

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Prime Minister discussed with Mr. Hancock on 6 July the paper "Education Policy in Perspective" submitted by Mr. Hancock to his Secretary of State after the election, which Sir Robert Armstrong had shown the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said that she had been worried about the paper, which did not seem to her to show sufficient recognition of the need to ensure that children achieved basic standards of literacy, numeracy and articulation. She had always felt that the achievement of these standards had been damaged by taking children out of primary school into "conveyor belt schools": if they were to be improved attention needed to be paid to size of schools, the the significance and importance of the child within them and continuity by teachers. It was not a question of a wider curriculum or smaller classes: it could be said that present education was too diffuse and research had shown that children often responded better, eg in learning to read, in large classes where they reacted to each other. Mr. Hancock's paper appeared to be looking only for more money in order to solve problems rather than tackling the underlying obstacles to improvement.

Mr. Hancock said that the paper was only one of several briefs put to the Secretaty of State and that others covered, for example, value for money in detail. Some subjects, for example, graded tests, could only be covered in a very summary way in this paper. Measures were being taken to improve basic standards: for example, the Secretary of State would be introducing the concept of "benchmark standards" in a speech to the Council of Education Authorities in the following week. In order to get the improvement in teaching which the Prime Minister wanted, more would have to be spent on in-service training.

The Prime Minister commented that no amount of in-service training would turn a bad teacher into a good one. The best way of improving standards of teaching would be to find a means of getting rid of incompetent teachers: this would greatly improve

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the standards of the rest. Mr. Hancock said that the possibility of introducing a compulsory redundancy scheme was one which he would be considering.

Mr. Hancock said that the Secretary of State had a lever in approving teacher training because no teacher could be regarded as qualified except as a result of a course which the Secretary of State had improved. This power would be used to define standards for courses and withdrawal of the Secretary of State's approval from those which did not qualify. He wanted to expand the Inspectorate so that all teacher training courses could be covered within two years. Mr. Hancock added that falling rolls had made some grammar schools and village schools non-viable: a report was to be published in the following week on the Boys' Institute in Liverpool which would show that this had fallen to a deplorable standard. It would therefore be necessary to deal with some of these schools, as well as with inadequate comprehensives.

The Prime Minister said that she was not satisfied that teachers either in comprehensive schools or in further education spent enough of their time in teaching. There was more to be got out of the education system by approving value for money than by putting in extra funds. Children also needed to have more exposure to employers and their requirements. There were improvements to be made in the selection of Head teachers, and there were lessons to be learnt from the fact that Northern Ireland, which had not been reorganised, had the best academic results in the United Kingdom. Her feeling had been that the staff of the Department of Education and Science, with one or two exceptions, did not feel inclined or capable of tackling the basic problems of the education service.

Mr. Hancock commented by assuring her that these problems were being tackled, but it would take time.

F.R.B.

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