LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS

I believe that the Scottish Government’s proposal to remove mandatory non-domestic rates relief from independent schools is unfair and self-defeating if its purpose is to look to raise funds.

A large number of children in independent education receive means tested assistance. The proposal would mean that this financial assistance would be greatly reduced or removed by independent schools resulting in many children having to re-enter the state sector. As such the cost to the public purse would be far greater than any income derived from the proposal.

Any additional budgetary pressure on independent schools would also result in them needing to charge for the use of their facilities which are currently enjoyed by the community and other school children free of charge. Independent schools currently engage with the wider community in which they belong in many and extensive ways. This proposal would effectively shut these open doors drawing a divisive line between independent schools and the wider social environment.

By not being able to afford to provide means-tested assistance, independent schools would become the preserve of the very richest and elite which is absolutely not the case at present specifically because the ability to offer assisted places in this manner. This would result in an even more imbalanced society.

One of the reasons many parents sacrifice so much materially to send their children to independent schools is to benefit from the wider facilities that they offer compared to state primary schools and compared to some secondary state schools. This is not necessarily because of the standard of teaching but moreover the longer days, the sports, music and drama facilities and an alternative to the Curriculum for Excellence which is widely criticised for not working as it should. Removing these benefits from the less well off children at independent schools would not help the state system in any way, in fact it would hinder it by increasing class sizes, need for extra buildings and teacher numbers and adding £6,500 per child to the state costs (the estimated cost per child to the state for educating a child). Nor does the proposal take into account the fact that independent schools make a disproportionate contribution to support for learning and other additional needs provision.

Comparison has been made between the 80% relief received from independent schools and the nominal rateable value of 100% applied to state-maintained schools. This is unfair because in reality no money ever changes hands between the state schools and their local authorities. In effect therefore independent schools contribute
more, even more when you consider they are only partially exempt from VAT when state schools are fully exempt.

There is a clear contradiction when the 56 independent schools are being singled out from 24,000 Scottish registered bodies and the remainder are not subjected to the collective benefit test.