LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM CATHERINE MORRISON

The Barclay Review into Non-domestic Rates states in its introductory paragraph that the remit was to ensure, amongst other principles, fairness and consistency. The resulting recommendations provide neither fairness nor consistency. It is difficult to fathom why Scotland’s Independent Schools, which have been the subject of rigorous testing by OSCR in order to justify their charitable status, should be treated differently to other charities. Bodies of a similar status should be treated equally.

In common with many rural Independent Schools, St Columba’s School, is an integral part of village life, providing jobs for local people and contributing significantly to the local economy. External groups rely on the use of our sports facilities since they cannot afford to pay the rates charged by local sports centres. The School will provide over £400,000 this year in means tested financial assistance to support pupils who could not otherwise afford to attend St Columba’s.

The additional cost to the School, resulting from the loss of charitable rates relief, is approximately £160,000. That is a significant sum and not one that can easily be absorbed. Current market conditions are challenging and we cannot simply pass this additional cost on to fee payers. We operate an extremely prudent financial model and the effect of this additional cost will have a material effect on the School going forward. The Independent School sector as a whole is under unprecedented financial pressure.

Scotland should be a forward-looking nation, striving to prepare young people who are fine ambassadors for their country. The excellent education available at Scotland’s Independent Schools is a valuable asset in achieving that goal. We should not allow this to be compromised by the introduction of unfair and inconsistent legislation.