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PRIME MINISTER

MEETING OF E(EP): 25 MAY

Following your talk with us this morning, Brian Griffiths had a long session this afternoon with Kenneth Baker, Angela Rumbold and senior DES officials. This does not seem to have taken us much further forward and leaves serious questions about the approach DES are advocating.

You may like to start the meeting by referring to the terms of the Manifesto (copy attached). The key question is whether the DES proposals will deliver that commitment. Particular points to raise include:

- Is the basis of assessment turning out to be formative rather than summative?
- Refer to paragraph 4 of the first supplementary report of TGAT (the highlighted passage immediately below Brian's note at Flag C).
- How much of the assessment process will be national tests and how much in-school assessment? Will there be explicit publication of both? What exactly will parents be given and how will it enable them to compare the performance of their children with others?
- How much aggregation of the testing information is proposed? How much valuable information will be lost in the process?

One further paper has come in since this morning, namely a minute from Peter Walker supporting Kenneth Baker's paper. He has sent this note in because neither he nor Wyn Roberts can attend the meeting. It is attached immediately below this minute.

*S. Morris*  
*D. clerk*  
P. (PAUL GRAY)

24 May 1988

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- There are more teachers in proportion to pupils than ever before.
- British schools are world leaders in the use of computers in the classroom.

But money alone is not enough. Increased resources have not produced uniformly higher standards. Parents and employers are rightly concerned that not enough children master the basic skills, that some of what is taught seems irrelevant to a good education and that standards of personal discipline and aspirations are too low. In certain cases education is used for political indoctrination and sexual propaganda. The time has now come for school reform.

#### *Four Major Reforms*

First, we will establish a National Core Curriculum.

It is vital to ensure that all pupils between the ages of 5 to 16 study a basic range of subjects - including maths, English and science. In each of these basic subjects syllabuses will be published and attainment levels set so that the progress of pupils can be assessed at around ages 7, 11 and 14, and in preparation for the GCSE at 16. Parents, teachers and pupils will then know how well each child is doing. We will consult widely among those concerned in establishing the curriculum.

Second, within five years governing bodies and head teachers of all secondary schools and many primary schools will be given control over their own budgets.

They know best the needs of their school. With this independence they will manage their resources and decide their priorities, covering the cost of books, equipment, maintenance and staff. Several pilot schemes for financial devolution to schools have

already proved their worth, such as those in Cambridgeshire and Solihull.

Third, we will increase parental choice.

The most consistent pressure for high standards in schools comes from parents. They have a powerful incentive to ensure that their children receive a good education. We have already done much through the 1980 and 1986 Education Acts so that parents can make their voice heard. But parents still need better opportunities to send their children to the school of their choice. That would be the best guarantee of higher standards. To achieve this:

We will ensure that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) set school budgets in line with the number of pupils who will be attending each school.

Schools will be required to enrol children up to the school's agreed physical capacity instead of artificially restricting pupil numbers, as can happen today. Popular schools, which have earned parental support by offering good education, will then be able to expand beyond present pupil numbers.

These steps will compel schools to respond to the views of parents. But there must also be variety of educational provision so that parents can better compare one school with another.

We will therefore support the co-existence of a variety of schools - comprehensive, grammar, secondary modern, voluntary controlled and aided, independent, sixth form and tertiary colleges - as well as the reasonable rights of schools to retain their sixth forms, all of which will give parents greater choice and lead to higher standards.

We will establish a pilot network of City Technology Colleges. Already two have been announced and support for more has been pledged by industrial sponsors.