

16 January 2024

Dear Members of the Productivity Commission

Re: Response to the Draft Future Foundation for Giving

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the recommendation in the Draft Report, released on November 30, 2023, suggesting the withdrawal of Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status for School Building Funds.

We would like to address the potential impact of this recommendation on Firbank Grammar School, and request that the Productivity Commission reconsider its recommendation of withdrawal of Deductible Gift Recipient Status for School Building Funds.

About Firbank Grammar School

Firbank Grammar School is an independent K-12 school in Victoria, with campuses in Brighton and Sandringham offering families the choice of girls only or co-education. Our commitment to providing exceptional education is paralleled by our dedication to fostering a supportive community. With 1177 students enrolled across our campuses, Firbank has a rich history of producing accomplished alumni who have contributed significantly to various fields.

Impact of community support

As an independent school we receive no government funding for infrastructure development. As a result, our school's growth and development has been achieved through the generous support of our community, including current and past parents, alumni, and staff.

An example of this community support in action is our dedicated Arts Precinct, which opened in 2022.

Designed to promote student participation in the Arts, the 3-level, 1555m² precinct includes spaces for performance and dance, as well as specialised learning spaces for digital and studio arts. Community donations contributed 15% of the total project cost of \$5.5m.

These teaching and learning and performance spaces are widely used by our local community outside of school hours. This use ranges from classrooms for external language providers through to rehearsal and performance spaces for acting schools. Many local primary schools also use our performance spaces for their school productions and presentation nights.

Community giving at Firbank 2019-2023

The following table illustrates the substantial support we have received from our community for various funds, including the building fund:

**SENIOR SCHOOL
BRIGHTON**

51 Outer Crescent Brighton
Victoria 3186 Australia
Phone 03 9591 5188
Fax 03 9593 1158

**JUNIOR SCHOOL
BRIGHTON**

Middle Crescent Brighton
Victoria 3186 Australia
Phone 03 9591 5141
Fax 03 9553 8164

**JUNIOR SCHOOL
SANDRINGHAM**

45 Royal Avenue Sandringham
Victoria 3191 Australia
Phone 03 9533 5711
Fax 03 9521 0365

ABN 69 007 000 419
CRICOS Provider No 00140K
enquiries@firbank.vic.edu.au
www.firbank.vic.edu.au

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Donors – building fund	239	140	224	202	175
Donors – scholarship fund	90	58	37	44	347
Donors – library fund	1	1			
TOTAL Donors	330	199	261	246	522

Impact of DGR status withdrawal

The withdrawal of DGR status for building fund donations would have a profound impact on Firbank Grammar School. Building fund donations accounted for 58% of all donations received from 2019-2023. Without tax-deductible status, it is unlikely that our community would continue supporting the building fund, potentially leading to a decrease in donations.

The ramifications of reduced funding would impact our ability to maintain existing facilities, potentially resulting in fee increases that could burden families already facing financial pressure. Our ability to develop new teaching and sports facilities, crucial for student learning and achievement, would also be severely hampered.

Current and future projects

Building fund donations are currently supporting the implementation of stages one and two of our sports masterplan, including the development of multi-use courts and a new sports stadium. There is strong community demand for these new facilities, with grassroots AFL, soccer, and basketball groups registered to use the facilities once completed. Community donations have contributed 10% of the total project costs of \$5.5m.

The potential withdrawal of DGR status jeopardizes stages three and four of our sports masterplan. This involves the redevelopment of the existing swimming pool, the creation of a learn-to-swim pool, and the creation of a sports stadium at our girls-only senior campus. These planned facilities are crucial for expanding the range of sports and swimming programs we can offer students and the local community.

This expansion includes the growth of the Firbank Aquastars Swim Club, known for its diverse swimming programs developed in collaboration with nationally and internationally recognised coaches. Increasing the number and variety of swimming programs will provide more opportunities for students from local schools and the broader community.

Our goal is to raise 15% of the \$35M total project costs through philanthropic support.

A change to the DGR status for building fund donations will impact our ability to attract community support, delaying the commencement of work and potentially limiting the scope of the projects. A reduction in project scope, particularly shelving plans to create a dedicated learn-to-swim pool, will limit the programs available to our community.

Voluntary support

Our community's passion for education is evident in their voluntary support for building, library, and scholarship funds. Approximately 20.2% of current families voluntarily contribute to the building fund,

with no personal benefit provided to the donor. Donors are thanked for their support and updated on how their support is being used to improve the facilities across the school.

In cases where an individual or organisation makes a significant contribution to a building project, their support may be acknowledged on honour boards, plaques or, in some cases, by naming a learning space. The donor does not receive any personal benefit aside from being acknowledged.

Conclusion

The withdrawal of DGR status for School Building Funds would hinder our ability to develop vital facilities, negatively affecting both students and the local community.

We respectfully request the Productivity Commission to reconsider its recommendation of withdrawing Deductible Gift Recipient Status for School Building Funds.

We appreciate the significant work undertaken by the Commission and are willing to provide any additional information required to facilitate a comprehensive review.

We look forward to your thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely

Jenny Williams
Principal