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MEETING RECORD

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

18 September 1986

From the Private Secretary

Dear Alex,

SCHOOLS - THE WAY AHEAD

The Prime Minister this morning discussed with Mr. John Anson and Professor Griffiths the ideas set out in the Chancellor's minute of 5 August for restructuring school education.

The Prime Minister described the proposals as sheer genius. But an immense amount of detailed work would be needed before any decisions could be taken. It was a sound idea to seek to disentangle education from local authorities. The 1944 Act had been based upon the need to avoid arrogating too much power to central government, from fear that it would be misused. But it would now be right to extend the 1944 Act whilst not taking power fully into the hands of central government. An analogy might be the way in which responsibility for housing was gradually being taken from local authorities and placed with housing associations, bringing power nearer to people.

The Prime Minister further suggested that there would probably need to be some form of umbrella organisation covering a group of schools, between the individual schools and central government. Many parents would want that reassurance and it could give a continuing role to local education authorities, reducing their hostility to the proposals. It was agreed that one idea which should be considered would be to set up a national education trust, to form the central administration for the school system. Single function local education authorities might be created separately from the local authorities and renamed local education trusts, with membership partly elected and partly appointed. School assets and the associated debt might be transferred to custodian trusts (which might or might not be the local education trusts). These would in turn give powers to individual school boards which could be withdrawn if the school boards failed to fulfil their obligations. The local education trusts would be administrative; they would have no role in determining syllabuses or examinations.

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Other points made in discussion included the following.

- (i) The inspectorate would enjoy greater sanctions under the proposed system, and would be brought within closer central government control.
- (ii) Continued central government control over pay arrangements and capitation rates would be needed to avoid leakage into higher pay.
- (iii) Arrangements would be needed for aiding closure of schools and creation of new schools.
- (iv) Central government would probably continue to provide most of the capital for the school system.
- (v) It would be wrong to place too much weight on the role of parents in running schools: work on school boards would not necessarily attract the right people and excessive reliance on parents would cause problems through lack of continuity.
- (vi) Many head teachers would not be capable, at least initially, of handling the additional responsibility. They would need guidance.
- (vii) Public schools might be able to help school boards in their areas.
- (viii) It would be useful to bring together a group of a dozen or so good headmasters to consider and advise on a core syllabus. Required standards of attainment would also need to be set alongside such a syllabus.

I am copying this letter to John Anson (H.M. Treasury).

John
David

DAVID NORGROVE

Alex Allan, Esq.,
H.M. Treasury.