LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS

I’m writing regarding the impact an increase in school fees will have on my family. I have two children and sending them both to fee paying schools has been a huge financial sacrifice for us. We just about pay the fees by only paying the interest on our mortgage, not going on holiday and driving a 15 year old car. We are just getting by, but we carry on because we have two very intelligent children who do not fit into the standard education system.

My eldest daughter initially went to a state school where her difficulties in reading were ignored. In fact, she did not learn to read anything in her entire primary one year. We subsequently moved to Edinburgh where we thought we would be able to count on small class sizes as promised by Alex Salmond. We were told we could not have a place for my daughter in our local catchment area as the school was full. At this point we enrolled our daughter in a local private school despite our limited means. She has a visual distress disorder and dyslexia which was not picked up until she went to a private school. She has worked hard with the specialists in the school’s learning support group and has managed to catch up. My daughter did not thrive in a mixed sex primary school environment. She was always sat next to a boy who was constantly messing about, this despite the fact that she had to really concentrate hard just to read and write.

Since being educated in a single sex environment she has thrived. She has taken STEM subjects: Maths, Chemistry, Physics and Maths at Highers. I don’t think she would have had the confidence to do this in a mixed sex school. There are no single sex state schools in Edinburgh which is a shame as girls are seen to perform better academically, appreciate girl only sports provision, and are less stressed in a girl’s school environment.

I strongly believe in single sex education for girls due to my own experiences. Although I was good at, and loved physics, chemistry and maths, I didn’t pursue these subjects as the mixed sex school environment I was being taught in was so hostile to girls doing “boys subjects”. The Scottish government says it is keen to increase the number of women in STEM careers. To get women into these careers, girls need study STEM subjects in school. They are more likely to choose to do so if they are in the nurturing environment of a single sex school.

My son has Aspergers syndrome and an Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis. He is extremely intelligent but has sensory issues and problems dealing with change. Although we had a P1 place for our son at the local state primary school, we could not send him into a class of 40 pupils as he has major problems dealing with noise. We
have found some his needs have been addressed by educating him in a quiet ordered environment with a lot of structure and clear rules how to behave. Ability streaming has also helped him stay better focused and not zone out due to boredom or frustration as he is extremely good at some subjects i.e. maths and poor at others i.e. modern languages. However, I think the biggest help to my son has been a large outside play area where he could run off some of his frustration and make some friends. As my son has found it really difficult to make friends, I don’t want him to change schools now as it would be devastating for him and for us.

When I went to look around our local secondary school after it had been rebuilt it was largely open plan with a large echoing atrium. I was told that the school was very noisy. The canteen area backed onto this space and there were cooking smells which my son would not have coped with. Finally, there was no outdoor play space to play football or run around in. I really don’t think he could cope with this environment. I’ve met other parents that have had major problems getting their Aspergers’ child to go to school. One child I know of who is very similar to my son in terms of sensory issues refused to go to school for a year and now attends the specialist Dunedin school in Edinburgh.

Paying the fees for a private school, is the only way I think I can get my Aspergers son an education. If I had to take him out of his current school, Edinburgh city council would have to cover the costs of his schooling plus his Support for Learning costs and CAMHS referral as I don’t think he could cope with the stress of changing school. I know my son is not the only child in his year with an ASD diagnosis and there are other children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and other behavioural issues which the school is managing well. A significant proportion of parents who send their children to private day schools in Edinburgh are not wealthy and are just trying to do what’s best for their children.