LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS

To whom it may concern,

I write as a parent of three children who attend the Compass School in Haddington, East Lothian.

It would be our preference to educate our children in a state school, after all as tax payers we contribute towards the funding of state education. However, the large class sizes in the state system mean that our children will not get the individual attention they require to reach their full academic potential. Children, particularly in primary school do best in small classes. So many parents we meet at school have removed their children from state schools in East Lothian because the large class sizes mean their children are “falling under the radar”. The expected rate increases and subsequent fee increases will have a knock on effect of further increasing state school class sizes whilst ultimately costing the tax payer more! How can this be justifiable? It makes no sense.

It is alarming that the Financial Memorandum makes no reference to the additional burden that will be placed on the tax payer for each child that subsequently has to absorbed by state schooling. As tax payers I should have access to these numbers and without them I feel that the review is incomplete.

It is concerning that the review, consultation and subsequent draft legislation makes NO reference to the public benefit tests that independent schools undertake. Why has this information been omitted? This assistance will be substantially impacted by a sudden rates increase. Again, without including this information the review and draft legislation is incomplete.

Furthermore, there has been insufficient discussion regarding the lack of parity in VAT exemption state schools receive full VAT exemption as educational bodies, while independent school receive only partial exemption. This anomaly needs to be addressed and the importance of addressing it becomes even more relevant in the face of the Barclay Report and the Governments subsequent comments to “increase fairness and ensure a level playing field”.

It also seems unfair that no other charities have been subjected to the collective public benefit test or the measures proposed by the Barclay Review. Why is it that 56 independent schools have been singled out from over 24,000 Scottish registered bodies (including other fee-charging, restricted admission education charities)?
The state school rates valuation is an entirely paper based exercise, there is no actual cash flow. Why not reduce the rates of the state sector? Why not cut the rates of the state system rather than increasing the rates of independent schools?

House prices are so over inflated in the catchment zones of decent state schools. Most people cannot afford to buy family accommodation in these catchment zones. The proposed rate increases will inevitably place further pressure on buyers.

It is shameful that the government targets independent schools to deflect from its own educational failures. The Scottish government is either out of touch or playing cheap, nasty, populism politics when it brands independent schools as “elitist” and “privileged”. Both my husband and I are from working class backgrounds, single parent families. We make enormous financial sacrifices, out of our taxed income, to send our children to an independent school. We forsake so much to pay for the education of our children and we are not unique. Many parents are making these enormous sacrifices to educate their children at independent schools. Instead of targeting these schools the government should be thinking of how they can best use the independent schools to reduce the pressures of an overburdened, under resourced and failing state schooling system.

A school is only as good as its worst teacher. And an education system is only as good as its worst performing school. This government needs to think long and hard about the ultimate price of playing populist politics.