



cc J.C.

PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: REPORT OF THE TASK GROUP ON ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

1. We established last July a Task Group on Assessment and Testing chaired by Professor Paul Black of King's College to prepare advice on the practical considerations which should govern assessment, including testing, within the national curriculum.

2. I attach a copy of the Group's report. It is a powerful piece of work, thorough and far-sighted and has the unanimous support of the Group. I believe that its recommendations will greatly strengthen our hand. The Group authoritatively demonstrates the case for a national assessment system in support of our national curriculum. It is particularly helpful to have a report which favours a national system which:

- establishes nationally-determined tests as an integral part of the assessment arrangements;
- demonstrates how assessment and testing can support better teaching; promote higher standards in schools; and raise public confidence in the performance of our schools;
- provides for evaluation and reporting locally and nationally of pupils' attainments at the key ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 and
- recognises the distinctions between requirements for the core subjects and the more flexible approaches which we may want to adopt for other foundation subjects.

3. The Secretary of State for Wales and I intend to give a broad welcome to the report indicating that we shall want to

consider reactions to the report's recommendations before reaching conclusions on the Group's proposals in detail. We propose to invite the Group to undertake further work in particular on the detailed arrangements for implementing and administering the system. We would also welcome their further advice as necessary in the light of the public reaction to their report.

4. In my judgment, it will be essential to publish the report this week. It will be of particular and immediate value to us in Standing Committee: when we resume tomorrow we shall be straight into the curriculum and assessment clauses of the Bill. The Opposition are already aware that the report has been delivered. Unless it is available, we can expect them to try to adjourn the Committee. I therefore propose to make early copies of the report available to members of the Standing Committee and to announce publication of the report by way of a written statement in the House tomorrow. More generally, our proposals on assessment have generated a great deal of ill-informed criticism and the report will help us to put the record straight. I am preparing a digest of the report to send to the headteachers of all schools to counter some of the current misconception.

5. I am copying this minute to members of E(EP) and to Sir Robin Butler.

K.B.

KB
Department of Education and Science

// January 1988

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The attached note and weighty report has come in from Mr. Baker this evening. He proposes to make it available tomorrow.

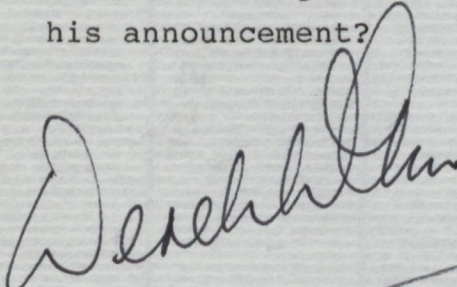
I have told DES that the tightness of the timing is most regrettable. But Mr. Baker's reasons for wishing to make the Task Group Report available tomorrow have considerable force - notably that the long Standing Committee session tomorrow night will be focussing on the assessment and testing issues in section 1 of the Bill. He also proposes - while welcoming the report - to make clear that the Government has yet to reach conclusions on the report's recommendations.

I have briefly discussed the line taken in the report with Brian Griffiths. Although he has not fully studied the document, he confirms Mr. Baker's comment that it is generally supportive of testing.

You will obviously not want to plough through the report at this stage but might like quickly to glance at the recommendations in paragraph 227. The Policy Unit will be giving you an assessment of this report, and the others on science and maths, in the next week or so.

No more than good in parts.

Are you content for Mr. Baker to make the report available tomorrow, subject to his office clearing with us the terms of his announcement?



Yes
not

not

Duty Clerk

PP. PAUL GRAY
11 January 1988