LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM KIRSTY McRAE

I write in response to the call for evidence regarding the proposed rise in non domestic rates for independent schools. Independent schools offer a vital part of the overall education system for pupils in Scotland. I speak as a teacher who has taught in both the state and independent sector within Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. While it is a choice for parents to send their children to a private school, it is a considered decision that often sees them choose to forego other luxuries in life to facilitate their choice. Independent schools, contrary to some public opinion, are not just used by the immensely wealthy just because they can. Below I have listed the reasons, in my experience, that justify a continued reduction in non domestic rates for independent schools.

**General points**

- A rise in non domestic rates for independent schools will inevitably need to be passed on to the consumer. Many will not be able to afford this.
- State schools and their staff work incredibly hard in what can often be difficult circumstances. Underfunding and understaffing are recognised problems within the state system. It is fair to say the independent sector does alleviate some of that pressure though this is rarely, if ever, recognised.
- All children have the right to a local authority school place, in part funded by council tax. Parents of those attending independent schools pay their council tax but choose not to take this school place. By choosing not to use this place they are saving councils a considerable amount of money.
- A rise in non domestic rates would inevitably see a proportion of parents unable to afford the subsequent rise in school fees. These children would then have a legal right to be taught within the state sector. Schools that are already overstretched in terms of finance and staffing would be required to take these children on with no additional funding.
- Staff at independent schools face redundancies or full school closure as a result of parents not being able to afford the inevitable rise in fees. This would affect employment figures, thereby causing a further drain on Scottish Government finances. Revenue for local businesses is also likely to be affected as a result.
- Despite being required to follow local authority guidance on educational initiatives, independent schools find themselves unable to access vital support services which should be available to all children under the GIRFEC heading. Presumably these are services in part payed for by council tax payments and therefore should be available to all regardless of which school they attend.
- Many independent schools invest in facilities which are open to the public at certain times, providing vital community resources. Schools also hire facilities within the community therefore injecting the local area with additional finance.
Personal situation

- Our school is the biggest employer in the town in which we are situated. Many employees have moved to the area to work at the school and this therefore brings additional revenue to the wider community.
- Our school actively raises funds for a variety of local and national charities throughout the academic year.
- As part of the local community we are involved in a range of sporting, musical and festival engagements.
- Our school spends significant money on the hire of local sports facilities.
- Community groups are able to use school facilities and the school is often asked to perform at church events, local nursing homes and for community groups.
- We arrange the annual CLIC Sargent charity nativity event in the Borders that has raised over £3000 annually for the charity over the last 6 years.
- Our school hosts the annual BGTB science festival, now in its 9th year. This is completely free to all attending and is open to all children. There is an average footfall of 1200 people at the event.
- Our school has been involved in a large number of initiatives to promote sustainable living within the Scottish Borders. This includes planting trees in the town, making and distributing bird boxes and tree nurseries for local authority schools and organisations and organising riverside cleans with the local community.
- Local businesses benefit greatly from the business of the parent body who come to the town on a daily basis.