving mechanisms to make philanthropy accessible to everyone.
- **A uniform national fundraising approach** – rather than a state-based system

Schools Plus sees the implementation of the above recommendations as crucial to enable equity in education for all Australian children. The removal of the Fundraising cap Schools for Plus will enable the organization to access more funding from philanthropic donors, support more disadvantaged schools across Australia, and provide a strong incentive for philanthropy to invest in education. This will make a significant contribution to doubling Philanthropy. Moreover, it would have significant economic and social benefits for Australia as a whole. A simpler and more transparent Private and Public partnering process will send a strong message to the philanthropic sector about the importance of collaboration and recognition of the role that both play in addressing educational challenges in Australia.

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