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C(80) 45

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CABINET

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EDUCATION EXPENDITURE 1981-82

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Education and Science

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1. In C(80) 44 the Chief Secretary, Treasury, proposes a further cut of about £60 million in the schools programme for England in 1981-82. This would be in addition to the cut of £20-£25 million in higher education (including the universities) and other parts of my programme which in the circumstances I have offered to make, despite the difficulties outlined in my letter to him of 8 July.
2. The Chief Secretary has had to accept that the further cuts he proposes must fall on the schools; and that this would make it impossible to honour our Queen's Speech commitment to maintain and improve the quality of education. We have repeated this commitment many times, most recently in my speech to the Association of County Councils on 2 July which was cleared with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Chief Secretary now argues, less than three weeks later, that we should "modify" our commitment on the lines that "resources should be concentrated on the basic skills leaving less for other aspects of educational quality".
3. This attempt to distinguish between "basic skills" and other aspects of "quality" is wholly fallacious. As the cuts already agreed become effective, there will be no aspect of education in schools which can be cut further without injury to those basic skills essential for work and life in an industrial society and a competitive world. These skills go beyond literacy and numeracy. They include competence in science and modern languages and in the whole range of skills on which further and higher education and training have to build.
4. The Queen's Speech commitment has formed the basis of our education policy since we came into office. If we now go back on it parents will conclude that we are deliberately planning to give their children a poorer education. The political consequences of this would be disastrous.

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5. I urge the Cabinet to reject the Chief Secretary's proposals and to agree that the further cuts in education in England should be limited to the £20-£25 million which I have offered.

M C

Department of Education and Science

22 July 1980

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