LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS

I believe removing the charitable status from Scotland’s private schools, despite the small number of pupils they represent, would have a negative impact on the whole country.

Scotland’s independent schools are not - at the moment - the elite playground for the rich they might be down South - and certainly not Ardvreck and Merchiston where my children are educated. Most of my fellow parents are holding down two jobs and many can still only afford the fees with assistance from grandparents.

We never intended for our children to go to independent schools but were forced to look outside the state system when it failed our son.

We are not alone, two-thirds of the other children in his class at Ardvreck, like him, required extra help, attention and smaller classrooms in order to enable them to learn. When our eldest started school he was unable to make sense of the writing in front of him. His behaviour started to deteriorate at school and at home and we had numerous meetings with the school to see how we could improve this situation. Unfortunately with only 3 teachers in a small school, the provision for extra help was extremely limited and our boy wasn’t a severe enough case to warrant it.

For us though, his change in behaviour from a happy easy-going boy to a sullen and violent one was a red flag and we realised moving him could change the whole trajectory of his life. Within a term of starting Ardvreck where he finally learned to read and write, he turned back into the child we recognised.

Some children are lucky and will get on fine wherever they are but private schools fill a gap the state system cannot fill to accommodate the extra needs of some children. I am furious I have to pay twice for school - once through my rates for my child's previous school and again for the private school where he was able to receive the education he is owed by the government.

There is no question that increasing costs for these schools will be passed on to parents forcing many of these children to leave the school and is likely to put smaller schools out of business.

The potential closure of Crieff's independent schools would be catastrophic for the entire town:

1. It will impact the whole community.

Crieff depends heavily on its two private schools. There are 50 staff at Ardvreck and many more at Morrions - all requiring somewhere to live, food and services from Crieff.
Ardvreck in particular brings a lot of visitors to Crieff as it is a boarding school so parents will stay overnight when they drop off and pick-up their children. Because boarding parents are coming from further away they stop for food, fuel, shopping, gifts and everything else Crieff has to offer. All outwith the busy tourist season so providing income and employment in the quieter months of the year.

Foreign boarding parents also use school visits as an excuse to tour Scotland, often taking a week to explore after a drop-off or pick-up.

2. **It will increase pressure in local schools.**

It is unlikely the Crieff schools could cope with the extra numbers if the local children currently being privately educated were poured back into the state system. On top of this the money for their education would also need to be found.

3. **Threaten the existence of valuable green spaces in Crieff.**

The playing fields for Morrisons and Ardvreck are enjoyed by the whole community. If these schools were to cease, it is likely this land would be sold off for housing.

4. **It will remove choice.**

Today at an independent school children receive an education in the extra-curricular subjects which cannot be replicated in the state system. The current requirement for PE in state primary schools is 2 hours a week. At the moment my younger child does a minimum of 2 hours a day and my older child is at a school which regularly feeds players into the Scottish National sporting teams. State schools simply cannot provide this level of training. There is no element of elitism here as assisted places are given to talented youngsters throughout Scotland in order to ensure our national teams are supported at root level.

It is my opinion the economic benefit of independent schools is vastly underestimated by this bill and would like to see a full economic impact assessment before any decision is made.