



CFM

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CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

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EDUCATION VOUCHERS

I understand that the meeting of MISC 91 planned for 24 February has been cancelled and that no date has been fixed as yet for a further meeting. Since it may be some time before we see the revised proposals on which Keith Joseph is working, I should like to record my views on the possible application of the proposals to the very different Scottish education system, to which I have been giving some thought since we last met.

We have had considerable success in Scotland in encouraging parental choice of school. Our new legislation on choice within the local authority sector and appeals where a parent's request is refused is working well and very few parents have been dissatisfied with the outcome. We have also emphasised all along that the assisted places scheme is intended to increase parental choice; it is not confined to "bright" children, and it is not subject to any local authority veto which I understand has caused problems in England and Wales. More can be done to build on these achievements and to develop choice still further, for example by incentives to local authorities to expand popular schools and by an expansion of the assisted places scheme.

One of the most striking differences between the English and Scottish education systems is the greater willingness on the part of the local authorities and the teachers' associations to accept a strong lead from the centre in relation to school standards, and in particular in relation to the school curriculum and the examination system. Whatever

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alternative package of measures we devise for Scotland should preserve my influence over the school system, since this ability to take direct action can have a much more immediate effect on standards than the application of market forces.

I would like to develop an alternative package of measures for Scotland when we are clear what sort of scheme we wish to put forward for England and Wales. If that scheme is to apply to England and Wales as a whole, it would be necessary for me to announce my proposals for Scotland at the same time. If we decide to go for pilot projects in the first instance in England and Wales, however, I could hold the position until the results of the English pilot became available.

I have copied this minute to the members of MISC 91 and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

C.4.

Education: Wider Parental Choice  
(Misc 91) Nov '82