



Prime Minister

### EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN SCOTLAND: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1. I have now had the opportunity to consider the responses to consultation on the proposals for the reform of school management which I put to colleagues in my minute to you of 23 July. Nothing in the responses leads me to think that I need change the basic objective, but some amendments of detail now seem desirable, for both practical and presentational reasons. This minute seeks colleagues' agreement to the changes I now propose.

#### Response to Consultation

2. Our plans have been the subject of very thorough public debate in Scotland and have attracted considerable interest. We have received nearly 8,000 responses from individuals and organisations. The response has shown almost universal support for one fundamental objective of our proposals - the immediate replacement of school councils (which cover groups of schools) with bodies at individual school level in which parents are fully involved. There is predictable opposition from local authorities and the teaching profession to our proposals that boards should, in time, have full control over finance and staffing for their schools. More significantly, the majority of individual parents and parent organisations who responded were also opposed to these latter proposals.

3. Some of the opposition is founded on misconception. There is, for example, a widespread concern that the new boards could undermine the delivery of an acceptable curriculum. We can readily make it clear that this is not what we intend. My parallel proposals for curriculum and assessment clearly indicate our intention to maintain national standards in Scotland. But we start from a position in which there are no individual school governing bodies in Scotland and inevitably it will be a little time

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before any of the new boards is ready to take full management responsibility. Our proposals have already shifted the ground of debate very markedly in the direction of parents. But if we are to consolidate the ground gained and ensure that parents do become fully involved in the life of their schools, I think we need to take some careful account of their legitimate concerns as expressed in the responses we have received. The rest of this minute sets out the main modifications I propose.

Constitution and Membership of Boards

4. We proposed that there should be a separate board for all schools with 100 or more pupils. For smaller schools, optional grouping arrangements would be possible. There has been strong pressure for every school, regardless of size, to have a board of their own. I am now persuaded that this would be practicable : in principle of course it runs very much with the grain of our own proposals.

5. Despite the opposition to the parental majority, I intend to stick to this proposal. I find the argument of the educational establishment that parents are incompetent to take a leading role in running their schools both unconvincing and patronising. We will, however, need to explain carefully that there will be safeguards over essentially professional areas such as curriculum and assessment and reassure parents that they will be properly supported with professional advice.

6. There has been widespread concern that boards should be properly representative of local opinion and protected from takeover by minority groups. I share this concern. I do not want to lose the benefits of keeping the boards relatively small, but I will want to ensure that the election of parent members is properly regulated. I have in mind to provide for postal ballot of all parents, arrangements for information on candidates to be available to all electors, and for parents to be elected for a 4 year term with half of the parent membership demitting office every 2 years.

7. We have proposed that education authorities should have a single non-voting representative on each board. Authorities have suggested that it will be burdensome for them to be represented on boards for each and every school. I intend to take them at their word and provide that

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education authorities should have a right (but not a duty) to be represented at board meetings by an assessor.

8. There has been some concern about the possibility that staff membership could imbalance the boards, particularly if teachers who were also parents at their school could be elected as parent members. I therefore propose to provide that members of staff could not serve as parent members for the school at which they teach. I also intend to provide that the staff membership of boards should be determined on a ratio of not more than one staff member per 20 staff. This will effectively ensure that primary school boards have only a single teacher member. I have been influenced here by the strong views of primary headteachers who are particularly concerned about the possible influence on primary school boards of a single teachers' union.

### Functions

9. The consultation has thrown up some useful points about the detailed functions of boards which we will be able to take into account. There has also been concern about the extent of the powers which we proposed.

10. You will recall that my original proposal was to give all boards a common minimum set of "floor" powers with a "ceiling" of further powers to which boards could move as they gained experience and confidence. Boards would be able to ask their authorities for further powers and appeal to me if they were baulked. I also proposed that I should have a general power to raise the "floor" by Ministerial directive. I propose to drop this. It has been widely represented as a mechanism by which unwanted responsibilities could be thrust on unwilling parents and to retain it would unnecessarily dissuade parents from taking part in the new boards. In any event there was never any possibility that such a power could be used during the present Parliament.

11. I have come under strong pressure - including pressure from certain of our own backbenchers - to defer introduction of the ceiling powers and leave these for future legislation. I am not prepared to restrict the boards to "floor" powers. I think that it would be wrong to introduce boards now without providing the opportunity for them to develop as parents wish. They must be encouraged to realise their evolutionary

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potential. I do, however, think that it would be presentationally helpful to move away from the "floor and ceiling" terminology. I therefore intend to maintain my proposal that boards should be able to seek further responsibilities which they are ready to take on. If the authority agreed the new powers would be delegated directly. If the authority did not agree the board would be able to appeal to me, provided that it first got the support of local parents in a ballot. This latter provision is designed to meet the concern of many respondents who argued that unrepresentative boards could seek powers that would not be welcomed by the parents as a whole. I would intend to make it clear that I would accept any appeal put forward on the basis of this provision and direct the education authority accordingly, save in the most exceptional circumstances. We will of course have to provide that decision-making power over the curriculum could not be delegated nor could the education authorities' responsibilities as employers of staff. It will, however, be possible for boards to seek power over the selection of junior staff and I intend to stick to my proposal that boards should be directly involved in the selection of senior staff from the outset.

Conclusion

12. I would want to make an announcement of my conclusions on school management as soon as possible after the recess. I intend to accompany the announcement by publishing a leaflet on our revised proposals which will be circulated widely to all those who commented on our consultation paper and to parents and teachers.

13. I therefore invite colleagues to agree that I should proceed as outlined in this minute. It would be helpful to have clearance by 13 January, since I propose to make an announcement early next week.

14. I am sending copies of this minute to the other members of E(EP) and to Sir Robin Butler.

MR

M.R.

12 January 1988

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EDUCATION: Gen Ed  
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10 DOWNING STREET  
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*From the Private Secretary*

13 January 1988

**EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN SCOTLAND:  
SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 12 January and is content for him to proceed on the basis proposed.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of E(EP) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

(PAUL GRAY)

David Crawley, Esq.,  
Scottish Office.

W/lo

PRIME MINISTER

**EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN SCOTLAND: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

Mr. Rifkind's minute of today is a re-cast version of a minute he first circulated on 29 December. This follows discussions that Brian Griffiths has had with Mr. Rifkind to strengthen the document. In particular, paragraph 11 now demonstrates a much stronger will to ensure that the powers of school boards are not left at the "floor" level, but rather move up towards the "ceiling".

Are you content with Mr. Rifkind's proposals as re-cast?

PLCG.

PAUL GRAY

12 January 1988

Yes Mr

*agbl*



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8 January 1988

*Dear Paul*

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN SCOTLAND: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

*Hay*  
My Secretary of State has no comments to offer on the Secretary of State for Scotland's minute to the Prime Minister of 29 December 1987.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Scotland and to the Private Secretaries to the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of the Cabinet.

*Yours,*

*Tom.*

T B JEFFERY  
Private Secretary



EDUCATION: Policy PT16.

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