

SUBJECT

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LONDON SW1A 2AA

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MTG RECORD

From the Private Secretary

20 November 1987

Dear Ceri,

EDUCATION REFORM BILL PUBLICITY

The Prime Minister yesterday evening discussed with Mr. Wyn Roberts (Minister of State for Wales), the proposed explanatory document on the national curriculum in Wales circulated with his minute of 17 November.

The Prime Minister expressed very great concern about the proposals described in the document. The effect would be to make Welsh a core subject for those children receiving a bilingual education where a bilingual education would be defined as taking place in any school where subjects other than Welsh were taught wholly or partly in Welsh. This was a very sweeping definition which would make Welsh part of the core curriculum where subjects other than Welsh were being taught even for a period or two in the Welsh language. For other schools Welsh would be a foundation subject with the result that it would take priority over French and other languages. The Secretary of State would have a specific power to make orders exempting schools or parts of schools from the national curriculum provisions on Welsh. But in practice this would be a very difficult provision to use. There would be very strong pressures and the consultation procedures (set out on page 11 of the document and in Clause 12 of the Bill) would put great difficulties in the way of the granting of exemptions.

Continuing, the Prime Minister said the requirement for their children to learn Welsh would be a matter of great concern to many parents in Wales and it would be a considerable deterrent to people outside Wales who might be considering moving there. It could well alienate the Government's own supporters. The right arrangement would be for Welsh to form part of the core curriculum for schools where the greater part of teaching was carried out in Welsh. For other schools, Welsh could be taught as the second language envisaged as one of the foundation subjects, but it should not be compulsory. The consultation provisions for the exemption power were grossly elaborate and some aspects, for example the requirement to publish a summary of the views expressed by people consulted by the Secretary of State, would be vulnerable to judicial review.

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Mr. Roberts said that the proposals set out in the document were in line with the views expressed during the consultation period. He attached particular importance to the exemption power of the Secretary of State, which would give a right unique in the operation of the national curriculum.

After further discussion it was agreed that the consultation document should be amended as follows. On page 2, middle paragraph, the phrase "... children who receive at least part of their tuition through the medium of Welsh ..." should be amended to read "... who receive the greater part of their tuition ...". On page 6, the first sentence of the middle paragraph should recognise that attainment targets will not be set for art, music and PE. Also on page 6, the second, third and fourth sentences of the middle paragraph from "the attainment targets" to "integrated approach" should be deleted. On page 10, the definition of "Welsh speaking schools" should be amended so that such schools would only be schools where the greater part of teaching was in Welsh. Page 11 should be deleted apart from the first four words on the first line of the page and the paragraph beginning "The Education Reform Bill ..." at the foot of the page. At the top of page 12 the phrase "against the background of his general policy on the language" in the incomplete paragraph should be deleted.

Generally, the document needs to be thoroughly checked to ensure that it is consistent with the proposals now being advanced on the national curriculum in England.

BIF/11
The Prime Minister remains most concerned about the provisions on the Welsh language in the Education Reform Bill. She has asked that urgent consideration should be given to ways in which her concerns can be met, and she will wish to have a very early report.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretary to the Lord President and to the Private Secretaries to members of E(EP) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yrs Sincerely,

David Norgrove.

DAVID NORGROVE

Ceri M. Thomas, Esq.,
The Welsh Office.