

Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ
Via email:

Date: Mon 29th July 2024

Cc: Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education

Dear Chancellor,

Re: Request for Exemption of SEND Schools and Faith Schools from 20% VAT on Independent Schools

We, the Conservative Councillors of Barnet, write to express our concern at the potential unintended consequences of the proposed imposition of a 20% VAT on independent schools. While we recognise the government's intent to increase tax revenue and address fiscal challenges, we are particularly troubled by the consequences this measure may have on independent faith schools and independent schools for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND schools).

Our Barnet SEND schools (particularly those with a faith component) play a crucial role in supporting some of the most vulnerable members of our community and some of these schools are independent. The impact of a 20% VAT rate could significantly undermine their ability to deliver high-quality education and essential services to children who need them most at a price their parents can afford.

Barnet is home to at least 57 faith schools, 18 of which are independent with each providing invaluable services to our community. In Barnet there are some 3,332 pupils in these schools. Faith schools are not only centers of religious and academic excellence but also pillars of cultural and moral education, fostering values of respect, discipline, and community service. For many families in Barnet, religious practice is an integral part of their lifestyle and these schools provide the essential religious education to their children, which reinforces this lifestyle choice. These schools often operate on tight budgets, relying heavily on charitable donations and affordable tuition fees to maintain their standards and religious environment while making them accessible to all who need them.

Many of the schools that would be affected are not large institutions but smaller community-based schools. These schools serve both the wider faith communities and families whose religious requirements are focused on their particular community. The families often make significant financial sacrifices to ensure their children receive an education that meets their particular religious needs. The imposition of VAT could make it even more challenging for these families, who are already making sacrifices, to afford the education they believe is essential for their children.

We believe that the proposed policy could potentially place undue financial strain on these institutions, limiting access to high-quality academic and religious education for many of our families. We ask the government to exempt independent SEND schools and faith schools from the introduction of VAT on schools.

Such an exemption would ensure that these vital educational institutions can continue to operate without compromising the quality of education and support they offer. It would also demonstrate the government's commitment to supporting diversity in education and safeguarding the interests of all children, regardless of their educational needs or religious background.

We request that you give this matter your urgent consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr. Peter Zinkin

Leader of the Opposition, Barnet Council

On behalf of the Barnet Conservative Councillors

