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cc/BG



Prime Minister <sup>2</sup>

RCCG

8/4

Advice from  
Brian Gubbins please -  
urgently.

PRIME MINISTER

**ADMISSION OF PUPILS TO MAINTAINED SCHOOLS**

Asap.

I sent you a minute on 20 October to report on the outcome of the consultation exercise on the more open enrolment proposals. One of the points I made was that, although the target date for implementation in respect of secondary schools was September 1989, it might be necessary to review the position at a later date in the light of the timing of Royal Assent, and on the evidence of the likely volume of applications for the revision of schools' standard numbers.

I am writing now to report that achievement of the target date of September 1989 looks to be increasingly impracticable, if we are to avoid disruption to local admissions arrangements and considerable irritation to parents. The evidence we have received to date suggests that the Department may receive applications for revised standard numbers in respect of about 20% to 25% of all maintained secondary schools in England - that is about 800 to 1,000 institutions. Nearly all these applications will be for a reduction in the standard number, and thus a lower admissions limit. Such proposals will require the publication of statutory notices followed by a two month period in which local people may submit objections. We thought this procedure essential, in order to ensure that applications would only succeed where they had a totally convincing case on accommodation grounds. But the requirement means that applications will not begin to arrive in the Department until the autumn of 1988, and we could not expect to process such a large number of cases until the admissions procedures for 1989 were well under way at local level. Parents will be antagonised if they do not know until the last minute what the admissions limit for their preferred school is to be. We have also to bear in mind the new possibility that I shall have to decide the terms of

disputed admissions arrangements between LEAs and the governors of aided schools, in accordance with the undertaking I have given to the Churches.

I therefore intend to let it be known during the passage of the legislation through the Lords that implementation of the more open enrolment provisions of the Bill will begin in September 1990. I believe such an announcement will be welcomed by the peers and in particular by the Bishops.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Wales, to other members of E(EP), and to Sir Robin Butler.

K.B.

KB

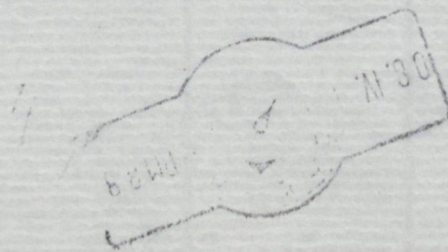
Department of Education and Science

8 April 1988

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EDUCATION: Policy Pt 17.

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DA



Alie

bc BG

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

13 April 1988

Dear Tom,

ADMISSION OF PUPILS TO MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 8 April.

She is not, however, persuaded that implementation of the more open enrolment provisions should be deferred from September 1989 to September 1990. She has noted that, although many applications for revised standard numbers may be for a lower admissions limit, there will presumably be a significant proportion where parents wish to see the admissions limit raised. Accommodating such wishes would not significantly affect other schools and such applications could therefore be allowed to go forward.

The Prime Minister has also noted that, although parents would obviously welcome certainty, those who wish their children to attend certain schools might well value the possibility of getting their children into them greater than the uncertainty of not knowing until the summer term the school to which they have been assigned. The difficulty could be eased by asking LEAs to inform parents at the beginning of the 1988/89 school year that for certain schools the final allocation for all pupils would not be made until the summer term. The process could also be speeded up by the appointment of part-time help to ensure that cases were decided by Easter 1989.

The Prime Minister would therefore be grateful if your Secretary of State could reconsider the position and draw up a timetable of arrangements which would make it possible still to implement the proposals from September 1989.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of E(EP) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yan,  
Paul

(PAUL GRAY)

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,  
Department of Education and Science.

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Prime Minister

PRIME MINISTER

You asked for Brian's views on this.

Do you want to question the proposal on the basis he suggests? 12 April 1988

Admission of Pupils to Maintained Schools

PRC6

12/4

Yes - suggest

The proposal from Kenneth Baker to delay introducing open enrolment until 1990 is based on some questionable arguments.

we write

in accordance

with Brian's

comment

for the

reasons

he puts out

✓ no

My suspicion is that he has accepted, rather uncritically, the arguments of officials, who while concerned to achieve a neat administrative solution, fail to appreciate the significant benefits of greater choice and therefore the urgency of getting something started immediately.

The problems with the proposal are set out as follows:

1. Even if 20-25% of schools question their standard number of pupils, this leaves 75-80% of schools who will not. A significant proportion of these will be schools for which parents wish to see the admissions limit raised. Accommodating these parental wishes will not significantly affect other schools. Surely applications to these schools should be allowed to go forward.

2. For the other schools, it is claimed that parents will not thank us if they do not know until late in the summer term the schools to which their children will go. Against this however:

- parents who wish their children to attend certain schools will almost certainly value the possibility of getting their children into them greater than the uncertainty of not knowing until the summer term the school to which they have been assigned.

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- in any case we could ask LEAs to inform parents at the beginning of the school year 1988-9 that for certain schools in the Authority (which they would list) final allocation for all pupils will not be made until the summer term (although of course most can be made well before that time).
3. The proposed solution is distinctly unimaginative. The DES claim that applications will start arriving by the autumn. If the DES were to hire on a temporary basis 10-15 recently retired civil servants or heads and some secretarial help for six months or so, they could ensure that the matter would be decided by Easter 1989 at the latest.

#### Conclusion and Recommendation

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At the time when the new Education Act comes into force it is far more important that the government is seen to be helping parents than supporting creaking bureaucracies.

Our approach therefore should be to:

1. Insist on implementing the proposals from September 1989 not September 1990.
2. Get the Secretary of State to ask officials to draw up a timetable which makes this possible.
3. Agree to the appointment of part-time help as a way of speeding up the process within the Department.

Brian Griffiths

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

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