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PRIME MINISTER

27 JULY 1988

E(EP): NATIONAL CURRICULUM: MATHS AND SCIENCE

The mountain of paper which is the basis for this meeting is a costly indictment of the way policy has developed over the national curriculum.

I had no idea when I first supported the concept of a national curriculum that we would end up with the following, for example in maths:

- 3 profile components
- 7 attainment targets in profile component 1
- 5 attainment targets in profile component 2
- 3 attainment targets in profile component 3

Profile component 1 is then made up of -

- 9 levels in attainment target number 1
- 8 levels in attainment target number 2
- 10 levels in attainment target number 3
- 10 levels in attainment target number 4
- 10 levels in algebra target number 2
- 10 levels in algebra target number 3
- 10 levels in measure

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This is then repeated for profile component 2 and 3.

In addition there are a:

multiplicity of programmes of study

standard assessment tasks (SATs) are broken down into:-

- short tasks
- long tasks
- extended tasks

there are teacher assessments (TA), and a

complicated system of weighting different tests and assessments.

Obfuscation takes on a new meaning with this document.

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SIMPLICITY, CLARITY AND PRACTICALITY

The following three questions need answers:

- (a) How from this document could an average parent find out what their child should know at 7, 11, 14 and 16? Whilst it is not impossible it is exceedingly difficult.
- (b) Will the new curriculum and testing in this report be an improvement on what is done at present. If so, what new topics are being added, what topics dropped and how is the curriculum being changed in maths and science? It is impossible from what is given, to find out.
- (c) What are the costs and benefits of various kinds of tests? Teacher assessed course work is very expensive while external written exams are much cheaper. Is there any evidence of why the former seem so prominent and the latter given little emphasis.

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The overriding need is for greater clarity, greater simplicity and a more practical approach to this curriculum and testing.

The NCC should be encouraged to distill from this document a simple document which answers the questions posed earlier: a sort of Highway Code for parents and children, which all could purchase at their local newsagent.

DETAILED COMMENTS

(a) Mental Arithmetic

The Report stresses the importance of mental arithmetic and proficiency in arithmetic. This needs to be given much greater emphasis and publicity: it is vital to our campaign of "Back to Business".

Kenneth Baker's inclusion of long multiplication and division using pencil and paper is a useful addition to the proposals.

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(b) Mathematic Map for Programmes of Study

of E(OP)
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Rec.

Figure 2 at the beginning of Chapter 8 sets out very specific activities which children will need to cover at different levels. Although not ideal it has the merit of being specific. The Secretary of State questions whether this is adequate, but gives no reason for his dissatisfaction.

My fear is that the precision of figure 2 may not be to the HMI's liking. It does not say enough about targets, concepts, cross-curriculum developments etc.

If this is the real reason then the proposal to change figure 2 should be rejected.

(c) Knowledge and Application

The report distinguishes knowledge skills and understanding from application. There is surely real merit in separating these two.

The Secretary of State needs to be questioned further on the subject.

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DRAFT LETTER TO NCC

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E (EP) (SS)
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The tenor of the letter is admirable but it needs to be strengthened - punches should not be pulled. Any encouragement you give to the Secretary of State to produce a clearer, simpler and more practical document will be a major factor in the national curriculum gaining general acceptance and so raising standards in our schools.

Peter Stredder

PP BRIAN GRIFFITHS

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