

'Our Schools'

Friday 9 February 2024

'Our Schools'
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Productivity Commission, Australian Government
4 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600

Attention: Philanthropy Inquiry Commissioners Alex Robson, Julie Abramson & Krystian Seibert
By email: philanthropy@pc.gov.au / also lodged via Productivity Commission website
Copies to: The Hon Andrew Leigh MP, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities & Treasury
The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education

Submission: Productivity Commission inquiry into philanthropy (Inquiry)
(*Terms of Reference dated 11 Feb-2023 issued by Jim Chalmers, Treasurer*)

Thank you to the Treasurer for requesting this Inquiry, the Productivity Commission for the draft report '**Future Foundations for Giving**' dated November 2023 (**Draft Report**) and for the opportunity to make a submission.

The Draft Report has provided a range of recommendations, including the removal of DGR status for school building funds. We will leave others to comment on this specific recommendation, instead focussing on a simple policy we would encourage the Productivity Commission to **recommend** to government ...

“Any private or independent school that elects to accept government funding, or benefit from DGR status, be obliged to open its facilities for use by other registered community organisations ... with priority access given to public schools.”

In other words, let's share the benefits of Private & Independent Schools' significant infrastructure - much of which has been funded by government. Why allow that to be utilised only by a select and small part of the community, when the surrounding community may be in desperate need for access to similar facilities?

The social divide in Australia is extreme at many levels in our society, most critically in access to quality education. This is such a grossly inequitable situation in our '*lucky*' country.

In education, the extremes are stark. Many private and independent schools are spending tens of millions of dollars on wonderful facilities that, in most cases, are accessible only to a select few; while federal and state governments struggle to fund public school (and general community) infrastructure.

There is an alternate approach. If private and independent schools elect to accept government funding or their donors receive tax deductions for donations, then it would seem only reasonable that the beneficiary's facilities so created be open for the benefit of the local community.

Implementation of this recommendation requires consideration of related practicalities (*incl insurance*), but the principles proposed include:

- ✓ Access be to registered community organisations (*group bookings*), not individuals;
- ✓ Priority be given to public schools, followed by other registered community groups;
- ✓ Administration costs be the responsibility of facility 'owner' (*i.e. a cost of accepting funding / DGR*);
- ✓ Applies to all existing and future facilities; and
- ✓ A financial incentive be offered to schools to build their facilities in a community setting.

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Outcomes of adopting this policy, are expected to include:

- ✓ Save hundreds of millions of dollars, by avoiding duplicating investment in community infrastructure;
- ✓ Strengthen communities (*sharing facilities will foster interaction between community groups, leading to better understanding and support for one another*);
- ✓ Position schools as the centre of the community (*crucially, opening facilities to community groups, will also foster the important adult and community interaction and connections*); and
- ✓ Improved accessibility of private & independent school infrastructure, in how they are designed (*influencing the design of future facilities to improve accessibility will benefit all communities*).

We would welcome the opportunity to engage with government on this recommendation.

Kind regards,

Julius Colman AM

Brent Dennison

Peter Danks

By way of background:

- Julius completed schooling at Elwood College and studied law. He became partner of the law firm that started MCS Property (a property syndication entity purchased by Centro), before joining the team that started and listed Japara (aged care). Julius and his wife established Colman Foundation, an educational charity that has committed \$30 million to a partnership with the Victorian government to deliver '**Our Place**'. Our Place is a holistic place-based approach to supporting the education, health and development of all children and families in disadvantaged communities by utilising the universal platform of a school.
- Brent completed schooling at Karingal High School and studied Commerce. He worked as a strategy consultant with Boston Consulting Group in Melbourne and New York, before leading entrepreneurial ventures in the UK and Turkey. Brent has been CEO of private equity backed businesses including Cell Care Group (international cord blood bank and cellular therapy investor) which in 2021 was sold to US Generate Life Sciences. Brent dedicates considerable time to community activities, including as a Director of Toorak College for ten years to 2023 (private girls school in Mt Eliza) and The Bays, a not-for-profit which operates The Bays Hospital (Mornington) and an Aged Care and dialysis unit (Hastings).
- Peter completed schooling at Camberwell Grammar School and studied Applied Science & Marketing. An experienced company Director and Manager, Peter has experience as a Director of an ASX listed company and held commercial roles including Sales & Marketing Manager for the Australian Formula One and Motorcycle Grands Prix. Peter dedicates considerable time to community activities, incl. as honorary trustee of Danks Trust (*provides funding to areas incl. education and disadvantage*) and as advisor (*via EFG*) to not-for-profit organisations incl The Big Issue and Homes for Homes.

This submission is made by the individuals listed, not any of the organisations named.