

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister 4

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20/5

PRIME MINISTER

EDUCATION IN TOXTETH

I have reflected on your Private Secretary's letter of 11 May about action to follow up the report by HM Inspectorate on Toxteth.

I agree with you that the failure in this case is principally that of the LEA. I have arranged to see the leaders and education spokesmen of the three main parties on 26 May, together with Michael Heseltine. Our aim is to get the elected members to pull together sufficiently to adopt a plan for improving education in Liverpool and to carry it through. I may not succeed, but I intend to apply strong and sustained pressure on the elected members, in private and in public. Officials here, who have close contacts with the Merseyside Task Force, will continue to drive home my message with the LEA's officers. Further pressure for improvement will be generated when HMI report to me on the inspections of Liverpool primary schools which they are now embarking on (and inform the LEA of the results.)

If none of this does the trick, I shall have to see whether I could use my section 99 powers, the only powers to take default action which I have. They enable me to direct Liverpool to take specified action to remedy a specified breach of duty and, if necessary, to enforce that direction by mandamus. At present, on the basis of the HMI evidence, Liverpool are clearly not in breach of the relevant duty of securing sufficient and efficient provision for nursery, primary and further education: if they do not act, they may come to be in breach in relation to some secondary schools.

I cannot take over Liverpool's education functions. Neither education nor local government legislation empowers me to act for the LEA, and they have no power to divest themselves of their duty to act by transferring it to me. (The Merseyside Task Force, too, does not, and cannot, exercise any of Liverpool's statutory functions.)



CONFIDENTIAL

When Parliament gave the Secretary of State these limited powers in 1944, it also required him to finance LEAs by specified grants. That valuable source of influence was removed in 1958; my proposal for an education grant (my letter of 6 May to Willie Whitelaw) bears directly on this issue.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Michael Heseltine.

KJ

Department of Education and Science

20 May 1982



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CONFIDENTIAL



cc DOE JF

C. Edmonds

10 DOWNING STREET

24 May 1982

From the Private Secretary

EDUCATION IN TOXTETH

The Prime Minister has seen and noted your Secretary of State's minute of 20 May. She remains doubtful that it will be possible to apply sufficiently strong and sustained pressure on the elected members of the LEA but she recognises that your Secretary of State cannot take over Liverpool's education functions.

I am copying this to David Edmonds (Department of the Environment).

W. P. S. RICKETT

Mrs. Imogen Wilde,  
Department of Education and Science.





## 10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

11 May 1982

EDUCATION IN TOXTETH

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's letter to Mr. Heseltine of 7 May, with which he enclosed a copy of a report on education in Toxteth prepared by HM Inspectorate of Schools.

Mrs. Thatcher notes that while the report is not overly critical of the schools in Toxteth, it does express concern over the inefficiency of the local education authority, and the apparent inability of elected members to agree on, or pursue, any positive responses to many of the City's major problems (paragraph 9 of the report). In these circumstances, the Prime Minister would like your Secretary of State to consider whether his Department should take over the administration of education in Liverpool. She recognises that such a step could clearly only be taken with the consent of the authority, or at the behest of representatives of the school children's parents; but she notes that the appointment of Mr. Heseltine as Minister with special responsibilities in Liverpool, and the setting up of the Department of the Environment's task force are a precedent for central government involvement in Liverpool's local government.

At this stage, I am not copying this letter to those who received a copy of Sir Keith's letter to Mr. Heseltine.

I.W.F.S. RICKETT

Nick Cornwell, Esq.,  
Department of Education and Science.





DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE  
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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State  
Department of the Environment  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 3EB

7 May 1982

Prime Minister 2

You may wish to glance at paragraphs 9, 11.2, and 13.2 of the attached report which give the background to Sir Keith's concerns.

WH 7/5

Dear Michael,

EDUCATION IN TOXTETH

I enclose a copy of a report on education in Toxteth prepared by HM Inspectorate of Schools. It confirms and adds substance to our worries about the state of education in Liverpool. The Chief Education Officer, who has seen the report in draft, has agreed with the Inspectorate that it should be made public, and I intend that the report should issue as its authors have proposed on 11 May.

By then the local elections will be behind us and I intend to press on with my plans to hold urgent discussions with the Authority about the need for decisive action to take surplus school places out of use. The HMI report shows that there are many problems affecting education in Toxteth. The effectiveness of the education service in coping with these problems and in making its contribution to general improvement in the area is adversely affected by the Authority's failure to respond effectively to the dramatic fall in the school population which is at the heart of the problems now facing Toxteth and other parts of Liverpool.

I welcome your readiness to lend your support in these discussions and I shall keep in touch on the appropriate moment when you might join in. But to keep the ball rolling, I would propose to meet the Authority myself to underline the compelling educational reasons for urgent action. I shall be announcing this by way of the attached written Answer in the House on 11 May.

I am sending copies of this letter and its attachments to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Lord President and the Secretaries of State for Social Services, Scotland and Wales.

Yours faithfully,  
Michael Heseltine

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