

The Education group is thinking about official education statistics and will present some ideas to the next AGM/Conference. Soon afterwards, we hope to produce a pamphlet, a companion to the Health Group's 'Unsafe in Their Hands'. Meanwhile, here is a short piece which we hope will whet your appetite, and persuade you to come to York for more details, and to let us have your views.

The long-running teachers' dispute has made education an important political issue and the replacement of Sir Keith Joseph by Kenneth Baker has led to a more vigorous defence of Conservative education policy. The government relies heavily on two assertions:

- 1) Real spending on education is increasing
- 2) Pupil teachers ratios (PTRs) and, by implication, class sizes are falling.

There are a number of questions which we should be asking, for example:

- a) Are the assertions true, even in their own broad terms?
- b) Even if broadly true, how well do they hold up when disaggregated?
- c) How much local variation do national statistics obscure?
- d) Are there other measures which tell a different story?
- e) Do important data remain uncollected or unpublished?

Here we comment very briefly on each of these questions:

a) Data from the 1986 UK National Accounts show that overall government spending on education rose slowly between 1978 and 1984 (by about 4% in real terms) but then fell back in 1985 to a level below that in 1980. So the first assertion is not true. (A slightly different picture can be obtained from DES spending but this excludes spending in Scotland and Northern Ireland and includes spending on science, libraries etc.) Between 1978 and 1985, total expenditure rose 15%, defence expenditure rose 25% and spending on public order and safety rose 33%.

DES statistics show that PTRs have fallen from 1978 to 1985 but not in all sectors and not in all local authorities. Also, the PTR is a statistic of rather dubious value.

b) Changes in overall education spending have been small but changes in capital expenditure (land, equipment and buildings) have been dramatic, as the figure below shows. Capital expenditure on education fell by 35% between 1978 and 1982, and was still 28% below the 1978 level in 1985.

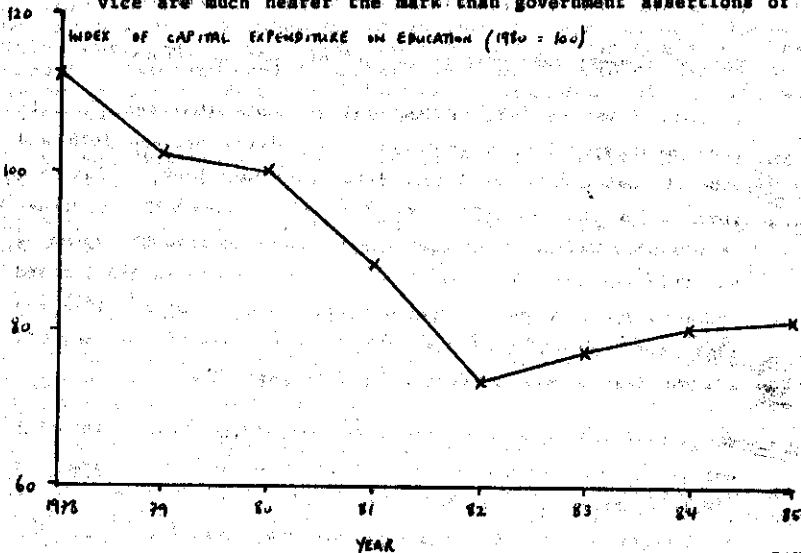
PTRs in secondary schools have fallen consistently from 1978 to 1985. PTRs in primary schools fell from 1978 to 1984 but rose again in 1985. PTRs in nursery schools and classes have risen steadily from 1981 and are now higher than they were in 1978. So the second assertion is only half true.

c) In 10 (out of 96) English LEAs, secondary PTRs were higher in 1985 than in 1979. In 8 LEAs, primary PTRs were higher in 1985 than in 1979. And in 14 LEAs, the proportion of under 5s in nursery schools and classes fell between 1979 and 1985.

d) Per capita expenditure on books in secondary schools (data put together by the Educational Publishers Council from statistics produced by CIPFA) shows a marked decline from 1979 to 1984.

e) No data are available on expenditure on the maintenance of school premises or on spending on teacher induction and in-service training.

Clearly, if unsurprisingly, the situation is not what the government would like us to think it is. Public perceptions of a deteriorating service are much nearer the mark than government assertions of improvement.



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