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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
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FROM THE MINISTER OF STATE

217
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Dear Prime Minister

SEX EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

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You will recall what Chris Patten wrote to you on 7 August explaining the Government's thinking on sex education. Since then I am of course aware of the heightened concern about this subject reflected in many of our postbags. I therefore thought it right to let you know how the Government intends to address this issue.

The Government will be tabling amendments about the control of sex education in schools. It shares the widespread concern that certain local education authorities and schools use unsound and inappropriate methods and materials in sex education. To combat such practices Clause 26 of the Bill requires any sex education offered by a school to be set within a clear moral context and to be supportive of family life. But we need to go further.

The new amendments will effectively remove control over sex education in county, controlled and maintained special schools from teachers and LEAs and give it to the new-style governing bodies provided for under the Bill, which will have increased parental representation and will be answerable to an annual meeting of the full parent body. The governors will be responsible for deciding, and stating publicly, whether sex education should be given in the school and, if so, what its content should be, and how it should be organised. The governors would thus have the power to decide, for example, that a particular textbook to which parents objected should not be used in the classroom, and to determine the way in which particularly controversial issues should be approached by teachers.

The governors would also have the discretion to allow individual pupils to be withdrawn from sex education lessons at parental request. This is the right way to tackle the concerns of individual parents. It would be wrong in principle to give parents an absolute right to withdraw their children in relation to sex education, as Chris Patten explained in his letter of 7 August.

/Appropriate

Appropriate and responsible sex education is an essential element in preparing young people for adult life. I believe that the measures which we are now proposing will reassure parents and the public and will encourage all schools to live up to the example set by the best.

Yours ever,

Angela

ANGELA RUMBOLD

