

PRIME MINISTER

14 April 1986

HOW TO GET BETTER SCHOOLS

The Secretary of State in his paper of 26 March makes four main proposals:

- A specific grant to give DES greater leverage over LEAs.
- A statutory Review Body on Pay.
- New Government Maintained Schools.
- An expansion of the Assisted Places Scheme.

Weakness of these Proposals

These proposals are inadequate. They involve:

- a. A major shift in power from the LEAs to the DES, but without any compelling arguments or evidence why central bureaucracy would be more effective than local bureaucracy in managing education.
- b. The prospect of pressure for increased local authority spending financed by specific education grants. Specific grants also run completely counter to our proposals in the Local Government Green Paper for a simpler block grant.



- c. A perpetuation of the rigid distinction between the independent and the maintained sector, with no proposals whatever for hybrid schools.
- d. Continuing to treat the LEA and not the individual school, as the key decision-making body.
- e. Creating feeble GM schools. If they are the radical option, then the old direct-grant schools must be positively revolutionary!

#### Power to the DES

If, some years ago DES had wished to create a nationalised education service - directed and controlled from the centre, with LEAs as their local outposts - they would surely have done the following:

- i. established comprehensive schools as "national" schools, and closed grammar schools;
- ii. introduced GCSE as a national curriculum;
- iii. reformed their monopoly over the national supply of new teachers (already under DES) by setting up CATE.
- iv. switched finance from local to national control
- v. established national control of teachers' salaries

They have already achieved i, ii and iii: the present proposals are for iv and v.



The Education Scene if these Proposals were Implemented

If the DES proposals were implemented (after major battles damaging battles with the LEAs and teacher unions) we would end up with:

- a. The overwhelming majority of schools still in the maintained sector, but subject to greater DES control.
- b. A few new GM schools (their number would be small because of the capital costs of setting up secondary schools). It would take a long time (well over a year) and absorb the energies of the DES between now and the next Election.
- c. Some voluntary-aided and controlled schools might opt for GM status. They would want extra cash to pay teachers higher salaries and show they were benefiting from their new status: in view of the financial position of the Church of England, it is doubtful if this option would be chosen.
- d. More pupils would be assigned to the Assisted Places Scheme.

Most parents would see little change in the education of their children. But we would have incurred considerable costs:



- a. The switch to a specific education grant would mean institutionalising conflict between the DES and LEAs over their grant, parallelling the present conflict between DoE and local authorities.
- b. Setting up a Statutory Pay Review Body would give greater, not less, power to national teacher trade unions: comparison with the Nurses, Armed Forces and TSRB is invalid because these unions have undertaken not to strike. It must be highly doubtful if teachers would accept this constraint.
- c. We would have perpetuated the division between schools in the public and private sectors. The DES proposals cover them separately - APS for the private sector, and GM schools in the state sector.

So you would have used all your energies and those of the DES to fight difficult political battles, and given birth to a mouse.

What kind of Education System do we want?

1. Abolish the present rigid distinction between independent (charging fees) and maintained (free) schools by creating a greater variety of schools in terms of their financing and their charging.



2. Make individual schools cost centres free to manage their own affairs with more independence from the LEAs.
3. Build on the undoubted success of voluntary-aided schools by increasing their number - with their foundations being laid by parents, charities, churches and business.
4. Increase the variety of schools by introducing technical, TVEI schools and making a commitment not to close any more grammar schools.
5. HMI would continue to be an inspectorate which laid down minimum standards.

The end result would be a decentralised system subject to overall HMI quality control with a variety of institutions which can therefore respond more effectively to parents' wishes.

#### Recommended Action

The range of radical options from DES officials is too limited. Therefore, invite them to submit two more papers.

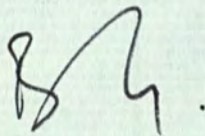
The first paper should cover greater independence within the maintained sector. The rigid separation between the private and public sector must be broken down. The DES have not grasped this yet. Ask for a paper, therefore, which examines:



- (1) differing ways of converting existing county and controlled schools to a more independent status;
- (2) ways of setting up schools similar to the old direct grant schools, not GM schools; and
- (3) a method of giving these schools greater managerial freedom within their overall budgets.

Central to such a paper would be a change in the responsibilities of LEAs under the 1944 Act.

Secondly, invite a paper on the Tebbit proposals for DES contracts with LEAs.



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