Has the Prime Minister read it? In full? This note does clearly deflect PRIME MINISTER for him now by Mr Carlisle's response on the relative value of the H.M.I. survey

MAP 20/XII.

PRIME MINISTER

I was glad that you had the opportunity to look through the HMI survey of aspects of secondary education in England. You asked for my views on the relative value of this kind of work. I think that the HMI survey has been a most valuable study for a number of reasons.

First the survey is based on detailed inspection of schools, but with the focus limited to those aspects deemed professionally and publicly to be of greatest importance - the shape of the curriculum, language, mathematics, science and personal development (including careers education). In respect of these the form of inspection within the Survey was as rigorous as, and perhaps more so than, within a full inspection. But we could not conceivably have mounted about 400 full inspections in 3 years because we do not have enough specialist HMI. Nor is there the same national concern about subjects like PE, home economics, art or drama - although HMI continue to deal with them in routine inspections.

Second, in terms of effect on schools there is little difference between a national secondary survey-type inspection and a full inspection. The oral report made to the school is exactly the same, within the limits of the exercise, as for a full inspection and, while it is true there was no written report to the governing body and LEA, such a report is always less "hard" than the oral one and possibly less useful in terms of its effect on the school's performance.

Third, the statistical methods underlying an approach of this kind increase the value of HMI time spent, in that they allow generalisations to be made in a publicly usable form about the organisation of schools and the standards of performance. No amount of individual full inspections giving rise to the traditional "rubric" report could ever focus national attention on major matters of concern. Nor could such reports enlist the support and interest of parents, industrialists, examining boards and others because they would not know what had been said. By contrast the follow-up programme to the report, which will deal with broad and specific issues will allow HMI to be engaged in serious debate with every Chief Education Officer in the country in a series of regional conferences to be held in January and February of next year.

M.C.

MARK CARLISLE
20 December 1979

Education

JAH

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

10 December 1979

BF 17.12.79

As I mentioned to you on the telephone today, the Prime Minister had a chance last weekend to look through the HMI survey on aspects of secondary education.

She would be interested to have Mr. Carlisle's views on the relative value of this kind of work, given the amount of time it must have involved both for inspectors and schools. Has this been at the expense of rather more detailed individual inspections?

M. A. PATTISON

R.J. Green, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.

GB

JE

PRIME MINISTER

To be aware of tomorrow's publication of this report. The Duty Clerk has a copy if you want to glance at it tonight: otherwise, I will put it in the week-end box

MAP 4/XII

2.

PRIME MINISTER

The HMI report of their national secondary survey, "Aspects of Secondary Education in England" will be published at 12 noon tomorrow and I enclose a copy for you. — report filed in separate folder.

The Survey was carried out between October 1975 and March 1978 and concentrated on the education of pupils during the last two years of compulsory education. HMI inspected 384 schools of all types and these formed a structured sample of about 10% of all maintained secondary schools with pupils between 14 and 16.

The report does not allow comparison to be made with the past nor does it purvey any message about one type of school being preferable to another. It gives a general evaluation of the chosen aspects of secondary education and provides both a valuable analysis of problems which need to be tackled and a base line against which to measure future progress. It shows that there is much to be thankful for in terms of achievement and potential but identifies matters of concern such as inequalities of staffing or curriculum as well as specific weaknesses of provision. Some of HMI's findings have resources implications but the report recognises present constraints and there is much which LEAs and schools can do within their present means. The report's evidence reinforces the action we already have in hand in respect of the curriculum and standards.

M.C.

MARK CARLISLE
4 December 1979

Mark - do you really think there is much point in this kind of massive survey which must have taken a lot of HM I's time & schools time. I would far rather have more detailed inspections.

MT