LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS

We are writing to provide our perspective on the proposal to remove eligibility to claim charitable relief from non-domestic rates from mainstream independent schools (section 10 of the Barclay Review). On reading the document it is interesting to note that there is no reference made to OSCR’s public benefit test that independent schools had undertaken. You may not be aware but independent schools offer means-tested fee assistance; this assistance thus provides significantly wider access than is widely realised. We are concerned that one of the implications of the review will be a significant reduction in bursary schemes, as a direct result of the budgetary pressure that a loss of rates relief will bring to independent schools.

It is not just the implication for the independent sector that needs to be considered, there will be undoubtedly knock on implications for state schools. An area that we know, is already under significant pressure, with a lack of teaching staff across the curriculum, class sizes that are too large to provide a quality education for children and attainment levels dropping significantly in the past number of years relative to international peers.

We also find it interesting to note as taxpayers, the Review and subsequent responses from the Government highlight that state schools pay rates at 100%, whilst independent schools’ benefit from their charitable status and receive relief. It is our understanding that current Government policy ensures that state schools are fully funded from central and local council taxation. These taxation sources are paid by everyone, including ourselves, despite not making use of State schooling for our children. In this case it is important to note that despite the relief that independent schools receive, there is still a net taxation benefit to the Government, which is not the case with state schools.

Our children attend St Mary’s School in Melrose and we wanted to ensure that the Committee fully understand the role that the school plays in the education of local children and in the wider Borders community. St Mary’s employs 54 people and as such is the largest employer in Melrose, but it is not just the direct employees, that should be considered, it is also local suppliers and contractors that provide services and goods to the school. This is significant and cannot be underestimated, for example, all food is provided on premises for children and staff, which is locally sourced.

200 pupils attend the school, with a dedicated team of staff providing each of them with an education that will allow them to succeed and achieve their individual potential. This is in smaller class sizes that ensures each child receives the appropriate support
for their development. It is this for this very reason that we have chosen St Mary’s for our children to attend, foregoing our right to educate our children at a state school despite having paid for this through both central and local taxes.

The facilities of the school are readily used to host a number of events which are to the benefit of all children in the Borders. For instance, ‘bang goes the borders” science festival, which regularly attracts in excess of 1000 visitors, supported by universities, colleges, science related businesses to name but a few. There are no charges associated with the event which provides children with access to science related activities that would not otherwise be available in the Borders. The ‘farr out challenge’ is another activity hosted uniquely by the school and the school’s staff, a teamwork and leadership event for primary school children in the Borders and beyond. These 2 events draw on the staff of St Mary’s but provide a benefit to the community in the broadest sense. It is our concern that changes to the rates relief could result in such activities being changed that would have a detrimental impact on access to important learning and development opportunities for children in the Borders.

We hope this letter provides you with a perspective on why the current proposals on rates taxation do not fully consider the aspects of independent schools in the community. This may be a function of St Mary’s being in the Borders, a significant employer and being involved so intricately with the local community, which is a different situation than a city school. Something the Committee should consider as it gathers evidence to ensure that Committee Members are fully informed on the situation as it relates to independent schools and most importantly the children that are striving to reach their potential.