

FAQS about the FOTS donation scheme

Thornden's a Comprehensive school. Are you sure you can ask for money?

Yes. 'Friends of Thornden School' is a charity which is separate from the school. The PTAs of many state schools use a donation scheme particularly at Secondary level where the traditional model of PTA seen at Primary School tends to break down. The guidelines from the Department for Education permit Schools to ask for donations as long as these are kept totally separate from the Admissions process. The FOS Donation Scheme ensures full compliance with the guidelines, is voluntary and has been designed so that the School will have no knowledge of who has or hasn't given to the Scheme so there can be no accusation of partiality or prejudice.

Why a donation scheme?

Thornden, like many schools, faces enormous funding challenges so as a charity set up for the benefit of the School, FOTS felt that it might be well placed to help bridge the funding gap for the extras not covered by core funding. We wish to ensure that the pupils at the school today do not experience the exigencies of the cuts but rather continue to enjoy the wide range of clubs, societies and experiences which have marked an education at Thornden over a number of years. We approached the Senior Leadership Team about the possibility of setting up a Donation Scheme in Spring 2015. They, being broadly positive, put it out to consultation in the newsletter then brought it to the Governors for approval and in Summer 2015 the Governors gave the go ahead. Polly Gleeson and David Holdsworth then took it forward and it launched in February 2016. We are soon coming up to our first £100,000 raised by the scheme.

How will my data be used and stored?

As a charity we are compliant with the requirements of the Charity Commission and have registered with HMRC for Gift Aid. When you return your forms to Reception at Thornden, the FOTS Treasurer will then process them and send them on to your bank. For the purposes of Gift Aid, HMRC require us to keep a record of the names and addresses of our donors. Only the FOTS Treasurer has access to this list. The School will continue to send out global emails on behalf of FOTS as we will not have access to the Thornden email database but these emails and any letters will all be generic so the school will not know who precisely is contributing to the scheme.

What is the reference on the Standing Order form for?

We will create a unique identifier for each donor (based on the date that the form was processed) just in case there are any queries about the donation from HMRC or individual donors. This is solely designed to enable our Treasurer to be able to identify the individual donor quickly. Any similarity to your child's name or form would be purely coincidental as this is not information we are privy to. Your bank may include this reference on your statement.

Couldn't you just organise big events?

There are only a few of us on the FOTS team and we have found it difficult to raise significant sums of money from the events which we hold. We recognise that people in Chandler's Ford are increasingly 'time poor' and find it hard to commit even to attending one-off events let alone regular committee meetings. So a Donation scheme which involves many who might wish to do their 'bit' to help the School (but lack the time to do so) seems to be a clear way forward. It also has the potential to raise more money in the long run as well as providing the benefit of a regular source of income.

That being said, if you have a fantastic idea and would love to organise a big event on behalf of FOTS we would be absolutely delighted to try to support you in your endeavour!

How will FOTS decide where the money goes?

We hold regular meetings which are always open to all Friends and you would be very welcome to attend. The decision making process has been refined over several years. FOTS set aside a sum of money and ask teachers and staff to make bids for the clubs, events, needs etc which they see around the school. We are incredibly fortunate to have an amazing number of creative and committed staff at Thornden who are motivated to provide fantastic experiences for pupils. FOTS discuss and agree in their open meeting how the funds might best be allocated, usually on the principle of ensuring that a large number of pupils benefit from the money, although sometimes it is for those whose need seems to be greatest. Then the Treasurer releases the funds.

Can I pay online?

You can technically pay at any time into the Donation Scheme using the School's online payments system, Arbor, using the FOTS donation tab in the Arbor shop. There is a separate tab in the shop for paying for second hand uniform, which we can't claim Gift Aid on. We claim under GASDS for these donations as we don't get to see who makes them because they are aggregated by the system. If you want to set up your own standing order online you are most welcome to do. We would be most grateful, if you are a tax payer and are able to Gift Aid your donation, that you still fill in a Gift aid form and return it to reception marked for the attention of the FOTS Treasurer as we are only able to benefit from an extra 25% on top of your donation if you do so.

Are FOTS now going to stop running events?

No, but a successful donation scheme with the majority of families contributing will take much of the pressure off the small FOTS team feeling that they are responsible for the whole fundraising drive for the School! FOTS can then focus on events which build more of a sense of community around Thornden, on providing refreshments at Open Evenings or second hand uniform, on picnics and welcome events, helping each other out on Facebook or offering support. In actuality, Thornden pupils today are benefitting from the financial generosity of past parents to FOTS – Thornden Hall for example was partly financed by a large amount of parental donation; we need to play our part for our own children and those of the future.

How much should I give?

The choice is yours and the Scheme has been designed to put you in control. For those who want to talk cold, hard cash(!) most donations range from £2-£25 per month with the mean being £6.75 pcm. The FOTS Donation Scheme is entirely voluntary. We do appreciate that not all are in a position to be able to give financially at this time, in which case we would be delighted if you were able to offer FOTS practical help like sorting uniform, making teas and coffees at open Evenings or attending a meeting. We have tried to make it as flexible as possible to give money to FOTS, either monthly, quarterly or annually or as a one off donation. You can give either with gift aid or without; online or by Standing Order. If the majority of families at the school were able to contribute even a small sum each year this would make a significant difference to the experience of all children and staff at Thornden.