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SECRET & PERSONAL

PRIME MINISTER

25 May 1988

E(EP) Assessment and Testing

As a result of the various reports of the Black Committee, I am afraid that this subject has now become thoroughly obscured by a dense fog of technical pedagogy. Personally I cannot understand the significance of various aspects of the additional Black reports. I am also convinced that the education Ministers concerned do not fully understand the details of what is being proposed.

The Secretary of State would like to choose some parts of Black and reject others. Apart from the issue of the regional organisation of exams, which he wishes to reject, he is nervous about picking and choosing other parts of the report for fear of antagonising the educational establishment. The Secretary of State is effectively asking E(EP) to agree to this approach in order that he can issue the draft Parliamentary Answer (Annex C).

I believe this is a potentially dangerous path to tread. Annex C is much too vague and general. It will give enormous power to the Secondary Examination and Assessment Council to interpret the Black report as it sees fit. And Black is a member of SEAC. The fact that all decisions taken by SEAC are subject to the approval of the Secretary of State should not be given great weight. He will intervene only with great reluctance.

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Recommendation

ie in much more
specific terms than
Amex C to Mr. Baker's
paper.
R.G.

The government must issue its own statement on assessment and testing. It should draw on the Black Reports, but should be clearly seen by the world at large, as different. It should be what you want. It should be comprehensive and cover the detailed procedure to be followed in testing and assessment. But it should be written with clarity and directness, such that it is capable of being read by governors and parents.

The Secretary of State should be asked to prepare such a paper for the next meeting of E(EP).

Brian Griffiths

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