

PRIME MINISTER

GCSE

The White Paper "Better Schools" published a year ago, set out the Government's decision to replace 'O' level and CSE's with the new exam, and said the first pupils would be taking it in 1988. Sir Keith has subsequently stuck to this policy and timetable through thick and thin. Recent papers you have seen are at Flag A.

You are concerned that the new approach which GCSE embodies will lead to

- lower standards
- a shift away from the traditional approach to learning in favour of a "can't fail" mentality
- assessment by the pupils' own teachers with the consequent risk of introducing more bias.

You have not been impressed by the jargon-soaked justifications to come out of DES.

You are also worried about the rushed timetable, and that resources (the £20m and the two days off next term) should be devoted to this enterprise at this stage.

Baroness Cox reported on Sunday that the Education Study Group at the CPS had from the first been worried about the implications of the new exam for standards in education. She shared your concerns about the "course work" element in the new exam. She also said that, whatever DES officials said, schools were not on course to implement the new exam effectively this year. Some had not so far received any draft syllabuses. DES might argue they are not needed until May, but that was simply not realistic. John Mackintosh's school had had draft syllabuses only in English, Music and PE. She thought it was too late to change course completely, but that many teachers and headmasters, including eg John Mackintosh,

"Orderly recall of Jews".

Application.

Protestants status question solving.

Common work,

would welcome a deferral of the September start date. If teachers were given one or two more years to ensure that the syllabuses were sufficiently rigorous, the course work limited and properly assessed, the teachers properly trained, the textbooks adequately developed, this might make all the difference. Baroness Cox thought it would be possible to justify putting the timetable back on account of the disruption in the schools.

The main points you will therefore wish to put to Sir Keith are:

- i) You do not like the sound of the new exam; but you are even less keen that it should be rushed through without proper preparation. That will simply lead to its worst aspects (the "coursework") being worse still.
- ii) You are worried that many sympathetic teachers and headmasters do not believe the timetable is realistic; they despair the progress which has been made so far with draft syllabuses;
- iii) You suggest the whole programme be put back a year.

If Sir Keith agrees to recommend delay, he will need to write round to H Colleagues accordingly.

Gloucester Schools

You also wanted to have a word with Sir Keith about Gloucester County Council's proposals to secondary school reorganisation. Sally Oppenheim has written to you again about this (correspondence at Flag B). Sir Keith said he would clear his lines with you before any announcement was made.

Education Bill: Indoctrination

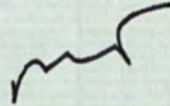
You may also wish to touch on the wider question of indoctrination, if you have time. Caroline Cox is seeking Government support for an amendment to the Education Bill (currently in the Lords) to ban political indoctrination in

E. R.

schools and to tackle censorship in higher education.
Baroness Cox says that her legal advice suggests that such
provisions could be drafted and would be workable. Sir Keith
as you know is also considering an inquiry into political
indoctrination and is due to report to you.

Man Adhwa

MEA



18 March 1986

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