CBLGP.

PRIME MINISTER

17 March 1988

SCHOOLS IN SCOTLAND

Your action over Paisley Grammar School has become a standard around which people can rally to the Party in Scotland.

Earlier this week Michael Forsythe was handed a petition of 17,000 signatures to keep open Notre-Dame School - an all-girls secondary school in Hillhead. The school has 654 pupils out of a possible 681 - and one-half of the children are there by the specific request of their parents.

The Labour MP for Hillhead, George Galloway, strongly supports the new regulations which make it possible to save another exellent school.

The strong impression I get is that the decision over Paisley has been welcomed enthusiastically by people at all levels throughout Scotland.

Recommendation

It is vital that we do not lose the chance to give these parents the right to opt-out of LEA's.

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

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Picture: IAN HOSSAC

Minister hints Notre Dame could be saved

By MAURICE SMITH

SCOTTISH Education Minister Mr Michael Forsyth stepped into the row over one of Scotland's most famous Roman Catholic schools yesterday with a broad hint that it could be saved from closure.

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The Minister met a delegation of Notre Dame Secondary parents yesterday during a school tour which he said he had organised in response to a welter of complaints about its possible closure.

Strathclyde Regional
Council is considering a
plan to close the
Dowanhill building and to
merge Notre Dame pupils
with those of nearby St
Thomas Aquinas
secondary.

Parents believe that the all-girls school, whose roll is only 27 places short of capacity this year, should stay open. The Minister agreed yesterday that its closure would have to be referred to the Scottish Secretary, Mr Malcolm Rifkind, as a result of new

Government regulations announced last month.

Mr Forsyth said that if Strathclyde approved the merger plan on April 28, the matter would "very clearly" be referred to Mr Rifkind under the new rules which came into force in the wake of the row over Paisley Grammar School.

"The Secretary of State would consider all the arguments in favour of the decision to close. It would be up to him either to confirm the decision or refuse it," he added.

"This is a school which is well-supported by parents and which has a substantial number here on placing requests. It has a good academic record and is clearly well run and organised.

"Anyone visiting this school would be struck by its strengths and the support which it has."

Mr Forsyth accepted that Strathelyde Regional Council was right to try to eliminate surplus places, but said he believed that closure plans for schools

which were "popular" with parents should be reviewed.

He said that the new regulations, which force councils to take school rolls into account when considering closure or merger, could affect 20 schools in Strathchyde alone. Notre Dame has 654 pupils out of a possible 681, and half of those children are there by their families' request under the "parents' charter".

The Minister was handed a 17,000-signature petition against Notre Dame's closure or merger with St Thomas Aquinas, which he also visited yesterday. Mr Jeremy Brock, parents' action group secretary, said: "He certainly gave us the impression that he was favourably impressed."

A Strathclyde education spokesman said that the merger plan had been put out to consultation, and that no final decision would be made until next month. "We cannot say anything until we know the results of the consultation process," he added.



Mr Michael Forsyth studies a petition of 17,000 names from the group fighting closure of Notre Dame school