



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Personal Minute

No. M2/88

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND

I received yesterday the attached letter from the Rector of Paisley Grammar School. This raises issues of fundamental importance for us in Scotland.

I believe we must take urgent action to prevent closure of a school like Paisley. If we act it could prove the turning point for the Party's fortunes in Scotland.

I want to reply to the Rector next week telling him what action we are taking. This will require some provision in your forthcoming Bill, which could presumably be included before publication. I should be grateful if you would urgently consider the best course of action and then clear this in correspondence with colleagues early next week. You will also need to consider whether you should make an announcement in the House before I reply to the Rector.

Margaret Thatcher

22 January 1988

cc/800



PAISLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

&

WILLIAM B. BARBOUR ACADEMY Glasgow Road, Paisley, PA1 3RP

ROBERT Y. CORBETT, M.A.
Rector

TELEPHONES: 041-889 3397 041-889 3484

Date 21.1.88

Our Ref: RYC/LL

Acked 22/1

The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
LONDON.

Dear Mrs. Thatcher,

PROPOSED MERGER OF PAISLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL AND MERKSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL.

Last Monday evening at a packed meeting of the parents of pupils attending this School, there was a unified resolve to resist the Region's proposals to merge this School with Merksworth High School.

There emerged at a meeting a clear feeling that parents and pupils were pawns in an educational game: that their feelings were being totally ignored in the interests of administrative tidiness.

Where Paisley had 6 non-denominational schools, it is now to have 3: where it had 3 Roman Catholic schools it is now to have one. The opportunities for parental choice will be minimal.

In the case of Paisley Grammar School the Staff and parents are totally baffled. The issue is 'falling rolls' - yet this School is full and annually has to turn away scores of applicants.

Our academic record will stand scrutiny with the best, both in private and in State Schools. We provide opportunities also in games and athletics, where our Rugby and Soccer prowess is well-known. From our 1000 pupils we can draw a Senior and Junior Orchestra: a Concert Band: a Stage Band - and numerous off-shoots, along with our Choirs.

We are wholly comprehensive; we take in every pupil from our two associate primaries and also several from our nearby Roman Catholic Primary. We are situated in the centre of our catchment area - we have no 'school buses'. We attract many Placing Requests from outside Paisley.

We do not have many adult students - because we don't have room for them. We do not have a swimming pool - nor do we have a community wing. These appear to be the major blots on our escutcheon, according to our local Labour Councillors.

We have served the community of Paisley since 1586 without a break. In the year in which the town of Paisley is celebrating 500 years of continuous growth, Strathclyde Regional Council is bent on closing an educational unit which has brought fame to the town.

I am aware of the powers delegated to local Regional Councils: I am also acutely aware that this ancient institution, to put in bluntly, is being sacrificed to enhance a 'ghetto' School. This 'marriage' will never be a success.

May I ask you to do what lies in your power to prevent this happening ?

Yours sincerely,

R.Y. Corbett
Rector.

229 Glasgow Road,
PAISLEY.
21.1.88.

The Scottish Office,
New St. Andrew's House,
EDINBURGH EH1 2SX.

Dear Mr. Rifkind,

CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL PROVISION.

I am concerned at the changes proposed by S.R.C. in educational provision here in Paisley, involving mergers - closures by another name.

These proposals, made after months of consultation, fly in the face of educational factors, parental choice, community needs and safety of children going to and from Schools. The changes have been made, certainly, in the case of Paisley Grammar to satisfy a narrow political viewpoint.

I would ask you to enlarge your powers under the forthcoming Education Act to enable you to require an appeal procedure or a review procedure to be built into merger/closure processes where parents feel a manifest wrong has been done.

I am supported in my view by innumerable parents and the Staff of Paisley Grammar.

We all accept that there have to be economies in the provision of School places but what we do not accept is that Paisley Grammar should be sacrificed. It meets the criteria of 'Adapting to Change'; it has the support of all its parents; it is full: its academic record stands scrutiny anywhere. Why should it be closed?

Yours faithfully,

Lesley Campbell.

Lesley Campbell.
President, Paisley Grammar School Parents' Association.

From: J. ALLAN STEWART, M.P.

Eastwood



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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22 January 1988

Dear Prime Minister,

PAISLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

You may have seen reports in the national and Scottish press about the proposal by Strathclyde Regional Council to close Paisley Grammar School as part of the rationalisation of secondary education in the region. The proposal is not a purely local issue, but represents a major and deliberate ~~dialogue~~ *challenge* to the Government's major educational objectives.

It is not in dispute that the Regional Council, faced with continuing over-capacity in its schools, is correct to try to obtain rationalisation in Paisley as elsewhere. There is also no doubt that Paisley Grammar has been targeted for purely political reasons. Both Malcolm and Michael have publicly confirmed the Scottish Office view that Paisley Grammar is educationally an excellent school. It is well used, and popular, not least because of its emphasis on sound education and traditional standards with an outstanding reputation in particular disciplines, notably music. Its pupils proudly wear school uniforms, in itself a justification for closure to the comrades of Strathclyde.

The school's catchment area is a cross section of the community. It includes an area which I represented from 1979-1983. I have no reason to doubt a local assessment that the majority of parents would have voted Labour in 1987, but with a significant Conservative vote.

My constituency no longer includes a part of Paisley Grammar's catchment area, but I have a number of constituents whose children are pupils at the school. They have been able to achieve that because of the Parents' Charter granted by this Government and opposed by the Labour Party. Strathclyde Region is deliberately ignoring

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pupils who are my constituents and others who have also exercised their rights under the Parents' Charter in their calculations. The result of emphasising present and future catchment area numbers, and in effect ignoring Parents' Charter pupils, is arithmetically inevitable. Schools popular with parents tend to be closed: schools unpopular with parents tend to stay open.

The Government at present has no powers to intervene to prevent Strathclyde closing Paisley Grammar. But a Scottish Education Bill is forthcoming. Whatever happens, I have made public my intention to propose an amendment to allow "opting out". The Government's perfectly understandable position is that Scotland is not yet ready for opting out.

It is, however, not impossible to find a formula which would allow a Scottish version directly related to proposed closures where the justification for closure ignored the importance of Parents' Charter pupils. Such a measure would, of course, act as a major disincentive to education authorities to follow Strathclyde's example on Paisley Grammar.

I am drawing this matter to your personal attention for these reasons. First, if anything is to be done for Paisley Grammar, it clearly requires a major development of Government policy. Second, there is an opportunity to extend Government policy in Scotland on clearly Conservative lines in a way which would be genuinely popular. Many outside Paisley are appalled at the proposal to close the Grammar School. Third, if you were personally seen to lead a Conservative initiative in Scotland as a result of a backbench Scottish Tory representing his constituents' interests to yourself and Malcolm, the political benefits would be considerable.

I would like to ask whether you would be prepared to receive briefly a small delegation of three or four constituents led by myself to discuss the issue. I appreciate that would raise expectations if the Government decides to take no subsequent action.

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Alternatively, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the matter with you.

I am copying this letter to Malcolm and Michael, both of whom are, of course, fully aware of my views.

*Yours ever,
Allan*

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher, MP
The Prime Minister



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

25 January 1988

I attach a copy of a letter from Allan Stewart about Paisley Grammar School which you will wish to see. I have sent an acknowledgement and do not propose to respond substantively until we have your Secretary of State's response to the Prime Minister's recent personal minute. I am sure the Prime Minister will wish to meet Mr. Stewart, though I expect she would see him on his own rather than agree to meet a delegation.

MARK ADDISON

David Crawley, Esq.,
Scottish office.