LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM RICHARD RIEGELS

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to you to expressing my views on the removal of eligibility to claim charitable relief from non-domestic rates from mainstream independent schools.

While I appreciate that in this time of austerity everyone should pay their way when they can I believe that this measure will not raise the revenues that the government believe it will and will indeed cause more damage than do any good. Indeed, it has been put in place purely so that government can be seen to “bash” the so called elites.

Every person who sends their children to an independent school is already benefitting the country by not taking up a place at a state school that they are entitled to, depending on your way of looking at it this either increases the spending per child that goes to state schools or, more likely, means the government does not have to spend these funds on education.

It has been estimated that if 1 in 30 children are forced out of independent schools then the funds raised by this initiative will be wiped out. There seems to be an assumption that everyone who sends their child to an independent school is “rich”, while I will acknowledge that my wife and I earn above average incomes, nearly all our disposable income is spent on our children’s education. Any rise in this cost would require us to remove our children from their current school and put them back into state education. Given the current overcrowding and underfunding of the state schools the further strain of additional pupils will no doubt make these matters far worse.

Also, if the incentive for the independent schools to help state schools so they can retain their charitable status is removed then there will be further damage. Speaking of my hometown of Musselburgh the independent school there works very well with the local schools, letting them use their facilities, especially their sports facilities and provide other assistance to them, without the need to do this to retain their charitable funding will this cease? Or will they start charging the local schools to use their facilities to make some of this money back?

The argument of the schools being elitist is also false in this regard, if the government want to ban independent schools they should just say so (and ban private tutors, after school activities, out of school music lessons etc as why is it fair that some children can have these and not others?). This move will only make schools more elitist as people such as myself and other middle-income families must withdraw our children and bursaries and assisted places are removed to lower income families, at average costs my three children re-entering state education will cost the government an estimated £19,500. Only the very rich will be able to afford independent education for their children which will segregate society even more. This will also cause house prices to rise around “good” state schools as wealthier people price out poorer families to
access the best state education. Our town and cities will become further segregated on basis of wealth.

The argument that it is not fair that independent schools receive rate relief and state schools don’t also rings rather hollow. State schools are funded by the state, any “taxes” they have to pay out they go straight to the people the fund them! They are fully funded and whether they pay rates or not is irrelevant to their funding. However the government do not complain when there is no parity between independent and state school with regards to VAT…

In summary this move by the government is purely so it can be seen to bash independent schools in a political play to raise their popularity, there is a good chance that it will actually cause more financial harm than benefit and cause further division while also removing the many benefits that independent schools provide to their local communities.

Yours faithfully

Richard Riegels