

PRIME MINISTER

GRANT-AIDED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

You agreed that H should discuss Sir Keith Joseph's proposal on grant-aided schools and said that if the committee endorsed the idea an announcement should be made after that. H are now expected to take this on 26 March.

Sir Keith (Flag A) is worried that an early announcement will put off the various sponsors with whom DES will subsequently need to consider the feasibility of the plan. He seeks your agreement that the timing of an announcement should be considered after the feasibility study is completed.

Given that the Government is looking at the idea of grant-aided schools (and we are here talking about a decision to proceed with a feasibility study for a "modest experiment in establishing about a dozen new grant-aided primary schools"), I can see some advantages in publicly confirming what is already widely understood. The story seems bound to emerge in any case once discussion starts up with outsiders, if not before. You may wish to get the Government's approach properly on the record sooner rather than later. It is, after all, a positive and a not a negative message. The announcement would need to be cast in general terms, but should not prevent DES discussing mechanisms in confidence with possible promoters.

There is a case, however, for letting H consider the pros and cons of an early announcement if they decide that the proposal should be proceeded with on its merits.

Agree:-

(i) to welcome the fact that H is to look at this shortly?

Yes not

(ii) say you think it would be helpful to have H's

advice on the timing of an announcement, on the assumption that they agree to a feasibility study?

Yes

(iii) note that your own view at this stage is that there is a case for going ahead with an early announcement?

Mark Addison

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13 March 1986

It may be possible to secure the cooperation of the sponsors rather under the announcement.

~~Nevertheless it is~~
no point in making an announcement unless we are sure the feasibility study can go ahead not

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I was grateful for your comments (your Private Secretary's letter to mine of 13 January) in response to my minute to you of 9 January; and I am about to circulate a paper to H Committee.

2. I find myself in some difficulty over your suggestion that an announcement of the scheme should be made if it receives H Committee's endorsement. I do not believe that we can decide definitively whether to go ahead with an experimental scheme of GA schools until we have explored its feasibility further; and that exploration requires very detailed discussions with possible promoters, which will be effective only if they are conducted in confidence. Without the necessary assurance on feasibility, we would be very vulnerable in the controversy which is bound to follow an announcement of a specific plan.

3. I therefore hope that you will agree that I should ask H Committee to agree to a feasibility study and to consider the timing of a public announcement only after this is completed.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to the Lord President, and the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

K.J.

Department of Education and Science

12 March 1986

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