



St Mary's Anglican Girls' School (St Mary's) submission to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report - *Future Foundations for Giving*

Introduction

The Productivity Commission's draft report into Philanthropy – Future Foundations for Giving – has provided a range of recommendations in relation to philanthropic giving in Australia and St Mary's Anglican Girls' School welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback.

This submission focuses on the recommendation to remove DGR status for school building funds on the basis that there is "the potential for a donor to be able to convert a tax-deductible donation into a private benefit."

We are extremely concerned that the Productivity Commission in its interim report has recommended the removal of Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status for School Building Funds, and we believe that this action would have a significant negative impact on our community and thousands of others around Australia and urge the Commission to reconsider.

St Mary's is located in Karrinyup WA and currently enrolls 1500 students and employs 290 teachers and other staff. The school contributes to the social and economic life of the community in which it is situated. St Mary's provides opportunities on its campus for non-St Mary's student community uses. In recent years these have included: Learn to Swim, Swim Club, Masters Swimming, Diving Lessons, Tennis Lessons, Basketball competitions, Dance Schools, Coding Camp, Core Fit Kids, Front Runner Sports, Vacation Care, Mandarin Classes and WASO Female Conductor "Women on the Platform" professional learning sessions on a regular basis, as well as a myriad of other one-off uses.

Schools as not -for profit entities

Like the majority of non-government schools in Australia, St Mary's is a not-for-profit entity, registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) with the charitable purpose of 'advancing education'. This recognition of the importance and public benefit of the work of schools in educating Australia's young people underpins the DGR status of the school building fund at our school and others around Australia.

The importance of building funds for schools

Across Australia, Independent school families, alumni and communities collectively contribute 86 per cent of school capital income nationally. Two-thirds of Independent schools receive no government funding for capital expenditure. In many schools, including St Mary's, capital funding is 100 per cent sourced from parents and school communities.

In 2021, the value of this contribution from Independent school families, alumni and communities was around \$1.14 billion for school building and capital works. These same families contribute around \$5.7 billion annually to the ongoing costs of educating their children, with their after-tax dollars.

Current St Mary's students enjoy the benefits of our Campus due to the contributions of past community, students and families. Any building work undertaken now at St Mary's is for the use of future, as well as current, students and is also often utilised by the broader community.

Private Benefit

The Productivity Commission has argued in its report that in the case of school building funds, there is "the potential for a donor to be able to convert a tax-deductible donation into a private benefit is especially apparent for primary and secondary education, particularly where students are charged fees."

However, the Productivity Commission has shown no real evidence to support its argument that there is a material risk of tax-deductible donations to school building funds being converted into a private benefit.

School Building Funds support capital works programs and develop assets with a life that extends far beyond the 1 to 14 years a child may spend at school. Further, it is not only the families of current students that contribute to school building funds, but alumni, community groups, and others through a range of capital and fundraising activities. It is extremely unlikely that a member of the community, or a school alumnus – who may have left the school many years ago – could benefit directly from these donations.

And while the draft report raised the possibility of there being a link between donations and fees charged for education services, this is not the case in schools. Capital works are funded separately to the recurrent operating costs that are recouped through fees, and deductible donations to a School Building Fund therefore do not materially reduce the fees payable by parents.

Impact of the removal of DGR status for school building funds

Removing DGR status for non-government school building funds will shift more financial burden onto families, who already make significant sacrifices to support their children's education and are doing their best to manage the ever-increasing cost of living pressures.

St Mary's Anglican Girls School has a proud 103-year history. As the top ranked Independent School in Western Australia (based on 2023 Year 12 results), our students undeniably contribute exceptionally to the academic landscape in our state, nation and internationally. In the 1960's the custodians of the School made the brave decision to move to a new site in Karrinyup to ensure the longevity of our School. For St Mary's, the removal of DGR status for school building funds will directly impact the capacity of the school to provide the best possible learning environment for our students. This will include future building projects needed to renew our now 60-year-old campus.

Conclusion

St Mary's Anglican Girls' School does not support the Productivity Commission's recommendation to withdraw DGR status from school building funds and is concerned about the very detrimental impact it could have on the provision of quality education nationally.

On behalf of our students, families and the wider school community we ask that the Commission reconsider this recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Mrs Judith Tudball
Principal

Ms Elizabeth Carr AM
Chair, Board of Governors

Mrs Bree Rosagro
Chair, Foundation

5 February 2024