



DSG.
a HO
WG
CO
CST
Education

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

12 September 1979

cc: Master Set
of Records

Dear Philip.

The Prime Minister held a meeting yesterday afternoon with your Secretary of State and Lady Young to discuss his proposals on the school curriculum.

The Prime Minister said that she understood that it was intended to publish the replies made by local education authorities to Circular 14/77 as soon as possible, that there would then be consultations with the relevant bodies, and that on the basis of these consultations, the Government would then set out its ideas on what the school curriculum should be. She fully agreed that the Government needed to give a lead on the question of curriculum and also on the question of standards, but she could not understand why it was necessary to enter into consultations before setting out our ideas. She assumed that the Department of Education and the Inspectorate already had a clear notion of what the core curriculum should be; if that were the case, the way in which Mr. Carlisle was proposing to proceed would surely waste time before the necessary changes in the schools took place.

Mr. Carlisle and Lady Young explained that there was no disagreement on aims. The only question at issue was how the aims of improving the curriculum and raising standards could be achieved. The Government had no power to impose its ideas on the local authorities. The Government could only persuade, and this necessarily required consultations. On the other hand, the draft commentary on the local authorities' replies to Circular 14/77 could certainly be sharpened up. Moreover, it should be possible to produce a further document setting out the Government's ideas on which the consultations would then take place - rather than wait for the consultations to be completed. In addition, the idea of a working party could be dropped. This should help to speed up the consultation process, and make it clearer from the start that the Government had its own ideas on curriculum.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that Mr. Carlisle should arrange for the commentary to be revised so as to set out the issues more clearly, and also to make it clear that

/ it is

HS.

it is the Government's intention to base the consultations with the relevant bodies on a further document which would set out HM Inspectorate's ideas on the curriculum.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), George Craig (Welsh Office) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

T. P. LANKESTER

Philip Hunter, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.



Education

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

27 September 1979

Dear Philip

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to Tim Lankester of 25 September. The Prime Minister has commented that the revised draft commentary attached to that letter is very much better than the earlier draft which she saw. She is content, subject to any further views from colleagues, for your Secretary of State to go ahead as he proposes.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Members of H and to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

Nick Sandes

Philip Hunter, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.

cc: Home Office
LCO
Ld. Pres. Office
D/Emp.
D/Env.
SO
WO
NIO
Social Services
CDL
Ch. Secy, HMT
Ch. Whip's Office
D/Trans.
Ch. Whip, Lords

PRIME MINISTER

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

I attach (at Flag A) a revised version of the DES paper on the curriculum which is intended to be published with the summary of the results of the responses to circular 14/77. I am told that Lady Young has devoted a good deal of time and effort to the drafting of this document and that much of it is in her own words.

I have been talking to the DES about their strategy for the next year or so. The picture is now a good deal clearer than it was when you first saw the papers, including the earlier version of this document at Flag B. What Mr. Carlisle proposes to do is to make it clear at Blackpool that the Government is going to get involved in educational standards, and to foreshadow the publication of this document. He will also have something to say about examinations and the quality of teachers.

If you agree the text, the document will be published at the end of October or the beginning of November. HM Inspectorate will put out their own views on the curriculum, with a short covering note from the Department, at the end of November and that document will be the basis for consultations with the local authorities and teachers. A further ingredient will be the publication of the HMI Secondary Survey just before Christmas. It will say that while a lot of good work is going on in our secondary schools, there remain a number of inequalities of staffing ratios, teachers' qualifications and levels of achievements. It will call for a greater degree of common curriculum up to the age of 16, reflecting the long-standing concern within the Inspectorate about the lack of structure and multiplicity of options in the secondary curriculum at present.

The consultations, which Lady Young may well take charge of, will run through 1980, with the object of reaching an agreed statement of policy towards the curriculum. The DES view is that the local authorities will be very ready to cooperate in those

/discussions and

CONFIDENTIAL

A

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

ELIZABETH HOUSE, YORK ROAD, LONDON SE1 7PH

TELEPHONE 01-928 9222

FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Tim Lankester Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

25 September 1979

Dear Tim,

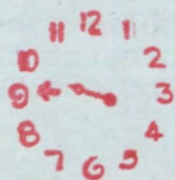
REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Your letter of 12 September recorded that, at the meeting between the Prime Minister, my Secretary of State and Baroness Young, it was agreed that the report on local authority arrangements for the school curriculum should be published, subject to certain changes in the covering commentary. Revisions were needed so as to set out the issues more clearly, and to indicate the Government's intention to base subsequent consultations on a further document setting out a proposed framework for the curriculum.

The commentary has been revised accordingly. Unless the Prime Minister or H Committee colleagues wish to raise further points at this stage my Secretary of State intends to send the document to HMSO for printing at the end of this week. It may be helpful if I record that the present text incorporates suggestions made in response to the earlier draft (circulated with Home & Social Affairs Committee paper H(79) 30) by the Secretaries of State for Industry and for Employment. My Secretary of State also recognises, as the Chief Secretary has suggested, that the publication date will need to bear in mind the timing of public expenditure announcements; it seems unlikely at present that publication could in any event be before the end of October.

CONFIDENTIAL

26 ... 1979



CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Copies of this letter and enclosure go to the Private Secretaries of H Committee Members and to Martin Vile at Cabinet Office. I am also writing separately to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Social Services about a suggestion made by him.

Yours ever

Philip Hunter

P J HUNTER
Private Secretary

CONFIDENTIAL

PART I : COMMENTARY

1. There is now more widespread public interest in the content of education - what the schools teach - than ever before. DES Circular 14/77 (Welsh Office Circular 185/77) invited local education authorities to respond to a series of questions on a range of curricular matters. The Education Departments wish to record their appreciation of the effort devoted by authorities to preparing their replies, some of which were very detailed and supplemented by considerable background material.

2. Part 2 of this report is a summary of those replies: it shows substantial variations within the educational system in England and Wales in policies towards the curriculum. It also gives valuable insight into the ways in which authorities' curricular responsibilities are discharged. It does not describe the curriculum in individual schools. The task now is to see what conclusions can be drawn that will lead to a more coherent approach to curricular matters across the country. Underlying the proposals in this commentary must be the question of resources. But restraint in resources must not be allowed to inhibit agreement on objectives or progress on curricular issues that are not primarily resource - dependent. Indeed a period of financial constraint calls for more effective curricular arrangements if the limited funds available are to be put to best use.

Inter-relationships of the Education Partners

3. Local authorities' policies, and the ways in which they are implemented, should not stand in isolation. They must be seen in the context of the relationships between all the parties with responsibilities for school education: central and local government, school governing bodies and teachers. The Secretaries of State do not intend to alter the existing statutory relationship between these various partners. Indeed they believe that the effective development and implementation of curricular policies must be based upon a clear understanding of, and must pay proper regard to, the responsibilities and interests of each of the partners and the contribution which each can make.

4. Nevertheless the Education Acts lay upon Ministers the duty to "promote the education of the people in England and Wales". This must involve an

C O N F I D E N T I A L

overall view of the content and quality of education seen from the standpoint of national policies and needs as well as the resources devoted to it. The Secretaries of State do not seek to determine in detail what the schools should teach or how it should be taught; but they have an inescapable duty to satisfy themselves that the work of the schools matches national needs. This task cannot be undertaken from the centre alone. The Government must bring together the partners in the education service and the interests of the community at large; and with them seek an agreed view of the school curriculum which would take account of the range of local needs and allow for local developments, drawing upon the varied skills and experience which all those concerned with the service can contribute.

5. The Education Acts lay the responsibility of providing efficient and sufficient primary and secondary education to meet the needs of their areas firmly on local education authorities. As with central Government, this implies a concern by authorities with the content and quality of education as well as with the facilities which they provide. To fulfil their responsibilities effectively within any nationally agreed framework authorities must exercise leadership and interpret national policies and objectives in the light of local needs and circumstances. Moreover, local authorities are concerned with policies for the level and distribution of resources, including staff, buildings, equipment and materials, which inter-act upon curriculum and standards of achievement. They are also in a position to foster co-operation and complementary provision among their schools, and between schools and further education colleges. It is therefore essential that they should be aware of, and take account of, the implications of their decisions on such matters for the curricula offered by their schools and colleges.

6. This does not mean that authorities should seek a detailed control of school curricula in their areas: but it does impose on them a responsibility to formulate curricular policies and objectives which meet national policies and objectives and command local assent. The Secretaries of State believe that the formulation of local policies, and decisions concerning their implementation, would be improved if local authorities were better informed about the curricular practices and aims of their schools and the extent to which the schools are successful in achieving these aims.

7. At the heart of the system are the individual schools. Their role is

vital, both in contributing to the formulation of agreed local policies, and in translating these into curricular content in the light of particular needs and circumstances. Existing articles of government for secondary schools commonly delegate to the governors "the general direction of the conduct and curriculum of the school", although curricular matters are often in practice devolved upon the head teacher and staff. Whatever the formal responsibilities of governing bodies there should always be the closest consultation and co-operation between the governors, head teacher and staff. Governing bodies can provide a forum for bringing together teachers, parents and the local community. In turn the teachers provide subject expertise and professional experience, and the fullest knowledge of opportunities and constraints, and of individual pupils' capabilities and expectations. At the end of the day, what schools teach and achieve remains a measure of the interest of the governing body and of the dedication and competence of the head teacher and the whole staff.

Local education authorities' policy and information needs

8. A nationally agreed framework for the curriculum is obviously very significant for teacher policies and resources at both national and local education authority level. In the view of the Secretaries of State it has a particular relevance to local education authorities' policies in the following areas:

staffing and staff development (including provision for posts of special responsibility in schools, and in-service training);

assessment (levels of performance within individual schools and throughout authorities' schools);

resources (covering buildings, equipment and financial allocations, including capitation);

educational records of individual pupils;

co-operation between schools and further education;

co-operation between schools and industry.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

9. The responses to Circular 14/77 show that many authorities have developed policies in these areas. Such policies cannot be isolated from resource considerations, but are not totally dependent on them. It is important to look hard at desirable aims and objectives, and to establish proper priorities for the future. The report which follows contains many references to in-service training needs and the role of the local advisory services, both of which may be circumscribed by financial constraints in the short term. But many developments aimed at making the most effective use of both in-service training and advisory services can yield a big return for a modest outlay, or even be carried out without additional manpower.

10. On the evidence of the replies to Section A many authorities need to increase their working knowledge of what goes on in their schools, in order to improve their capability to develop and implement more effective approaches to staffing, curriculum development, assessment and the distribution of resources, all of which should be closely related to their curricular policies and the aims of the schools. Where improvements are needed in these respects it is for authorities themselves to decide how to make them.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Areas of specific concern

11. The responses to Section C of Circular 14/77 show that many authorities already have in hand a range of initiatives in respect of parts of the curriculum which have recently been topics of general concern. Evidence from HM Inspectorate's various surveys and from other sources indicates the need for further action. The Secretaries of State would like to see improvement in a number of respects:

- a. English There is a continuing need to extend good practice, and to give more help towards literacy to meet the requirements of the adult world (C2).
- b. Mathematics Many authorities are already producing guidelines for their schools (C4) but continued emphasis is needed on developing the mathematical skills suited to the needs of school-leavers at 16 entering employment (C5). There is some indication of a need for more co-operation among schools, and between schools and colleges.
- c. Modern Languages There is a need for clear policies on the provision of modern languages in primary, middle and secondary schools (C8, C9 and C10). Such policies must take account of the availability of teachers. The dominant position of French gives rise to concern about the position of other major languages. Decisions about the ages at which children should start (and finish) modern language courses, and about the languages available are often made at school level. The Secretaries of State believe that there should be more local co-ordination in the light of broad guidelines which would help to promote national coherence and protect the position of less commonly taught modern languages.
- d. Science Authorities have indicated their concern to tackle the deficiencies in primary science (C13) identified by the survey of 'Primary Education in England'. This problem and the replies from authorities on secondary science (C14) viewed in the light of known weaknesses of provision for the age range 13-16 suggest that further guidance is necessary on science options in secondary schools (C14 and C15), on the relationship between school science and industrial

processes (C14 and C16) and on the co-ordination of planning for science education for the 16-19 age groups between schools and further education (C15 and C17).

- e. Religious Education Authorities' positions in respect of reviews of their agreed syllabuses vary widely (C20). All authorities are required by law to have an agreed syllabus, and it is desirable for it to be reviewed from time to time.

- f. Preparation for working life The Secretaries of State believe that all authorities should regard the setting up of an adequate liaison arrangement between schools and industry as a major educational responsibility. They commend three particular matters to authorities for further action: careers education, work experience and understanding the national importance of industry. It remains a matter for concern that the importance of careers work in schools, including links with the careers service, is still often under-recognised, that the potentialities of work experience on a wider scale have not been sufficiently explored and that many pupils are not being taught how industry creates national wealth and the ways in which we depend upon industry for our standards of living.

- g. Welsh Language The Secretary of State for Wales will be publishing an independent report within Wales on the Welsh Language section of WO Circular 185/77. (In all other respects, however, the report on authorities' curricular arrangements covers England and Wales.)

12. A great deal of valuable work on the curriculum has been done in recent years by many agencies. The various associations connected with subject teaching have been particularly active. The Bullock Committee reported on English teaching in 1975 and the Cockcroft Committee on mathematics is expected to report by about the end of 1980. In addition HM Inspectorate's surveys of primary and secondary education and their work with 41 schools in 5 local education authorities on their working papers Curriculum 11-16 provide evidence of the ways schools operate the curriculum and respond to the

challenge of one sort of coherent framework.

13. The Secretaries of State consider that the time is ripe to draw these threads together as far as possible and to seek a measure of general agreement. The summary of responses to Circular 14/77 suggests that not all authorities have a clear view of the desirable structure of the school curriculum, especially its core elements. They believe they should seek to give a lead in the process of reaching a national consensus on a desirable framework for the curriculum and consider the development of such a framework a priority for the education service. They recognise that this is a complex and difficult task. Such a framework will need to relate to the broad shape of the whole curriculum for the various stages of school education, and be capable of flexibility in accordance with changing perceptions over time of individual and social needs. It would give central government a firmer basis for the development of national policies and the deployment of resources; and provide a check-list for authorities and schools in formulating and reviewing their curricular aims and policies in the light of local needs and circumstances, and for teachers in exercising their professional skills and extending the interests of their pupils. Conceived in this way an agreed framework could offer a significant step forward in the quest for improvement in the consistency and quality of school education across the country.

14. As a first step towards the development of such a framework the Secretaries of State have invited HM Inspectorate to formulate a view of a possible curriculum on the basis of their knowledge of schools. The Education Departments will draw up and circulate a draft policy document suggesting the form a framework for the curriculum might take and the ground it should cover. This document will provide a basis for consultations within and beyond the education service which the Secretaries of State propose to hold ^{early} in 1980.

15. The consultations will seek to reconcile the broad range of views on curricular issues, and to concentrate on the many points where agreement should be possible. They will give an opportunity for a constructive exchange of views, based on proposals which will reflect current thinking within the Departments and HM Inspectorate. The Secretaries of State recognise that some issues may arise which will need to be referred to specialist groups for further study, but at the end of the consultations, the Education Departments expect to publish a revised version of the framework document for the guidance of local education authorities and schools, which would be subject to periodic review.



Edw

10 DOWNING STREET

MR. LANKESTER

The Prime Minister is having a meeting next week with the Secretary of State for Education and Lady Young to discuss the DES proposals for further work on the school curriculum.

As Nick is away, you will have to do this meeting and I attach the relevant papers so that you can refresh your memory with the subject.

Edw.

5 September 1979

Caroline
Can we find time (1/2 hr) !
for this next wk?
MAP

PRIME MINISTER

You did not like the DES proposals for further work on the school curriculum. You instructed that Mr. Carlisle should define his objective, and how he intended to achieve it, before launching further national work.

Lady Young believes that it is now urgent to make progress on this. I understand that she feels that the objective can now be more tightly defined. She has asked if she, and Mr. Carlisle who should be back shortly, could come to discuss this with you next week.

Would you be prepared to spend half an hour on this next week, or would you prefer to ask Lady Young to put her proposals in writing?

MAP

Yes m.

4 September 1979

11 Sept - (Thursday).
S.



Tyfi
To see for PM's discussion
with Lady Young and I next
week.

MP 7/1/x

PERSONAL

MR PATTISON

c Sir Derek Rayner

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

You mentioned that, having analysed returns following Circular 14/77, DES were proposing to enter a round of consultation with the "partners" on what should be done next.

2. In discussion with me this morning, Mr J G Owen, Director of Education for Devon, referred to the exercise without prompting. He said that the ideas of "guidelines" and "review" from and by the centre were much more in vogue now than they had been in the 1960s and early 1970s; he himself could get his own Education Committee to accept a policy of reviewing the performance of schools quite easily, for example.

3. Mr Owen thought it would be a great pity if DES now got stuck in consultation with the ACC, AMA and others, rather than (a) making the factual information provided by Circular 14/77 available generally and (b) publishing "norms" for educational provision and attainment (eg in English, Mathematics and Science). To consult would take a lot more time and probably miss the opportunity for reform represented by the public disquiet which produced Circular 14/77 in the first place and by what he described as the "softening up" of the education profession by that disquiet and the Circular.

4. I think that Mr Owen is right. The present exercise has been long drawn out. It began on Mr Callaghan's initiative in summer 1976 (three years ago) leading to DES's "Yellow Book"; was publicly launched by his speech at Ruskin College in autumn 1976; proceeded through the so-called "Great Debate" of winter/spring 1976 - 77; and culminated in the issue of Circular 14/77 (two years ago). To take the exercise into a new stage of consultation, unless this is done very expeditiously, does not seem to give the improvement of educational performance the urgency it deserves; risks paying excessive regard to the amour propre of the educational establishment; and may depress officers and others who, like Mr Owen, are only too ready to receive and act on a clear message from those who have the national responsibility of "promoting the education of the people", ie the Secretary of State and his department.

CP

C PRIESTLEY

30 August 1979