LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ELIZABETH LEWINGTON

Having worked in independent schools for 21 years, I wish to respond to the call for evidence regarding the proposed rise in non-domestic rates for independent schools.

There seems to be an opinion that independent schools are the domain of the wealthy and any increase in fees due to an increase in non-domestic rates will be easily paid for out of their pockets. What does not seem to be considered is the number of parents who forego holidays and such like in order to give their children the best start in life that they can afford, either on their own or with the help of means-tested fees assistance that is available in independent schools. This fees assistance would be at risk due to an increase in the non-domestic rates liability and whether due to the loss of fees assistance or due to even a small rise in the school fees, if these children were to be withdrawn from their independent school, they would be an additional cost to the taxpayer and put pressure on class sizes, school buildings, catchment areas and teacher numbers which are already stretched. In fact, the loss of 1 in 30 pupils from the independent sector would cost more to the Scottish taxpayer than the entire rates increase. Parents of children at independent schools already pay council tax to give their child the right to a local authority place which they chose not to take up so if they were to exercise this right, their child would take up a place and put pressure on a local authority for which the local authority would make no additional financial gain. It could therefore be seen that parents who pay for their children’s education are adding to the resources available to educate the country’s children by taking pressure away from state schools.

Working as I do in the learning support department of a Prep school, I see families who are willing to do anything to help their children when they feel they have been let down by the local authority. As cutbacks take away support staff from local schools, either altogether or by cutting their hours, children are being let down by the Government who have talked of Getting It Right For Every Child. By denying children access to the support they need, parents are turning to independent schools due to the huge contribution they make to support for learning and other additional needs provision. Parents have a right to get it right for their own child and they should be able to make choices for themselves without the Scottish Government forcing the decision on them should independent schools be forced to reduce their support staff due to the rates increase and the additional financial burden this increase would put on these schools.

Some people feel that independent schools provide children with an unfair advantage when what they are really doing is enabling children to fulfil their potential. Surely independent
schools providing children with relevant support when they need it is better for Scotland and the future than denying them their rights to an education suited to their needs.