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PRIME MINISTER

21 January 1988

Paisley Grammar School

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The fight to save Paisley Grammar School from closure could easily mark the turning point of Thatcherism in Scotland. It is an outstanding school; the pupils all wear uniforms, it has high standards of discipline and an excellent academic record and it is substantially over-subscribed.

Its academic record is well above the national and area average:

% Examination Pass rate/Presentations

	<u>'O' Level</u>			<u>Higher Level</u>		
	<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>
Paisley Grammar	77	82	85	71	73	77
Area Average	65	66	66	68	66	68
National Average	65	65	66	67	67	67

Strathclyde Council are proposing to close it and replace it with Merksworth High School. The capacity and enrolment of these schools is as follows:

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	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Roll 87/88</u>
Paisley Grammar	921	1016
Merksworth HS	1237	378

It is hardly surprising that Strathclyde Council is deeply embarrassed by the very existence of Paisley Grammar School and hence would dearly wish to close it down although they dare not say so in public.

It is unthinkable that a school like this would be closed down in any other country in the western world. Every American city would give its eye-teeth to have one school as good as Paisley Grammar. It would be a tragedy if we were to be seen to close it.

The Options

The 1981 Education Act removed power from the Secretary of State to prevent the closure of non-denominational schools, subject to certain minor caveats. As Paisley Grammar School is a non-denominational school it would seem that the Secretary of State faces four options:

- (a) He could introduce new regulations regarding school closure. Such action would almost certainly lead to judicial review and therefore is a non-starter.
- (b) He has power to make grants (100% funding on maintenance and 80% funding on capital costs) as was done with Jordanhill. But for this to be feasible the parents would need to own the school: something which

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Strathclyde Council would almost certainly strongly resist.

- (c) The Secretary of State could support Allan Stewart's amendment to the present Education Bill at Committee Stage, introducing the possibility of opting-out for Scotland. The Catholic Church have apparently said that they would consider supporting such an amendment - which would create a major split in the Labour Party in Scotland.
- (d) Lord Forte has hinted quite strongly that he would be prepared to help finance a City Technology College on this site - but presumably this would again run up against the difficulty of ownership.

Recommendation

If a Conservative Government in Scotland cannot save a school of the calibre of Paisley Grammar School then it will be another nail in our coffin north of the border. Paisley Grammar School pupils come from skilled blue collar and middle-class homes - precisely the people who vote Tory in England but not in Scotland.

The best option at present is probably to encourage the Secretary of State to back Allan Stewart's amendment and then to encourage Scottish members to support the parents in playing for time.

Brian Griffiths

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BRIAN GRIFFITHS

A school with a long history of excellence is under threat — provoking local controversy as well as dilemmas for the Scottish Office

Pride of Paisley in fight for survival

ONCE AGAIN a Scottish state school with a proud academic and sporting history faces the prospect of closure. In the 1970s the *cause célèbre* was Glasgow High School. In 1987 it could be Paisley Grammar.

When Glasgow High was closed, Gordon Campbell (now Lord Campbell of Croy), the then Tory secretary of state for Scotland, never recovered from the political backlash of Tory supporters and parents who could not understand why a state school which met the highest standards was being put to the sword by Glasgow's Labour council without the Tory government lifting a finger to help.

Now another Tory Scottish secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, could soon find himself in a similarly uncomfortable position.

So far the row about Paisley Grammar has been confined within the town's boundaries; but as the day for a final decision about the school's future draws nearer it threatens to spill out on to a wider Scottish stage, with all the makings of the bitter row that surrounded Glasgow High.

The school's problems started with the publication in November 1986, by Strathclyde Regional Council, of a report by a working group on the implications of falling school rolls throughout the region. Its findings then presented the regional authority with a problem.

Present secondary school capacity in Strathclyde is 244,450 places; but the number needed in 1991 is estimated at only 111,924. Unless drastic action was taken quickly, said the report, falling school rolls would result in an unacceptable proportion of Strathclyde's education budget being squandered on empty buildings. Even now the property costs of Strathclyde's secondary schools, at £357 per pupil per year, are the highest in mainland Scotland.

Paisley, with six non-denominational secondary schools, pupil capacity of 6,974 and a projected surplus of 2,817 places for the current year, is a microcosm of the Strathclyde problem. The Paisley area review group set to look into the problem

by Gerry Malone

met on September 29. It recommended that three schools of the present six should be closed, including Paisley Grammar; the news provoked a local uproar.

Paisley Grammar has a 500-year tradition, which makes it older than most fee-paying public schools. It was rebuilt on its present site at the end of the 19th century and its detractors say that the building is old and costly to maintain. But it was extended in the 1960s and a new science block was added in 1972. Although it needs estimated repairs costing £200,000, compared with Merksworth school (which is its proposed replacement) the grammar building has stood the test of time. Recently-built Merksworth already needs £75,000 to put it right, hardly a tribute to its structural durability.

Paisley Grammar's red sandstone Victorian facade, the gravel drive and the impressive assembly hall would put many decrepit and expensive English public schools to shame. But this is no elitist establishment as Robert Y Corbett, the school's rector, is keen to point out.

Comprehensive since 1975, the school's record of providing for the educational needs of the Paisley area by drawing pupils from depressed and well-heeled areas alike is a source of obvious pride to Corbett.

If some parents are attracted to the school by their own delusion of snob value that's their problem, he said, not his. But step inside the doors, and the school is obviously different from others. The pupils all wear uniforms. **The discipline and standards of academic excellence are the envy of the growing army of parents who seek to have their children placed in the school but are disappointed.**

Nobody in authority dares say it, but the underlying feeling in the recent letter columns of the local press is clearly that it is for precisely its traditions and values that the school is now under attack. Corbett denies that. He is battling hard for his school by sticking strictly to the criteria

for closure set out in Strathclyde Regional Council's working group report.

In a series of negotiations, where the unspoken truth boils below the surface, he knows that he must stick to the rules set down by the regional council and win his case on the merits and not emotion. So do the representatives of parents.

Lesley Campbell, the chairman of the parents' council, maintains that the school is needed because of its geographical location in the centre of town, which allows it to take a wide social mix from its catchment area without requiring children to travel long distances.

She points out that the school draws many of its pupils from areas where unemployment reaches 25%, hardly evidence of social exclusivity; if the going gets tough she will prove a strong opponent for the regional council.

Other groups are quietly taking positions. The local Labour regional councillor is sympathetic to the school's fight for survival; but Allan Adams, the local Labour member of parliament, is non-committal — on his own ad-

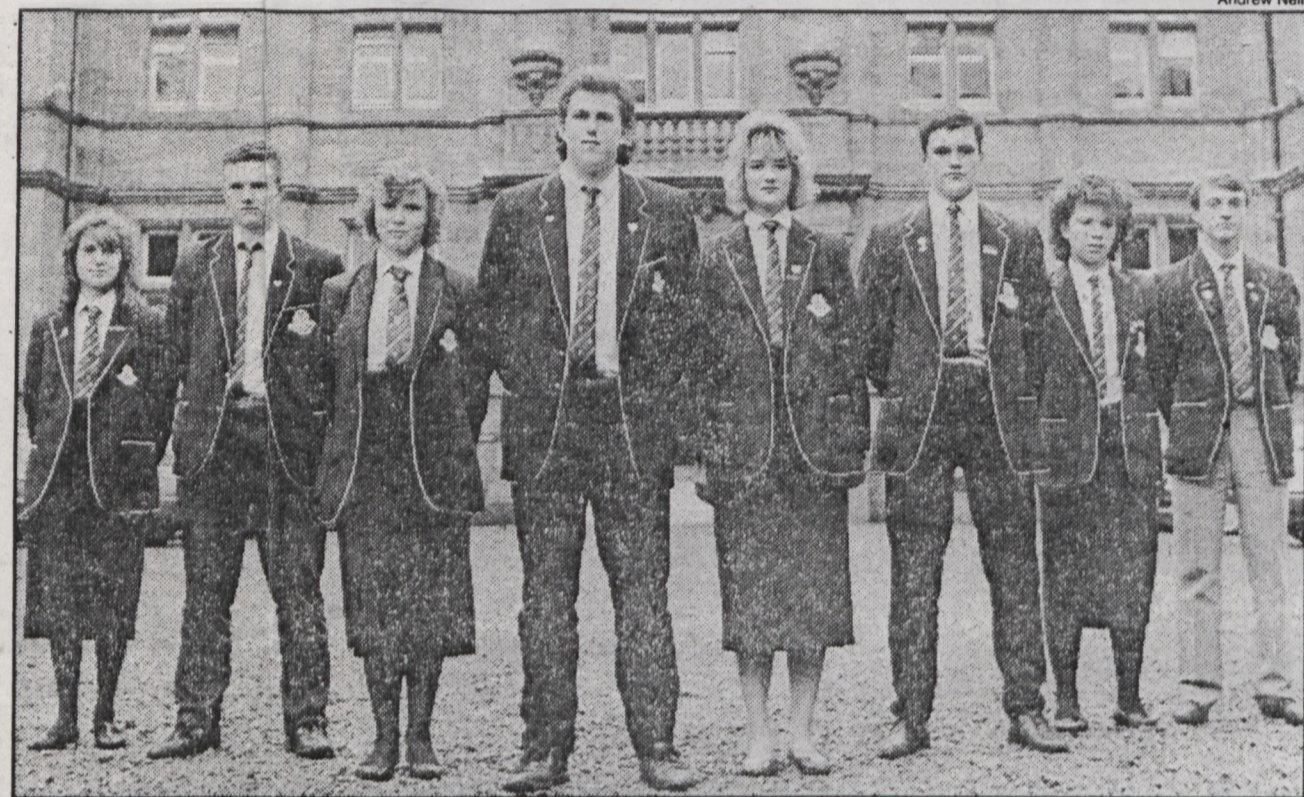


Michael Forsyth, left, Scottish Office education minister, has sympathy for Paisley Grammar, the school where pupils achieve high academic standards

mission, "keeping his head down".

Allan Stewart, Tory member for neighbouring Eastwood, has parents who live in his constituency who choose to send their children to Paisley Grammar by exercising their rights under the parents' charter. He is determined to take action to stop the threatened closure.

Although it is strictly a matter for the regional council and not, as the law stands, subject to Scottish Office review,



Stewart will raise the matter in parliament if the closure proposal goes ahead. If necessary, he will press government to accept an amendment to the education bill which will be introduced this session to ensure the school's survival.

Michael Forsyth, the education minister in Rifkind's Scottish Office, is in a more difficult position. To date he has expressed sympathy for the parents and given an undertaking to visit the school. He is well aware that at

a time when he is intent on breaking the mould of education in Scotland by injecting a large dose of parent power, his credibility would be severely damaged if a school like Paisley Grammar were to be closed.

The parents argue that falling school rolls overall is no reason to close a school as popular as the grammar, which has a nominal capacity of 969, an actual roll of 1,027 and has to turn pupils away. Yet the school the council

wants to keep, Merksworth, has a capacity of 1,187 and an actual roll of 348. So why axe the grammar?

The explanation lies in one of the factors set down for consideration by the Paisley review group as a criterion for determining school closures: "Is the proposed school structure likely to be distorted by placing requests?"

This factor goes beyond those set out by the regional council in their document, *Adapting to Change*, and as

the grammar is the only school in Paisley where placing requests are significant, the inclusion of this test made the outcome of the review group's report inevitable.

Critics say the test reflects the Labour party's antagonism to the whole system of placing requests and, although those directly involved are reluctant to admit that the forces of politics are at work, as the temperature of debate rises, the issue is bound to come to the fore.

IBM announces its first computer show

Sony's hi-fi assault beats EC red tape

by Nick Rufford

JAPANESE ingenuity has triumphed over European bureaucracy in the battle over the latest in home hi-fi gadgetry. Sony will launch the first digital audio



should be doing is getting these leaders talking together."

As he spoke, the Unionists shouted "Where's your mandate?" and "Don't be patronising".

inappropriate. He opposed hanging, he said, but it was a matter for parliament to thrash out.

After the speech, Hurd was philosophical about the reception he had received. "It was a

tion.

Rifkind said that after the election, the Tories had made big steps forward to recover the lost ground, by shaking up their organisation, winning new funds and receiving the

themselves regularly within the lost value position of mons, h

Parents vow to save school from the axe

by Gerry Malone
Glasgow

ANGRY parents are to fight a recommendation by the Paisley education area review board to close the town's 500-year-old grammar school. They have accused the board of bias, and the local MP has pledged to seek changes in the government's education bill to ensure the school's future.

The board's report, which will be considered by the larger central review board on December 18, recommends the closure of three of Paisley's six secondary schools: Paisley grammar, John Neilson and Stanely Green.

Members of the grammar school's parents' association are accusing the review group of approaching the restructuring of schools in the town with closed minds and predetermination. They say that a local newspaper reported that "informed" sources in the local education authority were predicting the closure of the grammar school long before the area review group was set up.

The review groups were asked by the Strathclyde region education authority to carry out their task in accordance with guidance set out by the region. An advisory document, *Adapting to Change*, made it clear that educational issues should be uppermost in the considerations of review groups.

Paisley parents say their review group added a criterion of its own: placing requests. The parents say the group referred to requests for placings as having had a "distorting" effect on the future demand for education in Paisley. Using such guidelines, Paisley grammar, which receives a large number of placing requests, was bound to lose out, the parents say.

Alison Munro, a member of the parents' association and a Paisley grammar delegate to the area review board, is incensed that educational factors appear to have taken a backseat in the group's discussions. She said: "The deck was stacked against Paisley grammar from the start."

Munro said there was a widespread feeling that political objection to the system of placing requests was the real reason for including this extra

criteria for the review group's consideration.

However, John Harcus, the divisional education officer, strongly denies the allegation that closure of the grammar is inevitable. He said the final decision would be taken by the full regional education committee in April next year.

Paisley grammar's parents' association has been promised support by Allan Stewart, MP for Eastwood, who has constituents with children at the school.

In a speech in his constituency yesterday, he pledged to table an amendment to the government's education bill which would allow Scottish schools to opt out of regional authority control, as will be the case in England.

He said: "It is a disgrace that political bias towards the placing request system should mean the closure of Paisley grammar which serves the needs of the whole community and provides education that parents want for their children."

Michael Forsyth, the education minister, who has already attended a meeting with parents of the school, is aware of developments but has no statutory authority to intervene.

Lesley Campbell, chairman of the parents' association has promised an all-out fight against any attempts at closure. Five hundred people attended a meeting on Thursday night called at 24 hours' notice over the future of the school and she says this illustrates the depth of feeling in the local community about the decision.

A local petition is being organised in the hope of building up a strong momentum of public support for the continued existence of the school.

● Sir David Smith, a distinguished botanist and since last month principal of Edinburgh University, criticised the "technological dyslexia" of government officials who believed research grant money to universities was wasted.

Speaking at a graduation ceremony in Edinburgh, Smith said some "very senior and influential" government officials felt that University Grants Committee funds allocated for research could be likened to pouring the cash into a "black hole". Such allegations, he said, betrayed limited technical literacy.

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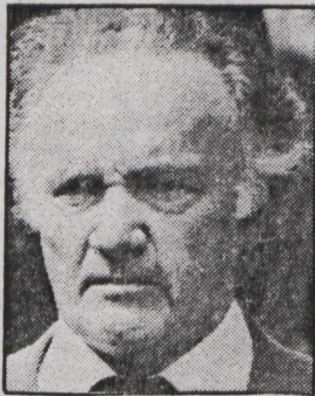
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"Mon cher Delamain, if your cognac's
matured in Jarnac, why not call it Jarnac?"
"It would only attract tourists, mon ami."



Jenkins: 'heartbroken'

them were given a chance to read the proofs before publication and in some cases their objections were not heeded. Jenkins said: "They said they didn't think the book was going to be like that. But I asked how I could write a book without the warts."

Family members are particularly upset by new revelations about Burton's womanising - including the claim that he made a girl pregnant in New York in 1951 - and his alcoholism. One passage outlines Burton's humiliating first performance in Equus on Broadway in 1976, when his drinking was at its worst.

The book also tells in detail of the fear and hatred that Burton's last wife, Sally, had for Elizabeth Taylor.

The most positive reaction is from Taylor. She has written the introduction, and Robby Lantz, her agent and Burton's long-time friend, sent Jenkins a telegram congratulating him on a "lovely job, a human book, a warm and affectionate memoir".

How widow froze out Liz Taylor, page C1

Forsyth hints at grant aid to save school

by Gerry Malone

THE education minister, Michael Forsyth, will consider using his statutory powers to save the 500-year-old Paisley Grammar School from closure.

Forsyth confirmed to The Sunday Times yesterday that he may give grant aid to enable the school to be funded independently of the Labour-controlled Strathclyde regional council, which wants to close it.

Grammar school parents leader Lesley Campbell welcomed the initiative but parents still plan to seek a judicial review of Strathclyde's handling of the proposed closure.

The parents have established a war chest to fund the fight in the Edinburgh court of sessions if the regional council endorses the closure plans in April. Judicial review of the council's actions would be possible if the process by which the decision was reached was shown to have been unfair. Campbell is confident that the action group now has sufficient evidence to back its case. The matter is in the hands of lawyers in Glasgow.

Over the past few weeks, Forsyth has been subjected to a rising chorus of protest from the grammar school's supporters. He has received more

than 1,300 letters and a petition with more than 3,000 signatures demanding that the school be saved. Unlike many other schools earmarked for closure, Paisley has no shortage of pupils. There is a continuing demand from parents seeking to place their children in the school under the charter for parents choice introduced by the government.

Authoritative sources are increasingly convinced that Strathclyde is determined to close the school because of political opposition to the government's placement scheme. This is vigorously denied by the region's education officials. The same sources maintain that no sound educational reason has yet been put forward for the closure of Paisley Grammar School although "educational reasons" were the main criteria for closure set out in the regional council's document Adapting to Change.

Parents now will have to convince Strathclyde region to hand the school to a suitable governing body rather than close it if Forsyth's proposal is to have any chance of success. While Strathclyde will be opposed to such a plan the region will now be put under intense pressure to give Paisley Grammar the chance of a new lease of life.

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cc/Sup

PRIME MINISTER

BILATERAL WITH BRIAN GRIFFITHS: 22 JANUARY

This is only a fifteen minute slot.

Brian is keen to discuss with you Scottish education matters, in particular the issues raised by the enclosed papers relating to the Paisley Grammar School. This particular issue would give you a good opportunity to raise more general issues with Mr. Rifkind if you are minded to do so.

I suggest deferring other items until next week.

Recd.

Paul Gray

21 January 1988

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