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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

cf Press

2.

Prime Minister
To be aware, and to note
especially comments in

the following paras:

64, 65 (primary)

68, 69 (secondary)

72, 73, 74 (General)

We will get briefing
for questions on Tuesday

M A Pattison Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

2 April 1982

Dear Mike,

REPORT BY HMI ON THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE

I am writing to let you know that, with my Secretary of State's agreement, a report by HMI will be published on 5 April setting out the effects of local authority expenditure policies in 1981 on the education service in England. Publication of the report will be announced by means of a Written Answer on 5 April and copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

I attach a copy of the report for the Prime Minister's information and would draw particular attention to the sections containing commentary (paragraphs 57-74 on schools and 106-110 on higher and further education). I also attach a copy of the short statement which my Secretary of State will be making by way of a Press Notice.

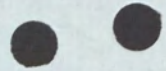
In view of the wide interest there is likely to be in the report, I am sending copies of this letter and enclosures to the Private Secretaries to members of the Cabinet, the Paymaster General and the Secretary to the Cabinet.

Yours ever

Imogen Wilde

MRS I WILDE
Private Secretary

2000



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY, NEW YORK

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7 APR 1982

8 April 1982

Report by HMI on the Effects of Local Authority
Expenditure

The Prime Minister was grateful to be
forewarned of publication of the above Report.

MAP

Mrs I. Wilde,
Department of Education and Science.

57.

**REPORT BY HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS
ON THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE
POLICIES ON THE EDUCATION SERVICE IN ENGLAND – 1981**

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March 1982

REPORT BY HMI ON THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE POLICIES ON THE EDUCATION SERVICE IN ENGLAND 1981

INTRODUCTION

1. This is the fifth in a series of short annual reports by HMI as presented to the Expenditure Steering Group (Education). It is based upon returns on all LEAs in England, made in November 1981 by district inspectors, together with observations and assessments made during the autumn term 1981 by HMI in the course of routine and programmed visits to educational institutions.
2. The returns made by district inspectors are based on information currently available to them and their teams and allow some comparisons to be made with the position reported in autumn 1980.
3. The returns on schools and colleges, though they cannot be taken as statistically representative nationally or for any one LEA, constitute a cross-section of inspection visits and are sufficiently numerous to provide some indication of tendencies and trends. They do not allow direct comparison with the situation of individual institutions reported last year. Evidence from direct observation has been analysed in respect of programmed inspections and a much larger number of individual HMI visits. In the case of secondary schools which did not have a full inspection and in the case of colleges, individual returns reflect the specialised focus of the visit and are unlikely to provide information on all aspects of provision considered in this report. The descriptions of observed effects of expenditure policies are therefore no more than illustrative both in terms of geographical distribution and coverage of the curriculum. 2126 returns have been received in respect of 1761 schools and 629 returns relating to 363 colleges.
4. Analysis of the returns has been undertaken in three separate stages. The later data have reinforced the main conclusions from the first and it is reasonable to conclude that further inspections would produce broadly similar results.
5. As in previous years some of the issues highlighted in this report do not relate to LEA expenditure policies alone. For example the effects of falling school rolls are increasing and, in the context of overall real reductions in expenditure, raise particularly difficult problems of diseconomies of scale.
6. HMIs' judgments in the returns on LEAs and in those on individual schools and colleges are on standards of educational provision as they exist. These result from the combined effects of previous levels of provision, financial policies, inflation, falling rolls and, in the case of HFE, from a shift in the balance of course demand. It is not always possible to disentangle these. The district inspectors' returns on LEAs allow the identification of changes in direction and magnitude of provision since 1980/81. The returns on individual school and college visits do not; in these HMI are reporting on the standard of available educational provision and assessing its effect on the quality of work observed. They are judging whether what they observe is good enough, not whether levels of provision and quality of education have changed since last year as a result of financial policies. Within the continuum from "very good" to "very poor", the term "satisfactory" is used to denote a level, range and balance of resources that are, in HMIs' judgement, at least adequate in educational terms for pupils to be taught according to their ages, abilities and aptitudes.

SCHOOLS: ANALYSIS

7. Last year's report drew attention to the variation among LEAs in levels of observed provision that already existed and to evidence that the variations not only persisted but that the gaps seemed to be widening. This year's returns on the schools sector suggest the trend has continued.

8. There has been a reduction in levels of provision in 71 LEAs which affected from one to most of the items* for which returns were made, the overall reductions being described as slight in 55 and moderate to considerable in 16. Of the 16 four were among the small group of LEAs whose levels of provision gave HMI most cause for concern in autumn 1980. Eleven LEAs that were judged to have had either a reasonable or better level of provision in autumn 1980 have improved it, increasing, in four cases, expenditure on teaching staff, non-teaching staff, in-service training, books, materials and equipment and, in seven cases, all these except teaching staff. Twelve other LEAs that were judged to have had either a reasonable or poor level of provision in autumn 1980 have reduced it, in six cases in respect of all the above items and in six in all except teaching staff.

9. Of the 11 LEAs that improved provision from a previously reasonable or better level one was a London borough, four were metropolitan districts and six were shire county LEAs. Of the 12 where provision has worsened from a previously reasonable or poor level one was a London borough, four were metropolitan districts and seven were shire counties. This illustrates the widening gap in levels of provision among LEAs, the trend being most marked among shire counties, and least marked among the London boroughs.

Teaching Staff

10. The number of teachers in schools in England contracted by more than 10,000 between September 1980 and September 1981 while the number of pupils fell by nearly 200,000. This substantial reduction in the number of teachers employed has been achieved mainly by natural wastage and early retirement. Authorities have continued their efforts to avoid redundancies but are finding it increasingly difficult to do so. Exceptionally, redundancies have been declared. Redeployment of teachers is usually within the primary or secondary phase although there is some movement from primary to secondary schools in about a quarter of the LEAs.

11. In the majority of LEAs the stated overall ratio of pupils to teachers in both primary and secondary schools has not changed by more than 0.5 in either direction. Where change of this magnitude has occurred it has, on balance, been unfavourable, more so in the case of secondary than primary schools. Of the 23 LEAs whose changes in notional PTRs for primary schools have been greater than 0.5, 13 have worsened them within the range 0.6 to 1.3. Of these, 5 LEAs had less favourable ratios than the median for all LEAs last year. Ten authorities have improved notional primary ratios within the range 0.6 to 1.3. Of these, seven had more favourable ratios than the median last year. Eight LEAs have worsened notional overall secondary PTRs within the range 0.6** to 1.0. Of these one had a less favourable ratio than the median last year. Two authorities improved ratios by around 0.6. One had a more and

* Teaching staff, non-teaching staff, in-service training, induction, advisory service, premises, per capita allowances for books, materials and equipment.

** As an example of the effect of PTR changes of this order a secondary school with 1000 pupils on roll has a staff of 60.6 when the PTR is 16.5 : 1. A change of the ratio to 17 : 1 would result in a reduction to 58.8 or the loss of almost 60 teaching periods; a change to 16 : 1 would result in an increase in the staffing establishment to 62.5 and a gain of a similar number of teaching periods.

one a less favourable ratio than the median last year. The median LEA pupil : teacher ratio for secondary schools (including sixth-forms and middle deemed secondary schools) in January 1981 was 16.6 : 1 and the recorded range in individual LEAs 14.3 : 1 to 20.2 : 1. These figures do not demonstrate either the differentiation between the compulsory years and the sixth-form or the variation in the range of PTRs that exists in the individual schools of an authority. HMIs' returns do not, in all cases, include PTRs. The evidence available records a range of PTRs from 15.0 to 19.5 : 1 for the compulsory secondary years (11 – 16) and 8.6 to 14.0 : 1 for the sixth-form.

12. District inspectors' returns show that while the current level of staffing of primary schools has caused no drastic overall change in their internal organisation, there has been an increase in the number of mixed-aged classes in nearly a third of the LEAs and a reduction in the number of small teaching groups for remedial work in just over a tenth.

13. Observations were recorded on the provision of teaching staff in some 970 primary schools. The observed provision, in numbers and range of expertise, was judged satisfactory or better in 790 – some five-sixths. This is about the same proportion as last year. In the remaining schools, and particularly in small schools, there is evidence that loss of staff through falling rolls, the stricter application of staffing formulae, worsened pupil : teacher ratios or a combination of these is leading to inflexibility in organisation. This makes it difficult at best, impossible at worst, to provide remedial teaching or to respond to pupils with a range of special learning needs, or to provide specialist help for parts of the curriculum requiring particular subject knowledge. While there is little evidence that work in early skills of language and mathematics is being restricted, there is ample evidence of reduction in the amount of remedial work. Music and physical education also show reductions.

14. In over one-third of the authorities, and especially in the shire counties, district inspectors report changes in the curriculum for secondary school pupils in the form of reduction in the range of courses offered. These changes affected pupils of all abilities to some extent but particularly the less able. Examples include the cutting out of such courses as child care and motor vehicle technology from the range available in the fourth and fifth years* and less provision for remedial work, physical education, instrumental music and sixth-form general studies. There were also reports that pre-16 teaching is increasingly didactic with less practical work and fewer out-of-school activities. District inspectors report an increasing incidence of subjects being taught by teachers who do not hold appropriate specialist qualifications. In small secondary schools in 11 LEAs staffing levels and range of qualifications were judged to be having an adverse effect.

15. District inspectors report that in 12 LEAs sixth-form courses have been cut back, particularly, but not only, those designed for the less academic pupils. In sixth-forms in four LEAs they report that the staffing levels and range of qualifications were also judged to be having an adverse effect.

16. The reports of 932 individual HMI visits to secondary schools and sixth-form colleges suggest that, within the range of subjects inspected, about a fifth of schools and colleges suffered from too few appropriately qualified staff. Examples were quoted in respect of virtually all areas of the curriculum but most frequently referred to craft, design and technology, history, art and design and courses for the least able pupils. These reports confirmed

* See also paragraph 82 for reference to linked courses in FE, more often decreased than increased.

those of district inspectors that secondary teachers continue to be asked to teach subjects which are not their main specialisms in most areas of the curriculum including English, mathematics, modern languages and science. There were a few reports of subjects disappearing altogether from the curriculum, available to fewer pupils or having reduced allocations of time. Examples included craft, design and technology (11 cases) and languages (10 cases) with the elimination of second modern language courses mentioned in four reports.

17. Several reports refer to difficulties in mounting or sustaining an appropriate range of courses in the sixth-form, particularly for pupils not taking GCE A levels.

18. There were examples from secondary schools of various attempts to sustain their curricula, among which were co-operation between institutions, for example, to provide second languages, internal reorganisation such as mixed-age groups, adopting different teaching methods to maximise the use of materials and making extra demands upon the teachers, including, in some cases, lunch-time classes.

In-service Training

19. Total funds for in-service training have remained unchanged from last year's level, in real terms, in 50 LEAs. They have been increased in 21 and reduced in 25. In just over half of the LEAs the range of subject and phase coverage was judged at least satisfactory.

20. Of the 50 LEAs where funding has remained unchanged, 25 were judged not to make a satisfactory range of provision. (Six of these LEAs reduced funding last year and two increased it.) Of the 21 LEAs that increased funding, eight were judged not to make a satisfactory range of provision (six of these LEAs increased and seven reduced funding last year), and of the 25 who decreased funding (11 of whom decreased it last year), 10 were judged not to make a satisfactory range of provision.

21. Within the range of subject and phase in-service training that was provided, the amount was considered at least satisfactory in 64 LEAs.

22. The sums allocated for financial assistance to teachers to attend outside courses and conferences have remained unchanged in real terms in 65 authorities and have increased in 10, although these increases have, in some cases, been improvements on a previously low level.

23. In 23 authorities, teachers' centre provision has been reduced, in 10 cases by a reduced provision of courses and a failure to replace warden or assistant leader posts, and in 13 others, by closure of some of the centres entirely. In two cases only one teacher centre is left, and in another only three out of the previous eight remain.

24. In around 260 of the 863 primary schools visited and 330 of the 816 secondary schools visited, opportunities for teachers to participate in in-service training were judged unsatisfactory or poor, while in only half of the 59 special schools were arrangements for teachers considered satisfactory. In authorities where the coverage has been reduced, there was no local provision at all in some secondary subject areas, for example, in modern languages and history.

Induction

25. Since last year a further nine LEAs have abandoned established or deferred proposed induction schemes. This is due in some measure to a reduction in the number of probationary teachers employed. Although 53 LEAs have retained some centrally planned arrangements for induction and six have increased such provision, the main responsibility rested in most cases with the school.

26. Returns on the induction of probationers were made from visits to 138 primary and 416 secondary schools. For both phases the proportion of satisfactory or better assessments was rather more than three-fifths. Some probationers' difficulties were compounded by temporary contracts and others were judged to be teaching too wide a range of subjects.

Advisory Services

27. The total number of advisers in all LEAs is about 20 fewer than last year's total of approximately 1900. The number increased in 16 authorities and fell in 31 and district inspectors judged the coverage by advisers of subjects or phases to be satisfactory or better in only 38 authorities. Increases occurred in four London boroughs and two metropolitan districts with less than 15 advisers in 1980 and in eight shire counties and two London boroughs with more than fifteen last year.*

28. As in 1980, the reductions affected mainly the metropolitan districts (15 cases) and the shire counties (12) rather than the London boroughs. In 14 authorities, nine of which were metropolitan districts, these losses occurred where the strength of the advisory team was already less than 15. Again, in 15 authorities the reductions followed losses experienced in 1980/81. The number of advisers was judged to be satisfactory or better in 45 LEAs and these were evenly divided between those that had increased and those that had decreased their numbers.

29. When commenting on deficiencies, district inspectors drew attention to insufficient coverage in the humanities (principally history and geography) in 31 authorities and in English, mathematics, multi-cultural education, religious education and science in at least 14 instances each. Some of these deficiencies have been of long standing. Poor coverage in the primary phase and special education was mentioned in 18 and 17 authorities respectively.

30. Most reports tell of an increasing proportion of advisers' time being spent on administrative work, particularly that concerned with the redeployment of teachers.

Non-teaching Staff

31. Overall, there is a continuing contraction of all categories of non-teaching staff although 13 LEAs have made small increases in individual categories. The provision of classroom ancillaries has decreased in 44 LEAs; librarians in 17 LEAs; technical assistants in 31 LEAs; clerical staff in 48 LEAs and language assistants in 16 LEAs, nine of which have made substantial reductions in this last category of support staff. Other staff (cleaners, gardeners, etc)

* For the purposes of this paper HMI is using, in line with the Association of Education Committees' evidence to the 1967-68 Select Committee Enquiry into HM Inspectorate, a basic minimum of 15 advisers per LEA to reflect the range of subjects, aspects and phases, with additional numbers according to size of authority.

have been cut in 20 authorities. Overall, the provision of non-teaching staff is reported by district inspectors to be entirely satisfactory in only 37 LEAs, compared with the two-thirds judged tolerable or better last year. There are reports from 10 authorities where reductions are secured as and when staff leave, thus causing unplanned effects in individual schools.

32. From the reports of 845 individual HMI visits to primary schools and 644 to secondary schools, the provision of non-teaching staff was assessed as satisfactory or better in nearly three-quarters of primary and nearly two-thirds of secondary schools and sixth-form colleges. Although primary schools, normally employing fewer non-teaching staff, presented a more favourable picture than secondary schools and sixth-form colleges, there were reports of difficulties arising from the reduction of secretarial help in small primary schools in nearly 50 returns and of ancillary assistance for teachers of very young children in over fifty.

33. From observations by subject specialists in secondary schools some difficulties were reported in providing adequate technical assistance in craft, design and technology in three-quarters of the observations in that subject, modern languages in one-half and science in one-fifth. In some schools less use is being made of relevant audio-visual equipment because of insufficient technical support.

Per-capita Allowances

34. Nineteen authorities, 11 of them shire counties, have increased allowances, in real terms, from last year's levels while in 36 the current allowances represent a reduction. The remainder have broadly maintained last year's levels. However 14 authorities, including seven where capitation has been reduced and five where it is unchanged, have increased the range and nature of the items falling within per-capita expenditure and, in some, capitation now has to cover such items as postage, telephone charges, cleaning materials, visits, field studies, furniture and repairs and the maintenance of library book stocks.

35. District inspectors report that in one-tenth of LEAs, schools are still able to draw upon reserves of materials, particularly stationery, and are no doubt better off in some cases because of reduced numbers of pupils. The effects of changes in per capita allowances are assessed as moderate or considerable in the primary schools of 24 LEAs and, in the 11-16 stage of secondary schools, in 27 authorities. Reports from five shire counties refer to the added difficulties occasioned by mid-year cuts or the withholding of the previously agreed levels of per-capita allowances.

Books

36. District inspectors reported that the library and text-book stock is satisfactory or better in just under one-half of the LEAs. This compares with just over half last year. The schools of the London boroughs as a group are significantly better provided with books than either the metropolitan districts or shire counties. Twenty-six returns from district inspectors express concern about the level of provision in school libraries.

37. Individual HMI visits to schools produced some 1900 returns on book stocks, and these returns were evenly divided between primary and secondary. In the primary schools, almost three-quarters of the reports indicate that book provision is satisfactory or better, while the equivalent proportion in the subjects seen in secondary schools is almost two-thirds.

38. In 240 primary school returns recording less than satisfactory provision, an acute shortage of books was referred to in 15 instances and in a similar number reference was made to book stocks which were out-dated and in poor condition. Individual comments included most curriculum areas and reference to text-books as well as works of reference and fiction.

39. Among the 300 secondary school reports of less than satisfactory book provision, an acute shortage, particularly of library stocks, was mentioned in 33 returns. In addition reference was made to out-dated books in use in most subjects including English and mathematics. In a few schools and subjects appropriate text-books were made available to only a limited number of pupils, usually those on examination courses, and there were reports of unsuitable sharing of text-books and of homework opportunities being restricted by the unavailability of appropriate books, including a small number relating to sixth-form courses.

40. Of the 58 returns on special schools, 37 indicated satisfactory or better provision while 21 report book stocks to be less than satisfactory, eight of these being described as poor.

Materials and Equipment

41. As last year, the provision of basic consumable materials appears to have first claim on per capita allowances and district inspectors report that this is satisfactory or better in two-thirds of the LEAs, although this figure suggests some deterioration since the previous report — when the position was described as satisfactory in nine-tenths of LEAs. The provision and maintenance of more durable equipment appear to have changed little since last year with the situation described as satisfactory in about two-thirds of LEAs. Some apparent deficiencies may be the result of schools' curricular policies and priorities rather than public expenditure policies. The purchasing policies of both LEAs and schools are an important factor, the use of relatively cheap sources of local supply, resourcefulness and economy in the use of materials being crucial.

42. Just under one-fifth of observations in primary schools referred to individual shortages of equipment and examples included basic equipment for physical education, for investigational science and for instrumental music as well as audio-visual apparatus.

43. Nearly one-quarter of returns from secondary schools and sixth-form colleges noted specific shortages of equipment, most frequently in science, craft, design and technology and art. Audio-visual apparatus and other electronic equipment also featured in some reports, although in some other schools these were observed to be available but under-used. A few schools and colleges faced difficulty in meeting the costs of maintenance or replacement of worn-out or obsolete equipment, and examples are quoted in respect of machinery and equipment for craft, design and technology, science and physical education.

School Premises

44. Thirty-seven LEAs have reduced their expenditure in real terms for maintenance, repair and re-decoration of premises as compared with last year. In 23 of these, district inspectors record that the present state of repair and decoration of schools is less than satisfactory. In 19 LEAs, reduced expenditure follows a cut in the previous year. Of the 34 LEAs where there was no change in the level of expenditure, the building stock in 23 was judged to be in a less than satisfactory state of repair and in 18 of these authorities a reduction had been made in the previous year. Twenty-five LEAs increased expenditure on premises, 11 of them following

a reduction last year, while in eight authorities a higher level of expenditure followed increases in 1980/81. District inspectors reported maintenance, repair and re-decoration to be less than satisfactory in 17 of the LEAs which were increasing their expenditure. Less than a quarter of all LEAs are judged to have a satisfactory programme of maintenance.

45. Returns received from 1961 individual HMI observations record that the state of maintenance and decoration was satisfactory in about three-quarters of the primary and about two-thirds of the secondary schools and sixth-form colleges visited. Other comments mention the educationally unsuitable environment provided by shabby and inadequately maintained buildings. Older school buildings are generating problems, but the trend identified in last year's report of difficulties with newer buildings is reinforced by occasional examples of rotting external joinery and leaking flat roofs. Especially in some of the shire counties, funds raised by parents are being used to improve the quality of the school premises.

46. Overall, the stock of school premises is continuing to deteriorate, and failure to maintain the fabric of some buildings has already presented at least two LEAs with heavy repair and renovation costs. Six other LEA reports refer to the serious consequences of long-term neglect of maintenance, and a further two record the closure of all or part of school premises as a result of structural deterioration.

Surplus Accommodation

47. In the three-quarters of the authorities where there is a discernible policy on surplus accommodation, most are concentrating on removing or re-locating mobile temporary accommodation and, where possible, selling surplus permanent accommodation and sites. Eighteen authorities are reported as making spare accommodation available to other local government departments, to the community and, particularly, for use by FE including YOP courses. The high cost of moving temporary buildings was frequently mentioned as an inhibiting factor.

48. About a tenth of the returns made on visits to schools referred specifically to accommodation as "surplus" and nearly nine-tenths of these related to primary schools. In most cases schools had already taken steps to make use of spare rooms, for example, for music, PE, library, pottery or as a parents' room. In consequence much of the "surplus" was not so regarded by the schools.

Parental Contributions and Other Sources of Funding

49. In virtually all LEAs parents are contributing to schools in cash, kind or labour, to an increasing extent. In rather more than half of the LEAs, district inspectors reported that parents and other individuals are contributing funds to a moderate or considerable extent for the purchase of such basic items as books and materials. Support on a similar scale for the provision of equipment was reported in over three-quarters of the authorities. About two-fifths of LEAs are said to adopt "neutral" policies on whether monies raised in this way should be spent on such basic items, the decisions being left, in the main, to the heads. However, about a fifth of authorities, mostly metropolitan districts, regard such provision as being their responsibility alone.

50. Returns made by HMI in the course of visiting schools confirm that in many parts of the country, and especially in the shire counties, school funds are enlarged, often substantially,

through money raising events. In small primary and special schools, this income, in some cases, exceeds the capitation allowance from the LEA. In some instances, parents contribute regular weekly, termly or annual payments. The reports include such examples of fund raising as £12.50 per head per annum in a small rural school, £9000 pa in a large London primary school, £15000 pa in a metropolitan grammar school and £1000 pa in a shire primary school of 121 pupils.

51. This income is still used mainly to buy relatively expensive items of equipment over and above the normal provision for the school, but there were 50 reports from primary and secondary schools and sixth-form colleges of such funds being used for the purchase of books, and 33 references to the purchase of equipment directly related to curricular activities, some of which would normally have been a charge upon LEA funds. Examples included the acquisition of microscopes, weather instruments, sewing machines, welding equipment and musical instruments. Other uses mentioned include support for educational visits, field-work, transport to games, redecoration of school premises and, exceptionally, payment for extra hours of non-teaching staff. Parents have also contributed towards the costs of such improvements as the construction, maintenance and up-grading of swimming pools, the extension of playing fields and laying of hard-courts, the erection of covered ways, cycle-stands, changing accommodation, the adaptation of premises for libraries and rooms for music and careers education and improved facilities for storage and display.

52. Twenty-five reports referred to schools, both primary and secondary, receiving income from trust funds and covenants. Examples ranged from £120 pa in a small primary school to £3500 spent on library books in a sixth-form college. Occasionally, schools are in receipt of small grants from parish councils, community groups and voluntary associations. In some areas contacts with local industry enable both primary and secondary schools to acquire supplies of materials such as wood, plastic, card, paper and fabric.

53. Although many parents in the more affluent areas appear able and willing to respond to requests from schools, over 40 HMI observations refer to schools in areas of unemployment and other deprivation where headteachers feel unable to seek financial help or where fund-raising events produce much smaller sums.

Changes in Other Aspects of Provision

54. The returns from district inspectors show little change from last year in LEA policies for the admission of pupils under the age of five. Five authorities have increased admissions to a moderate or considerable extent as primary rolls fall, and one authority has cut back on entry. In two of the LEAs admitting more under-fives and in three others there has also been an increase in the provision of nursery schools and classes, and in one, the appointment of a pre-school advisory teacher. One authority has reduced nursery provision.

55. In six LEAs, improvements have been made in the provision for children with special educational needs in ordinary schools, including the establishment of advisory posts and the opening of special units. Otherwise there is little change in the provision for special educational needs.

Public Examinations

56. The examination policies of almost exactly half of the LEAs impose some degree of restriction on entries for which fees are paid by the authority. These variously relate to the

resitting of examinations, late-entry fees, CSE "conversions" to GCE O level, double entry to both CSE and GCE O level, and limitations on the total number of entries per candidate. None of these policies imposes undue restrictions upon the schools or candidates and there is no evidence that expenditure on public examinations has been reduced.

COMMENTARY: Schools

57. Schools set out upon the academic year 1981-2 with a shared set of imperatives: for example, to inform parents and others of their educational aims; to review their curriculum with reference to these aims and to "The School Curriculum"; to initiate their pupils into the micro age; to re-examine in a variety of contexts the fitting of education to individual need, including that identified as special; to cooperate in the development of criteria for examining at 16+; to serve an increased and diversified post-16 population; and to prepare all pupils better for the demands of adult life and work, not least by offering them opportunities for learning to develop their personal potential and, where possible, to give them a usable qualification.

58. Education law allows for local variation in translating these imperatives into effect. But pupils of comparable ability and aptitude have a right to equal access to the basic enabling programme of education. The majority of schools are still well found and the majority of pupils still adequately served but there are growing differences in access to education both for comparable pupils and for pupils with different needs. Both the academically able and the less academic, particularly the slow learners, are affected in some degree, the latter more obviously than the former and at every stage from the primary school to the sixth-form. The awareness of schools and LEAs of the limitations set to what they can offer generally evokes a determination to do everything possible, but it is also professionally undermining. So too is the uncertainty caused by protracted discussion of re-organisation and closures.

Primary schools

59. Further general restraints in spending and falling school rolls have, together, continued to affect primary schools in similar ways to those described in last year's report.

60. Teaching staff levels have broadly remained the same in relation to the number of pupils. As school rolls become smaller and staffing formulae continue to be rigidly applied, flexibility in the deployment of the reduced number of teachers has diminished and the number of mixed-age classes has increased. Where such classes are larger than about 25 in number the children's performance can suffer. Also, there will be fewer opportunities for those children who have learning difficulties, or are very able, to be taught for some of the time individually or in small groups and they are therefore unlikely to make the progress they should.

61. Increasingly when teachers leave, they are either not replaced or are replaced by teachers on short-term contracts or by redeployed teachers who may not fit the school's needs in terms of curricular cover or the age and ability range of pupils to be taught. With continuing tight staffing it is difficult for heads to arrange for experienced teachers, or those with specialist knowledge, to help and advise these and other teachers in their classrooms or for the release of staff for in-service training.

62. Another effect of the combination of economic restraint and falling rolls is the deflection of head teachers from their proper role as setters of standards and leaders in curricular and educational matters affecting their schools. This has come about because of reduced clerical assistance, which increases the administrative chores for the heads, and the increasing teaching load as schools become smaller to the point where heads have to take over, permanently, a class full-time.

63. Economies continue to impinge on swimming, field studies and instrumental music. For these activities and for the upkeep of the supply of books, materials and equipment of all kinds voluntary contributions from parents, both in money and in kind, have become increasingly important to many of the schools, though not all do, or can expect to, receive similar levels of support of this kind.

64. Given the variation in parental support among schools; the disparities which already exist in pupil : teacher ratios, and increasingly in levels of teaching resources, among LEAs; it is clear that educational provision for pupils with broadly similar needs has become less comparable across the country as a whole.

65. Unless the level and pattern of staffing and the provision of other resources for primary schools can be maintained in such a way that they allow broad coverage of the curriculum and both expertise and time for teachers to deal with the range of learning needs identified, it is unlikely that existing standards, particularly in numeracy and literacy, will be maintained or that it will be possible to achieve comparable educational standards in all primary schools. It is even less likely that they will be able to secure improvement or implement new policies.

Secondary schools

66. Financial restraint similar to that set out in last year's report and falling rolls, which are now beginning seriously to affect many secondary schools, are adding to the cumulative effects of restraint in spending over the past few years. Widening differences in provision across the country for pupils who have similar needs and abilities are accentuated by widely differing levels of parental and other financial support. A sharp rise in parental contributions has, in many cases, enabled schools to maintain a wide range of activities within and outside the formal curriculum.

67. In general, LEAs have attempted to retain as favourable a staffing ratio as possible and pupil : teacher ratios have been maintained at about the same level as last year. There are, as always, wide differences in the notional ratios between LEAs and the actual ratios operating in similar schools within the same LEA: ratios of 1:17 or less favourable in the compulsory age range were recorded in 31 out of the 48 LEAs for which information was available in this form. In eight out of the same 48 LEAs, the 16-19 ratio was 1:13 or less favourable. Problems caused by mismatch between the qualifications and experience of teachers and their teaching commitments are increasing throughout the curriculum, and subjects such as English, history, mathematics, modern languages, science and craft, design and technology are not immune. Small schools, especially those with falling rolls, are particularly vulnerable in this respect.

68. Effects on the curriculum, of the kind noted last year, are again to be found in a considerable number of schools, for example:

- (a) the loss of individual subjects and opportunities, including craft design and technology, modern languages, general studies in the sixth-form, aspects of physical education and instrumental music. Subjects such as motor vehicle technology, child care, geology and photography have, in some schools, disappeared from the options in the fourth and fifth years. The curriculum of the less able throughout their secondary schooling continues to be constrained. Curtailment of remedial provision is fairly common;
- (b) restriction of the range of work and experience provided within certain subjects, eg practical work in science, residential fieldwork in biology and geography. Shortages of materials and equipment adversely affect subjects such as science, home economics and craft, design and technology. Shortages of text-books and deficiencies in school libraries affect particularly the setting of appropriate homework and may generally diminish the pupils' part in their own learning;
- (c) restriction of desirable developments in the curriculum, particularly the improvement of courses for non-academic pupils in years 4 and 5 and post-16, at a time when opportunities for linked courses with FE colleges are also being reduced (see paragraph 82).
- (d) more pupils are staying on in school to take courses other than A-level. Although many schools understand what they should provide, and there have been some successful ventures, many have not been able, given their existing commitments to pupils, to make enough and appropriate provision of courses for these students. LEAs have left largely undetermined the relationship of these and of GCE courses to comparable courses offered in FE colleges (see para 108).

69. Taken together, these characteristics add up to a serious threat to the maintenance of standards and to desirable improvements.

General

70. With a few exceptions, schools have been standing up remarkably well but many are clearly under strain. Most authorities have maintained their pupil : teacher ratios around the 1980/81 levels but these decisions to protect teaching staff have led to a reduction in other types of expenditure which, in many cases, limits the effectiveness of the teachers employed. In only five LEAs were the levels of provision in the schools described as satisfactory or better under every one of the major resource headings (see footnote, p.2).

71. In general, viewed in isolation, the further reductions in provision are small, or affect a minority of authorities. However, it must be remembered that these same areas of provision bore the brunt of cuts in 1980/81. Thus the reductions in per-capita allowances noted in 36 authorities this year followed similar reductions noted last year in four-fifths of LEAs. The provision of books is satisfactory in fewer LEAs, there has been a further general contraction of non-teaching staff and two-fifths of LEAs have further reduced their building maintenance, repair and redecoration programmes. The standstill, or in some cases further reductions, in these areas of provision suggests that the conditions in which many teachers work are less tolerable than they were and the range of books, materials and equipment needed to support their teaching is reduced. Unchanged pupil : teacher ratios in most LEAs, means an increase in mismatch between qualifications, experience and what some teachers are asked to teach, as falling rolls affect more, and especially secondary, schools.

72. To put it in a nutshell, many LEAs and schools are surviving financially by doing less; but they are often obliged to take the less in the form that comes easily to hand rather than shaping it to match educational priorities. This means, in some cases, a general retrenchment in which most services, schools and pupils are affected to some degree. But it is clear that some things are more vulnerable than others. Subjects that require expensive specialist books or materials and equipment for practical work, and which are taken by relatively few pupils, are particularly at risk. Remedial teaching, courses for academically less able pupils and additional work with the very able, are less easy to justify and provide when provision for the majority is under pressure. Except in those LEAs with well organised policies of positive discrimination, schools and pupils in deprived and disadvantaged areas are adversely affected by a combination of factors including old and deteriorating buildings, sharp falls in pupil numbers, reductions in specialist help for pupils with learning difficulties, cuts in ancillary staff, such as nursery assistants and classroom helpers, and the absence of alternative sources of funding from, and support within, the community.

73. Schools are turning increasingly to parents and the local community for financial and other help. Some schools have a long tradition of raising funds to pay for educational visits and desirable but expensive items of equipment. Funds are now frequently used to provide basic materials and equipment. This trend is leading to marked disparities of provision between schools serving affluent and poor areas.

74. At the time of their visits to institutions, HMI gained the impression of continued professional commitment and resourcefulness but of the teachers' morale worn very thin as the uncertainties and changes arising from falling rolls and cuts in expenditure affect both the maintenance of present standards and attempts to bring about improvements. For many LEA officers and teachers a particular frustration is that of being unable, because of shortages of funds and resources and tight controls on staffing, to capitalise on the benefits that could arise from the fall in pupil numbers or to respond to problems or new needs of which both officers and teachers are acutely aware.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION: ANALYSIS

General

75. Returns were made by district inspectors on all local authorities, though not in all cases on the same range of aspects of provision. Six hundred and twenty-nine reports came from HMI's routine and formal inspections. These together form the basis of this part of the report. Reports on visits and inspections are mainly based on individual courses and subjects, whereas district inspectors' reports are based on whole LEAs and their institutions. Individual inspection returns confirm the trends described in the district inspectors' returns.

76. Individual returns came from 79 visits to polytechnics, 22 to mainly AFE institutions, 195 to mixed AFE/NAFE institutions, 275 to mainly NAFE institutions, 11 to adult education centres, 30 to youth centres, two to community centres and 15 to colleges of agriculture. Wherever possible, the comments in this report distinguish between institutions offering mainly advanced further education, those offering mixed advanced and non-advanced further education and those offering mainly non-advanced further education. It is not possible to comment separately on teacher training institutions or on courses, entirely or in part, directed to the education of teachers. Given the complexity of HFE, the returns allow only a fairly broad analysis.

Enrolment Trends and Teaching Capacity

77. The trends in enrolment and course demand previously reported continue and there is now clear evidence to show that major changes in quantity and character are taking place in the post-16 further and higher education student population. Reports of increasing numbers of post-16 year old students staying on full-time in further education (as in schools) are widespread. Full-time numbers are generally increasing. Part-time recruitment in the 16-19 age-range has fallen substantially in many areas, while part-time recruitment in advanced further education is either steady or in some subjects ("high technology" and business studies) increasing. Demand for the technical and applied scientific subjects is generally steady for both full-time and part-time courses; on the arts side and for business studies, and such specialities as catering and hairdressing, it is increasing rapidly. The swing towards full-time academic courses (mainly GCE O and A level), business studies, catering and hairdressing is pronounced in non-advanced further education.

78. These student population changes, which are occurring in a period of restrained finance, apply stresses to the system which are widely reported by HMI. Additional sources of finance, like Manpower Services Commission and other full-cost courses, both relieve and complicate the pattern of stress. However, from the information in the returns, there is little evidence that there is either a serious breakdown in the capacity to provide or a large volume of unused capacity in the system. There is evidence of actual or potential problems in:

- (a) the future prospects for the technical subjects in NAFE, particularly for part-time 16-19 craft-technician engineering and construction courses, in which recruitment has been moderate to low for some time;
- (b) rapidly increasing demand for courses in catering, hairdressing, nursery nursing and the pre-health services subjects, where recruitment is limited by the availability of places (catering, hairdressing) or employment uptake (nursery nursing and pre NHS);
- (c) the effects of large reductions in the numbers of recruits for the specialised areas of vocational education such as printing, textiles and marine navigation studies. Recruitment to printing and textiles courses has been falling for several years and is now running at about one-half of the 1976-77 enrolment. For marine navigation, first-year recruitment until recently fairly steady, has fallen below half its 1979-80 level.

79. In 54 authorities, additional provision is being made for full-time NAFE students including those on GCE O and A level courses. In many authorities, additional provision for GCE subjects continues to be made without any apparent reference to what is or might be provided in schools. Seventy-six authorities are attempting to make increased provision in the more specific and technically expensive subjects of catering and hairdressing. Substantial increases in demand are extensively reported for courses in nursery nursing, "pre-caring" courses, art and design, and full-time business studies. There are reports from seven LEAs of adequately qualified students being turned away from catering courses. Part-time recruitments in the traditional technical subjects of NAFE have declined for five years; the total number of first year apprentices is approximately half the 1975-76 level and many colleges have under-used capacity in, for example, engineering and construction. These subjects are not as popular in their full-time form as GCE O and A level. Neither the associated staff nor these technical facilities are readily adaptable to new types of demand. Provision for the adult and youth services is unchanged in the majority of LEAs from last year's level when it had already been reduced in size and scope in many LEAs.

80. There are 38 reports from institutions, of new initiatives to deal with poorly-qualified school leavers, including a number of pre-vocational courses of the "A Basis for Choice" type. The response of the colleges visited to these new populations of students is variable; some reports record no more than the fitting of these students into existing courses and their chances of success may be poor.

81. Provision for the FE parts of the Manpower Services Commission — Youth Opportunities Programme for unemployed young people continues to increase. Seventy-six reports, mostly from the midlands and the north, record that in regions where young adult unemployment has been prevalent for some time, major and more effective YOP operations are now being mounted, mostly with MSC funds. In others, mainly in the southern counties, this type of work is very new to the institutions, who are still working through problems associated with the nature of the programmes and the suitability of the facilities.

82. Thirteen authorities are giving increased priority to school — FE linked programmes but in 21 authorities the support is being reduced, sometimes because colleges are directing their resources to provide for young unemployed students.

83. Colleges providing predominantly for AFE have so far experienced fewer changes of demand. In September '81, recruitment to many full-time degree and higher diploma courses increased, mainly in the arts subjects and in business studies. Smaller increases occurred in sciences and technology. The majority of these increases have occurred with no reported difficulties in providing staff or teaching accommodation. Demand for post-18 part-time AFE remains buoyant and no difficulties of provision are reported. Small increases in AFE provision for full-cost courses are reported in four LEAs.

84. The fact that these changes in recruitment have occurred without serious difficulty is evidence of the substantial margin of slack capacity which existed in the AFE parts of the system.

Teaching Staff

85. The position observed in respect of teaching staff shows little change from last year. Where additional staff have been recruited, it is to meet markedly changed course needs in NAFE. Where change has occurred, it has tended to be a decrease of modest proportions but randomly distributed as a result of policies which use voluntary and early retirement. The great majority of mainly AFE institutions are satisfactorily provided with teaching staff; a slightly smaller majority of the non-advanced and mixed advanced and non-advanced colleges is reported to be satisfactorily staffed.

86. The previously reported trend of reducing numbers of part-time staff continues. Only 12 LEAs have provided for increases, 27 are maintaining the same position as last year and 53 are reducing their allocation. Some colleges are said to be placing too high a reliance on part-time staff and some are placing limitations on their use. No separate reports were made on the overall LEA provision for the staffing of youth work or adult education. Reports on provision observed in visits to NAFE and AFE colleges confirm the district inspectors' reports of broadly satisfactory staffing but less than half of the activities observed in 30 visits to youth centres were considered to be satisfactorily staffed. Nine of the visit reports on the eleven adult education centres record satisfactory staffing.

87. The use of income from external sources, particularly MSC, is now common. One college is reported as being almost entirely dependent on MSC funds to provide for the part-time teachers concerned with YOP programmes.

88. Although the nature of demand in NAFE has changed significantly in the recent past, only seven colleges are mentioned specifically as having a marked under-loading of staff, mainly in the technical subjects. In another 24, some over-loading was recorded, mainly in general education, business studies and catering. There is much less evidence of over-loading in the mainly AFE colleges.

89. In five non-advanced colleges, teaching provision for the high-demand subjects was being reduced from the common 25-27 hours out of a 30 hour week to 20-25 hours. Five other returns report that additional paid part-time work was being undertaken by full-time staff as a means of meeting the teaching requirements of courses.

90. Among the institutions offering mainly advanced education, several continue to adjust their teaching capacity by early retirement or voluntary redundancy, with evidence of an increase in explicit planning, sometimes for reductions of the order of 20 or 30 staff.

Staff development

91. In general, LEA funding of staff development in HFE shows little change in real terms from last year, but where it has occurred the evidence is predominantly of modest reduction with very little difference between types of institutions. Provision is judged to be satisfactory in 38 LEAs, barely satisfactory in 30, and unsatisfactory in 26. A wide diversity of practice in assistance with travelling and subsistence costs is reported with very varied effects on the uptake of provision.

Non-teaching staff

92. In some two-thirds of LEAs, the level of expenditure on non-teaching staff has remained unchanged from last year while the remainder are fairly evenly divided between those making a modest reduction and others who have made a small increase. For the non-advanced and mixed institutions, the returns assess the provision as satisfactory in 35 LEAs, barely satisfactory in 44, unsatisfactory in 15; this contrasts with the returns on the advanced institutions – satisfactory in 24 LEAs, barely satisfactory in 11, unsatisfactory in six.

93. In a number of authorities, there are reports of marked variations in the provision of support staff within the departments of colleges and between colleges in the same LEA. A policy of reducing numbers by natural wastage is quoted as a contributory factor. As a result of shortages in individual colleges, there are difficulties in introducing new areas of work such as computing and electronics, restrictions on experimental work in laboratories and curtailment of library opening hours. In one LEA, young people on YOP schemes are being employed to relieve the problem.

94. Inspection visit returns are more likely to be related to individual subjects. In two-thirds of the polytechnic departments visited, and in the mixed AFE/NAFE and NAFE institutions, the provision of non-teaching staff was satisfactory. In the AFE colleges (other than polytechnics), the figure was three-quarters.

95. In about two-thirds of the adult education and youth service visits, and in almost three-quarters of the colleges of agriculture visits, the provision of non-teaching staff was recorded as satisfactory.

96. Twelve visit returns repeat the now frequent observation that, in NAFE particularly, the increased administrative requirements of TEC, BEC and other validating agencies are straining clerical staff resources and, where these are inadequate, the teaching staff.

Equipment and Books (including Library Provision)

97. Against a previous background of tight control over the level of provision of equipment, this year's returns now show that just under one-half of authorities are maintaining last year's level of expenditure in real terms and that between one-quarter and one-third are providing increased funding for both NAFE and AFE. District inspectors' returns describe the provision in the non-advanced and mixed colleges as satisfactory in 38 LEAs, barely satisfactory in 39, and unsatisfactory in 16. For the mainly advanced institutions, 27 are judged as satisfactory, 11 barely satisfactory and four as unsatisfactory. The inspection visit returns provide information about the provision and condition of equipment; three-quarters of the observations recorded express satisfaction. However, a number note the presence of obsolete or worn out equipment.

98. Three-quarters of all inspection reports on library book provision in HFE record it to be satisfactory or very satisfactory. Less than satisfactory provision is more often found in some of the mixed colleges: these colleges are also the source of the few recorded cases of poor or very poor provision. Although library budgets are mostly at a standstill, and in some cases decreasing, a few specific comments refer to colleges and authorities being able to maintain excellent provision. Evidence of weak or inadequate library stocks is frequently a consequence of changing course demand.

99. Restrictions in the opening time of libraries resulting from shortages or reductions in library staff are now more frequently reported. The movement of the student population to full-time courses is creating problems for the provision of study space as the libraries of many colleges were not originally designed for large populations of full-time students.

Materials

100. The general trend continues, in both NAFE and AFE, of requiring tight economy in the provision of teaching materials. In a third of authorities, cuts have been made in budgets for materials in adult and youth and community centres but mostly on a moderate scale. A very few authorities have increased allocations for all institutions. The returns on LEAs report the provision of materials for the non-advanced and mixed institutions as broadly satisfactory in all but 13 authorities, for the advanced group of institutions, in all but six.

101. Many colleges are adjusting to these conditions by paying strict attention to economy in the use of materials. Although gifts from local industry and techniques of using materials several times for various teaching purposes are used, there are still difficulties reported from colleges using costly materials such as metals, fuels, photographic chemicals, and foodstuffs.

102. A very few authorities have made supplementary allowances to colleges to assist them in the purchases they need to make. In some colleges, costs are being passed on to students, either by direct payment for materials used or by means of fee surcharges and levies. However, returns on visits to colleges suggest that the present position remains generally satisfactory with only 15% of observations recording an unsatisfactory situation.

Premises

103. Building maintenance programmes continue to be common targets for economies. There was no change this year in the level of funding in real terms for NAFE and mixed colleges in 52 LEAs, an increase in 11, and a decrease in 33; in six of these the decrease was considerable. For AFE colleges there was no change in 25 LEAs, an increase in five and a decrease in 11, considerable in two cases. Returns for this year show that one-third of authorities are keeping to fairly low expenditure under this heading. Provision for modifications and the acquisition of buildings has been less affected. The district inspectors' returns report that provision and maintenance of premises were satisfactory or better in about two-thirds of the non-advanced and mixed institutions. Non-advanced students and their teachers, generally continue to occupy a greater proportion of unsatisfactory or inappropriate accommodation than their advanced counterparts.

Grants and Out-county Payments

104. Some two-thirds of authorities continue to limit out-county payments, largely by restricting payment to specific subjects and courses, duration of travel and mode of study. In at least one case, additional provision is being made within an authority, so that out-county payments will be curtailed, although equivalent provision is available in a neighbouring authority.

105. About two-thirds of authorities are making additional provision for discretionary grants and the remainder are either maintaining last year's level of finance or, more frequently, reducing their allocation. The allocation of grants within the sum available uses variations in number and value with very mixed effects on the support available to students. This trend is having its most serious effects on grant support for many vocational non-advanced courses (eg textiles, catering) and on many areas of advanced further education, where there are numerous non-graduate level vocational courses entirely dependent on discretionary awards.

COMMENTARY: H and FE

106. This report and those of previous years show that HFE, although stressed by stricter financial control and changes in its student population, has considerable adaptive capacity. That it has this capacity also demonstrates that it was, and is, a generally well-provided service with rather more resource potential than has often been displayed. The general tendency in most authorities and institutions is to use, more severely, economic measures which are fairly easily applied, rather than those designed to adjust the capacity of the teaching systems in their charge. Overall, the frequency of less than satisfactory judgments recorded is still relatively low and may not be significantly greater than in organisations operating in less stressful circumstances. The exceptions are the youth service and adult education.

107. The system will, in future, face more severe challenges. Current financial policies call for a level of improved institutional efficiency and concentration of effort that will not be easily achieved by the economy measures used so far. NAFE is already being stretched by student population changes arising from young adult unemployment and the general trend amongst the 16-19 year groups of going into employment later, on the basis of courses and qualifications achieved after leaving school. The Government's intentions for a comprehensive youth training scheme is likely to make demands on LEAs' provision, for post-16 education in both schools and FE, which have complex resource and organisational implications.

108. In many authorities, studies of future arrangements for 16-19 education are still only in the very early stages of consideration, and there remains a considerable amount of uncoordinated and duplicated provision between schools and non-advanced FE. Ironically, financial arrangements still allow provision (eg for O and A level), squeezed out of the schools by tighter staffing, to be established in the NAFE and mixed colleges.

109. The future size of the contribution to be made by the education service to the comprehensive youth training scheme needs to be known fairly quickly so that authorities can begin to think about the effects of this potentially large increase in demand in their post-16 institutions and systems. The potential volume of work involved in this change suggests that authorities will need to have more determined policies for the structure and staffing of their post-16 institutions if the available capacity is to be properly applied to this new demand. Ways of stabilising the teaching capacity of NAFE in the technical and vocational subjects (whose presence and general academic health is essential to the youth training scheme development) also need attention.

110. AFE and HE, on the other hand, have, by their recent response to a substantial increase in full-time recruitment, both demonstrated their substantial reserve capacity and their ability to use it more efficiently.

March 1982

83/82

NOT FOR USE BEFORE 15.30 HOURS
ON MONDAY 5 APRIL 1982

EDUCATION SECRETARY COMMENTS ON HMI REPORT

Commenting today on the report by Her Majesty's Inspectors on the effects local authority expenditure policies were having on the education service in England, Education Secretary Sir Keith Joseph said:

"The report summarises the observations of HMI on the standard of provision in English schools and colleges in the autumn of 1981.

"What HMI have observed is the combined result of the expenditure policies of local authorities and several other factors, including the continuing fall in the number of pupils in our schools.

"The report relates to a year in which the local authorities in England spent on education in schools and colleges nearly £750 million more (total just under £8 billion) than in the previous year - representing a fall in real terms of less than one per cent. The number of pupils fell by about two and a half per cent.

"In 1981-82 the money spent per pupil was at a record level in real terms - £810.

"And the pupil-teacher ratio continued to be at a record level.

"I recognise the case for saying that, with fewer pupils, spending in the schools should have been higher still to give better protection to the curriculum.

"But we must face economic realities. We can spend on education and other public services only what we can afford.

"Moreover, quality in education does not depend solely on money.

"The report states that most of the schools observed were well found and most pupils adequately served. It is the growing disparities that cause concern. Too many of the reductions in staff and other resources seem to have been unplanned.

"In higher and further education HMI report that the service is generally well-provided.

"Some local authorities were still overspending last year - despite all the warning signs of the last few years.

"If only they could be persuaded to exercise the same restraint that other authorities are displaying, there would be more scope for putting right the deficiencies - revealed by the report - which money could remedy."

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