

From: John Edward
Sent: 19 October 2017 13:12
To: letters@sundayherald.com
Subject: Letter for publication - right to reply

Importance: High

Please find herewith a letter for publication in response to the issues raised in the edition of 15 October, page 16 and editorial.

Dear Sir

The dictionary definition of a "swindle" is a "fraudulent scheme or transaction". The families and teachers of more than 5,000 pupils in Glasgow, and 25,000 elsewhere in Scotland, have long accepted that their choice of an independent education is one not everyone will support. In the debate on a crucial issue such as education, however, is a new low to label those communities as complicit in fraud ("The great private school swindle", 15 October).

As the Sunday Herald well knows, having written the same story in July 2012, independent schools are the most tested and scrutinised of all the 24,000 registered charities in Scotland. A public benefit test was designed specifically for them in Holyrood, and they have spent 12 years meeting that test - providing over £30 million in means-tested fee assistance to new pupils (one tenth of the figure for all of higher education across England). That status has since been tested again through a public petition to Parliament and other representations.

Those schools receive not a single penny from the exchequer, providing almost £250 million in exchequer receipts; supporting more than 10,500 jobs; and promoting Scottish school education worldwide. School staff helped design the new curriculum and National Qualifications, work as Assessors for school inspections, share staff and teaching resources with 100's of local authority schools, and open facilities for free or at non-commercial rates across Glasgow and beyond.

Local authority schools are the exception - and that is an issue for others to consider. Publicly funded universities and colleges receive charitable relief, as do Royal Medical Colleges, or private health providers. Independent schools still provide a rates contribution each year, in new money, derived solely from parental fee income. No state school will ever "pay" a rates bill with new money, rates being accounted for as part of the tax-paid funding of local and central government.

There are dozens of registered charities in Scotland that each tax-payers might object to on grounds of personal belief, political conviction or public priority. That is their right. To pretend that independent schools are uniquely untested or unqualified is to fly in the face of legislation, regulation and the hard-work of dedicated Scottish institutions.

If the Sunday Herald seeks the removal of charitable status altogether, on the basis of state funding for education, perhaps it could take the time to explain to those parents who would lose fee assistance, what the greater cost to the taxpayer would be of pupils seeking new places in the state sector? The loss of international pupils to Scotland through increased fees? Or the loss to communities of shared services provided explicitly as a requirement of charitable status - as outlined in successive Herald group advertising supplements on...independent education?

The independent sector has never shied away from meeting its responsibilities and delivering the best for young people in Scotland. Accusing it, and those educated in it, as being part of a "fraudulent scheme" is a dreadful contribution to public debate.

Yours sincerely,

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