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CABINET

THE SCHOOL BUILDING PROGRAMMEMemorandum by the Minister of Education

In November, 1954, the Cabinet agreed to a much-needed increase in school building, more especially of secondary schools in rural areas, which had come off badly compared with the towns (C.C.(54) 80th Conclusions, Minute 4). Local authorities got to work on the enlarged programme for 1955/56, but shortages of various kinds were holding up a good many projects when in February last the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked me to cut £10 millions off the 1956/57 programme which had, with Treasury consent, been given to authorities some months previously.

2. I pointed out that as the carry-over from 1955/56 was likely to be more than £10 millions it would be necessary to adopt sterner measures. We therefore agreed -

- (a) that I would do whatever was necessary to see that £20 millions of starts should be carried forward from 1955/56 into 1956/57;
- (b) that the total amount of work to be started in the first half of 1956/57 should not exceed £25 millions;
- (c) that the total amount to be started in 1956/57 should not exceed £47 millions, subject to a later review of the allocation for the second half of the year.

If the forecast of the carry-over proved correct the result would be to push not £10 millions but £30 millions of work out of the 1956/57 programme, i. e. £20 millions carry-over + £57 millions authorised in 1956/57 minus £47 millions allowed to start = £30 millions.

But in the event the carry-over at 31st March last was £32 millions not £20 millions.

3. The Chancellor would like me to disregard the fact that £12 millions less schools were started before the arbitrary date of 31st March than the forecast and to stick to £47 millions of starts for the whole of 1956/57. This would mean that £42 millions, or three-quarters of the schools already approved for the current year, would be postponed till 1957/58. Such a heavy reduction would rouse a storm because most of the schools in the current programme must be started this year to be completed in time for the maximum increase in

the secondary school roll, which occurs in September, 1958. If, therefore, I do as the Chancellor wishes we make certain of acute shortages of secondary school places in the years 1958 and 1959.

4. I ask therefore to be allowed to tell the local authorities that we are working to the following time-table:

(£ millions: current prices)			
1956/57 (first half)	1956/57 (second half)	1957/58 (first half)	1957/58 (second half)
30	25	30	30

and to put this to them as an extension of the 1956/57 programme to 30th September, 1957 to be followed by a programme for 1957/58 of half the expected size.

5. In short, school building would lose a whole six months' programme. That the impact on the building industry would be merely to hold the level of starts is due to the fact that I have to cut down on a policy of sharp expansion to which we have repeatedly committed ourselves. To go any further would be inconsistent with the technical education programme which rests on adequate secondary schools.

D.E.

Ministry of Education, W.1.

4th June, 1956.