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Paul Gray Esq
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30 March 1988

Dear Paul

TEACHER UNION CONFERENCES

Mr Baker promised to circulate a brief note setting out a line to take on current issues concerned with schools which may receive some publicity during the school teacher union conferences. A note is attached. The three teacher union conferences taking place over the next week are those of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the National Association of School Masters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT) and the Association of Assistant Masters and Mistresses (AMMA).

This letter is copied to the Private Secretaries to each member of the Cabinet and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours,

Ton.

T B JEFFERY
Private Secretary

SCHOOL TEACHER UNION EASTER CONFERENCES

LINE TO TAKE ON CURRENT SCHOOLS ISSUES

School Teachers' Pay and Conditions

The IAC submitted their report on 31 March. It will be considered carefully by the Secretary of State. It will be published later this month together with the Government's views as a basis for statutory consultation. Under the requirements of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 there will be full consultation with the interested parties before an Order is laid before Parliament changing existing pay levels.

Green Paper on Future Arrangements for Determining Teachers' Pay and Conditions

The former negotiating arrangements under Burnham had to be abolished because of the chaos they created. The Green Paper proposed the establishment of a Teachers' Negotiating Group which would provide for future negotiations from April 1990. There have been various responses to the Green Paper. Several organisations have asked to see the Secretary of State about future arrangements. These meetings will take place later in the Spring.

National Curriculum

Since 1979 the Government's objective has been to raise the standards attained by pupils in all maintained schools by securing a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum matched to children's differing abilities. Progress towards that objective on a voluntary basis has not been fast enough for the children's or the nation's needs. The National Curriculum will make such a curriculum requirement for all pupils, so that they all have the opportunity to achieve their potential and prepare for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life.

Testing

Assessment, including testing, should be an integral part of good teaching, and help to raise standards. Teachers and parents must be able systematically to find out what individual children know, understand and can do, so that they can discover what stage the children have reached, identify strengths and weaknesses and plan their next educational steps.

And those concerned have a right to clear and fair information on how schools are performing. The Task Group on Assessment and Testing has endorsed these principles. The Government has welcomed the broad framework proposed by the Task Group, and will be considering its detailed recommendations in the light of public reaction and of further advice awaited from the Group.

GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education)

The Government recognises the highly professional and time-consuming demands GCSE is making on teachers. The recent HMI report provides reassuring evidence that the new examination is being successfully introduced. The GCSE is already leading to better teaching and learning in many classrooms across a wide range of subjects. This is greatly to the credit of teachers: it is through their efforts that GCSE will be a success.

Financial Delegation

Financial delegation represents a challenge and an opportunity for all concerned. Governors and heads will have the freedom to target resources, particularly their most vital resource - their teachers - in accordance with their own school's needs and priorities. Pilot schemes of financial delegation are already operating in around a quarter of all LEAs and their experience shows the benefits to be real and extensive: better management means better education.

Grant-Maintained Schools

The objective of the Government's proposals is to extend the range of choice available to parents within the maintained schools sector. There is nothing compulsory about grant-maintained status: schools will opt out only where parents and governors want it. A grant-maintained school will provide free education and will be funded no more and no less generously than it would have been, had it remained in local authority control. The only privilege it will enjoy will be the freedom for the governors to run the school, free of outside interference.

Discipline in Schools

Teachers deserve, and should get, society's wholehearted support in pushing for acceptable standards of behaviour. The Secretary of State has announced an enquiry into discipline in schools, which will be chaired by Lord Elton. It will start work at once and report by the end of the year. It will look at what action can be taken to secure the orderly atmosphere necessary in schools for effective teaching and learning to take place.

ILEA

ILEA has a unique combination of extravagant spending and poor results. That is why in our manifesto we signalled the end of the unitary authority. When it became clear that several boroughs were actively preparing to leave ILEA, the case for transferring education responsibilities to all boroughs in an orderly way became very strong. The Government believes that borough level LEAs will be more responsive to parents' risks than a remote County Hall; we are building safeguards into our legislation to ensure that the transfer of responsibility takes place with no disruption to schools and colleges.