

CONFIDENTIAL

R/S 811



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

25 October, 1983

Education on Merseyside

The Prime Minister was grateful for, and has noted your Secretary of State's minute of 20 October about education on Merseyside.

DAVID BARCLAY

Miss C. E. Hodkinson,  
Department of Education and Science

CONFIDENTIAL

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*of no (2)*

PRIME MINISTER

*MS*Prime Minister

EDUCATION ON MERSEYSIDE

Patrick Jenkin minuted you on 14 September about the work of the Merseyside Task Force and proposed that parallel reports should be circulated on the activities of Government Departments in relation to Merseyside.

The attached paper by officials here concerns the five education authorities on Merseyside: Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and the Wirral. Its main focus is on the first two and especially Liverpool where the region's population decline is most marked and where the number of educational institutions is inefficiently and expensively out of line with reduced demand.

Since May 1982 when, with Michael Heseltine, I met the leaders of all parties in the then hung Liverpool City Council, I have had regular discussions with Liverpool and other politicians on Merseyside so as to bring home to them the educational and financial disadvantages of the current degree of over-provision. I have approved important reorganisations in the Wirral, in Knowsley and for Roman Catholic secondary school provision in Liverpool. Action is also in hand to rationalise further and higher education in the region. When I met leaders of Liverpool's new Labour administration in August I was pleased to find that, despite our very different philosophies, there was a fair amount of common ground on the need for substantial and early action. I expect to receive Liverpool's proposals for the reorganisation of their county secondary schools later this month. They will cause us difficulty, but I must wait to see them (and even more so local reaction to them) before I can form a view on my response.

My efforts to get the institutional framework right have been accompanied by initiatives and action to raise the quality of the education on offer. Since their report in March 1982 on provision in Toxteth, HM Inspectorate of Schools have continued to focus attention on Liverpool. Through the normal programmes of inspection visits to schools and colleges in Liverpool and the publication of inspection reports (most recently that on Liverpool Institute High School, published in July) the Inspectorate and the Department are seeking to obtain necessary improvement in Liverpool's educational practice. HMI has also worked with the authority to devise a group of educational projects intended to raise educational standards in inner city schools, further education and some aspects of the Youth Service. These projects are not yet in place because despite our efforts backed by the Task Force, it has not yet been possible to persuade the City Council to include them within their proposals for Inner City Partnership Funding. This is an example of the prevailing malaise within the authority and the leadership of its education department which is reflected in the general sense of drift and decline in the city's education service.

In order to stress my concern at standards of education on Merseyside I shall be visiting Knowsley for two days in December. I intend to see at first hand their problems and practice. A similar visit to Sefton is planned for 1984. But the main focus will remain on Liverpool and in the light of developments on school reorganisation, I intend to review how best I and my colleagues can maintain the pressure to see that Liverpool's institutions are effectively managed, carefully monitored, and provide a good education.

Copies to Cabinet colleagues  
and RTA.

14.

20 OCTOBER 1983

## GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY ON MERSEYSIDE: EDUCATION

## SCHOOLS

1. The Merseyside local education authorities, like most such authorities in England, have been beset by the problems caused by the dramatic decline over recent years in pupil numbers.

Progress on Merseyside depends upon these authorities acting decisively to ensure that their educational resources are not spread too thinly over too many schools. Policies to cope with falling rolls must be the cornerstone of any strategy to raise the quality and morale of the education service in the schools. Well-conceived and sensitively implemented policies on falling rolls provide an opportunity not only to deploy scarce resources to give a better educational return but also to extend or launch initiatives in various fields such as the curriculum; staff redeployment, training and induction; and the parental and community involvement with the schools.

2. The Merseyside authorities have risen to this challenge in varying degrees, putting forward for the Secretary of State's approval a number of statutory proposals to take surplus capacity out of use. The Wirral took 4,000 school places out of use in Birkenhead and Wallasey by reverting from a three tier middle school system to a two tier one with a break at 11+. the Secretary of State approved these proposals in April 1982. But there is still a long way to go particularly in Knowsley and Liverpool.

3. The imperatives of falling rolls are nowhere more compelling than in Knowsley. Having secured a positive statement of the authority's policy to raise teaching quality in the institutions concerned, the Secretary of State has recently approved the authority's proposals to replace seven 11-18 comprehensive schools and a college of further education with five 11-16

schools and a new tertiary college. With just over 400 pupils in the sixth forms of the existing seven schools (most being non-A level pupils) this rationalisation not only brings capacity better into line with falling numbers but also offers the potential of a stronger and richer variety of opportunities for 16-19 year olds in the area. There is also a very strong Roman Catholic presence in Knowsley: their schools too are in need of urgent rationalisation. In May 1983, when he approved the amalgamation of two secondary schools, the Secretary of State urged the Archbishop of Liverpool to cooperate closely with Knowsley in reducing the excess capacity. If nothing is done, there will by 1988 be more than three secondary places for every single Roman Catholic 11 year old in Knowsley. Discussions are underway between the LEA and the RC authorities.

4. In Liverpool political deadlock has conspired against the development of any coherent policy to cope with the pressures caused by the City's decline in population from three-quarters to half a million over the years 1961 to 1981. In October, the new majority administration is to present the Secretary of State with proposals to reorganise the City's county secondary schools: these will reflect the local Labour Party's commitment to providing each community with its own 11-18 school. A judgement on the scheme's educational acceptability must be deferred not least until an assessment can be made of local parental reaction.

5. Some rationalisation has already taken place. In August 1982 the Secretary of State approved the proposals of the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the authority to reorganise the City's Roman Catholic secondary schools. The net effect was to reduce the number of schools from 41 to 15 and the number of places from 19,500 to 12,600. As for county secondary schools, in June 1982 the Secretary of State approved the closure of three declining and decrepit inner city secondary schools thereby taking out of

use 1,500 places. He has also resisted the authority's attempts to unravel their original proposals to close Croxteth School which, following a sit-in by parents, is now receiving temporary financial assistance from the authority in support of its operation as an independent school. In the primary sector, where excess capacity is at its greatest, just five schools have been closed since January 1981. It seems likely that proposals to rationalise primary schools will be deferred until the fate of the authority's secondary proposals is known. In the meantime, the authority have announced their plans to use spare capacity to expand nursery provision.

6. Against this background, HM Inspectorate has continued to support the LEAs concerned through a continuing programme of visits. Inspection reports have been issued or (since January 1983) published on a number of primary and secondary schools. Following the Toxteth Report published in March 1982 HMI agreed to work with the Liverpool LEA in the development and implementation of a programme of projects to be funded through the Inner City Partnership (ICP) and which gave some promise of being replicable in other areas. The largest project involves helping 4 inner city secondary schools mainly in the local Task Force areas to improve pupils' educational performance and strengthen relations with the community. Others, based on voluntary bodies, seek to improve the basic skills of unqualified school leavers in liaison with the MSC; to offer an improved education element in the scheme for giving residential shelter to homeless young blacks; and to see that educational opportunities are a strong feature of counselling for young people who visit an inner city drop-in centre. Although the necessary groundwork is complete, the new administration has frozen the projects while it completes its own review of the ICP.

#### FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

7. The five Merseyside authorities with their 18 further and

higher education institutions cater for over 30,000 full-time equivalent non-advanced further education (NAFE) students and over 7,000 full-time equivalent advanced further education (AFE) students. In these fields, the main focus of the Department's work has been in Liverpool with the aim of helping the authority restructure both its AFE and NAFE provision to enable it to respond more effectively to changing needs. This work continues with regular meetings between the Liverpool Education Authority, DES officials and HMI.

## NAFE

8. In the county as a whole, some 30 per cent of NAFE provision is now funded by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). Response to the demands of the Youth Training Scheme has been variable. In the Wirral, the LEA have taken an enterprising and integrated approach based on their single FE college and the training centre associated with it, and are developing good quality provision both under their own managing agency and on behalf of local employers; this provision is also to be integrated with TVEI. In the rest of Merseyside, provision is less satisfactory, with particular variations between the different Liverpool colleges according to the degree of enterprise of their principals and according to the possibilities of involvement in respect of different industrial sectors. In Liverpool and Knowsley in particular, HMI have expressed concern about the pressure on administrative and teaching staff and the problems of responding effectively to new demands, which have in some cases been made worse by poor communication between the LEAs and MSC.

9. To overcome these difficulties and deficiencies in Liverpool, the Department sees a need for the authority's NAFE provision to be substantially restructured: the aim would be to reorganise the existing colleges, which each offer a narrow range of specialist vocational courses many of them in areas of declining demand (eg construction and mechanical engineering), into more

broadly based colleges capable of responding to changing demands. Guidance on the appropriate form of the reorganisation envisaged should be offered by the results of a series of inspections which HMI have been undertaking of NAFE institutions in Liverpool.

AFE

10. In the context of the Secretary of State's November 1982 decisions on the rationalisation of initial teacher training, the Department has encouraged Liverpool Education Authority to amalgamate the City of Liverpool College of Higher Education with the City of Liverpool Polytechnic. That merger is now proceeding (though not without a good deal of effort on the part of the Department, and difficulty locally over its detailed implementation). It should result in the establishment of a strengthened centre of excellence in higher education in Merseyside, complementing the centrally situated university. (There is also a joint Church of England/Catholic institute of further education.)

11. The future shape of the enlarged Liverpool Polytechnic, and its associated funding, will be contingent on the outcome of the national planning exercise with respect to 1984-85 on which the Secretary of State's National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education (NAB) is currently engaged. But some steps have already been taken to concentrate provision in the North West (eg in advanced engineering and in nautical studies) at the polytechnic, and such measures to consolidate provision in higher education are likely to be a general feature of the NAB plan as finally approved by the Secretary of State. To enable the polytechnic to respond constructively to the expected future demands upon it the Department has, in consultation with the Merseyside Task Force, been seeking to assist the Liverpool Authority in concentrating the polytechnic's provision in and around the city centre.



## TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE (TVEI)

12. Liverpool and the Wirral were the only Merseyside authorities to bid for inclusion in the first stage of the TVEI starting in September 1983; and the Wirral was one of the 13 English authorities selected. The Wirral scheme is based on four schools (in the Bebington and Wallasey areas) and an FE college. From September 1984 the authority plans to replicate the initiative at its own expense in two other areas. Bids are now being invited for an extension to the Initiative starting in September 1984 and it is hoped that bids from other Merseyside authorities will be made and accepted.

Reg. Pol  
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20 OCT 1983

