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Education spending has fallen, study says

*Independent**23 May 1987*

Academics attack cuts in schools

THE Government's claim that spending on schools has been rising steadily in recent years is being challenged by a group of university statisticians.

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THE GOVERNMENT's proud boast that spending on schools has been rising steadily in recent years has been challenged by a group of university statisticians.

The critical analysis of education spending figures by young academics belonging to the Radical Statistics Education Group says that government capital spending in the schools has been heavily cut, spending on textbooks in secondary schools has fallen, and that the pupil-teacher ratio in nursery schools is deteriorating.

A copy of the report, released exclusively to *The Independent* before publication early next week, claims:—

- Government spending in 1984 on each pupil in the assisted places scheme, which subsidises the fees of pupils from low-income families attending independent secondary schools, is 28 per cent higher than the amount spent on each state secondary school pupil — £1,520 as opposed to £1,192 per pupil in 1984 prices.
- Capital spending on education in 1985 was 25 per cent lower than it was in 1978.
- Secondary school spending per pupil on books fell by 25 per cent between 1979 and 1984.
- The pupil-teacher ratio in nursery schools was 8 per cent higher in 1985 than in 1980.
- While pupil-teacher ratios in the independent sector have fallen by 12 per cent since 1979, those in the public sector have only fallen by 4 per cent.
- Pupil-teacher ratios in independent schools are at least 45 per cent lower than in state-maintained secondary schools.
- The Government places a much higher priority on military expenditure, and spending on

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public order and safety, than on education spending.

The main author of the report, Ian Plewis, a statistics lecturer at the University of London Institute of Education, says in his introduction that Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education, has repeatedly asserted that real spending on education has steadily increased, that real spending per pupil has been rising and that class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios have been falling.

However, he adds: "Many who work for the state education service, and those who experience it as consumers or parents of consumers, have not seen things getting steadily better."

He concludes that "public perceptions of a deteriorating service are much nearer the truth than government assertions of improvement."

Although real spending on education rose by 5 per cent between 1979 and 1984, it dropped by 3 per cent in 1985 to its lowest level since 1979.

Military and public order expenditure on the other hand, the authors say, rose by 22 and 28 per cent respectively since 1979.

While there has been a steady increase in expenditure in secondary schools, the steady rise in primary school spending per head halted in 1983.

In 1984 spending fell to £612 per head in 1980 prices from £613 the previous year.

■ *Figuring Out Education Spending*, the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, 25 Horsell Road, London, N5, £1.