LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE NON-DOMESTIC RATES (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM DEBORAH WOOD

Regarding the proposed removal of rates relief for independent schools.

I feel that this would be a negative and punitive step that would serve to alienate a sector of our education system which has worked well with the state education system over many years. Within the choices that parents make for their children there must be enough room to accommodate all. This proposal would have serious financial implications that would stunt the good work that independent schools strive to do.

I am speaking both as a parent and a teacher. Although I am on a teacher’s salary I have managed to send three sons to St. Mary’s from Primary5-Secondary2. This was only due to the generous bursary system that appreciates income and the sacrifices that people are willing to make for their children’s education. Holidays and cars certainly haven’t been luxuries that I have been able to afford as I decided to prioritise my children’s education. I firmly belief that by removing rates relief this will be another financial burden that will find its way on to our fees. This could well be the final straw in terms of affordability for families like mine.

My sons have now returned to their local high school and I do believe that they are in a far stronger position to flourish and importantly add value to their secondary school community. I am confident that the education that they received at St Mary’s has been key to their development. Sport is central to my children and their experiences at St Mary’s has been a factor in their ability to translate their skills towards a representative level of participation.

Indeed I often find that we are tapping into the coaching skills of independent teachers who are heavily involved with the SRU and Cricket Scotland. These are people who give an enormous amount to the sporting community in Scotland. Often independent schools host events and training sessions. This is a generous gift of using their facilities that has benefitted my sons and other young people who are keen to succeed at representative level. Personally, I have found independent schools are keen to welcome the wider sporting community with open arms. I would hate to see playing fields being sold to cover the cost of rates!

As a teacher with over 25 years’ experience of both the independent and state system. I feel that I can comment on the value that having provision for both options allows in Scotland.

My own area is Art education which has been dramatically cut in the Scottish Borders area within the primary school environment. There is no specialist input where there was once a strong team in double figures visiting every school. The children who come to St Mary’s are...
provided with an art education that does not exist locally. We reach out into the wider community whenever we can. An example being a recent event where local primaries had an all-inclusive day of activities here at St Mary's including an art experience.

Children who have failed to flourish for one reason or another in the local system have found that they can reach their potential here at St Marys and I would hope that we could continue to offer an extended hand to other children in the Borders without legislation that aims to push up fees and make this type of education unobtainable.