



SCOTTISH OFFICE
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MAA

28 January 1988

Dear Mark

I enclose a copy of the statement my Secretary of State proposes to make in the House this afternoon about closure of schools in Scotland.

I am copying this letter to Alison Smith, Tom Jeffrey, Murdo MacLean and Bernard Ingham.

*Yours
Andy*

ANDY RINNING
Private Secretary

HMP02816

SCHOOL CLOSURES IN SCOTLAND

WITH PERMISSION MR SPEAKER I WILL MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT SCHOOL CLOSURES IN SCOTLAND.

REGULATIONS WERE LAID YESTERDAY WHICH HAD THE EFFECT THAT WHERE AN EDUCATION AUTHORITY PROPOSED TO CLOSE, CHANGE THE SITE, OR VARY THE CATCHMENT AREA OF ANY SCHOOL WHERE THE NUMBER OF PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL IS GREATER THAN 80% OF ITS CAPACITY THAT PROPOSAL SHALL BE REFERRED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HIS CONSENT.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND HAS TRADITIONALLY HAD POWERS TO REVIEW SCHOOL CLOSURES. UNTIL 1981 ANY PROPOSAL TO CLOSE ANY SCHOOL IN SCOTLAND HAD TO COME TO HIM FOR HIS CONSENT. AT THAT TIME THE HOUSE APPROVED A CHANGE IN THE REGULATIONS WHICH LEFT TWO CATEGORIES OF SCHOOL FOR WHICH HIS CONSENT WAS REQUIRED FOR A CLOSURE PROPOSAL, NAMELY DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS AND RURAL SCHOOLS WHERE THE ALTERNATIVE WAS MORE THAN A CERTAIN DISTANCE FROM THE SCHOOL TO BE CLOSED.

WE ALL RECOGNISE THAT A NUMBER OF EDUCATION AUTHORITIES ARE CURRENTLY FACED WITH SUBSTANTIAL OVERCAPACITY IN THEIR SCHOOLS. UNDERSTANDABLY SOME AUTHORITIES ARE CONTEMPLATING PROPOSALS WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE CLOSURE OF A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF SCHOOLS. THIS WILL ALLOW THEM TO USE THEIR RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION MORE EFFECTIVELY.

BUT THAT TASK MUST BE CARRIED OUT IN A BALANCED AND SENSITIVE MANNER. IT IS A CLEAR PRIORITY OF THE GOVERNMENT THAT EDUCATION SHOULD REFLECT THE INTERESTS OF CHILDREN AND THE WISHES OF THEIR PARENTS. THE EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT ALREADY PLACES A DUTY ON BOTH THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND EDUCATION AUTHORITIES TO ENSURE THAT PUPILS ARE EDUCATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARENTAL WISHES.

IT IS THEREFORE REASONABLE TO EXPECT EDUCATION AUTHORITIES TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT PARENT DEMAND IN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR SCHOOL CLOSURES. CLEARLY, NO ONE CAN BE SURPRISED WHEN AN AUTHORITY PROPOSES TO CLOSE HALF EMPTY SCHOOLS. BUT WHERE A SCHOOL IS FULL OR NEARLY FULL AND BY THAT FACT DEMONSTRATES BOTH THAT IT HAS THE CLEAR AND STRONG SUPPORT OF PARENTS AND THAT IT GIVES GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY TO ITS COMMUNITY, I BELIEVE IT IS ONLY RIGHT THAT THERE SHOULD BE SCOPE FOR FURTHER REVIEW OF A PROPOSAL TO CLOSE SUCH A SCHOOL.