

Visit to Luckley House School

Yesterday I visited Luckley House School, to the south of Wokingham.

The Head and Bursar wanted to review the issues surrounding tax and money for a fee paying school. I reassured them that I support charitable status for schools, and do not propose placing VAT on school fees. Private sector schools face large rate bills for their properties, and substantial tax on employing people, in addition to the taxes paid by their employees. There are limits to how much additional tax many private schools could afford.

The state is a double beneficiary of fee paying schools. It collects these taxes on the schools and their employees, and saves the money on providing places for the young people themselves in state financed schools. It would not be easy finding the extra money and providing the places necessary were some future government to ban private schools or tax them out of existence.

The main argument behind policy suggestions to tax them more is that parents who can afford fees for their children's education are buying privilege. The best answer to this criticism is to make sure the standards at all state schools are good so there is no great educational advantage out of going to a fee paying school.

In order to earn and maintain charitable status these days some think a fee paying school has to do more than offer a good education to the children of those who can pay. Private schools are encouraged to provide access funds or scholarships, so children from lower income backgrounds can attend. Schools often provide sporting and cultural facilities that are available for community use as well as school use. They may invite in pupils from state schools for various events and lectures they are organising, share their sporting facilities or otherwise make a contribution to better and wider ranging education elsewhere in the area.

I toured Luckley House School which has some good facilities, and wish it well for the future. The theatre at Luckley is particularly good and available for others to hire for their events.