Charitable Status and independent schools

As grandparents of two children currently in receipt of bursaries enabling them to attend an independent preparatory school, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the key recommendations of the Barclay Review, now contained in Section 10 of the proposed Non Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill.

While other respondents may be better placed to respond in terms of the financial arguments for and against, we will focus on what attendance at the preparatory school has meant in terms of the educational and social development of our grandchildren both as individuals and as contributors to society.

Both children attended state primary schools until around the age of 10 and are now aged 12 and 11 respectively. From the outset, the greater level of educational challenge provided at their preparatory school has been strikingly obvious across the curriculum, a challenge which both children have truly embraced as is evidenced in attainment and echoed by their school reports.

Both children already had advanced skills in musical instruments as well as being creative in art and design and in each of these subjects the means by which their school has sought to develop their abilities through stimulating opportunities, many involving external providers, are ensuring that their musical and artistic development is matching both their potential and aspirations. In every subject without exception, they have risen to standards expected and beyond, completing aspects of the curriculum that would not otherwise have formed part of their school experience.

Indeed, the focus on all children as individuals is what is most obvious through the teaching approaches adopted across the curriculum and also through the many activities offered both during school hours and outwith the school day. As individuals, the encouragement they have experienced has led significantly to increased confidence and assurance both of which are complimented by ways in which they have taken responsibility for their own learning.

Without their assisted place bursaries, they simply would not have experienced the level of challenge which has enabled them to develop to where they are now.

Should the charitable status currently available to independent schools be removed, it will be a crippling blow to the 4% of children in Scotland currently benefitting from assisted places and many more in years to come who have skills and abilities plus the potential to develop and achieve more than they would otherwise.
The potential contribution such children can make to society in the future in a huge variety of fields and expertise must not be underestimated.

Finally, the timescale proposed for implementation, should the Bill be passed, is both inconsiderate in terms of independent schools’ financial planning and disregarding of students currently in receipt of support where removal from their schools would be both disruptive to their academic development and future potential.

A quote from one of our grandchildren –

“I studied violin and piano from the age of 4 and enjoyed playing in ensembles and orchestras. It was only when awarded an assisted place in my current school that my musical experiences were taken into account and I am now being stretched to reach my potential through a range of opportunities – solo, chamber and orchestral music, choral music and composition.”