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FROM: PS/Jane Kennedy
16 June 2003

cc: See Distribution List

June Ingram - E

RETURN VISIT TO MALVERN STREET AND EDENBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOLS, 13 JUNE

Summary

Both schools reported considerable progress since the Ministers last visit and were extremely grateful for the support provided by the Minister and the Department of Education. However there was still more to be accomplished and the longer term problems needed to be addressed.

Detail

Jane Kennedy, you and I visited Malvern Street and Edenbrook Primary Schools in the Lower Shankill for a progress report following the Ministers last visit in February.

Malvern Street

2. Head teacher Robert Irvine provided a written update in advance of the visit detailing improvements in the school and any major concerns they had. **(See Annexe 1).**
3. During the visit Mr Irvine made the following points:-
 - The situation had improved dramatically this year with the additional resources made available by the Department which had enabled him to employ one extra teacher and one extra classroom assistant. The most significant improvement was enabling the most problematic class to be split and the effect had been amazing. He appreciated that the level of support would only continue for one further year but was hopeful that that would be sufficient to enable the chain of disruption to be broken. The behaviour of this particular class has had a knock-on effect on the whole school and since the class split the improvement has been echoed throughout the school.



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4. The Minister met the two teachers who were now looking after the 'split' P6 class. They each had nine pupils and they could not believe the difference in the children. Previously, with one class, it had been a struggle to bring any sort of order and maintain control never mind teach. Now the children were well behaved, attendance and attentiveness had improved and the children were enjoying the learning process.

5. On the down side, longer term planning was still a real problem and Mr Irvine tended to work only on a yearly programme as it was difficult to make longer term plans. Added to that he had recently been informed that he must pay off one teacher next year which the school could simply not afford to lose. He had taken the decision to carry on with current staffing levels and was critical of the lack of flexibility and understanding afforded to his school. He hoped the deficit in funding would decrease as he was replacing an experienced teacher (who was leaving to take up further studies) with a newly trained teacher whose salary would be lower.

6. Mr Irvine was critical of BELB for its lack of understanding and lack of contact. He rarely saw or heard from BELB except with bad news such as a 23.9% decrease in his school budget.

7. The playground areas were still untouched, as the grant from BRO had still not materialised. Mr Irvine was hopeful that the grant would follow but he had already been waiting quite some time.

8. Mr Irvine had opened up previously unused rooms for after school activities etc and he had offered the use of the school to voluntary agencies and churches. The voluntary agencies were providing support and he hoped that it would continue over the summer holiday period. When the school was closed during the summer months the pupils could easily return to their old ways without that guiding influence.

9. There was some work ongoing with other schools in the area, particularly Edenbrook, and Mr Irvine was keen to see that grow. Football matches and joint choirs had already been arranged and he would be keen to develop other initiatives. There was a lot of talent in the school and pupils had already participated in competitions.



10. Other secondary and grammar schools in the area were also assisting out as it was in their best interest to help their future pupils. A system of mentoring had been introduced, where secondary/grammar pupils came and spent time helping out in Malvern Street with activities such as Art, Music and Sport. This had proved to be very effective.

11. Mr Irvine said that ideally he would like one person appointed to act as a contact point/co-ordinator. He suggested someone from the Department of Education to take on that role. It would help cut through all the red tape and ensure that a co-ordinated approach was adopted. There were a lot of voluntary agencies willing to help and he believed with the help of a co-ordinator much could be achieved. The NSPCC and Barnardos had shown a particular interest.

12. Unfortunately Mr Irvine also reported that paramilitary activity in the area was still high. After Alan McCullough's murder, tensions had risen and the general feeling was that more trouble was brewing.

Edenbrook

13. The Minister was met by head teacher Betty Orr who could not wait to show the Minister the refurbishment which was taking place. Some rooms were being decorated and there had been significant changes with the addition of a 'roomy' parent room complete with sofas and a kitchen area. The community foundation for NI had paid for the conversion of a parent's room and it was hoped that the room would be used constantly. Barnardos had also committed to a 15 year programme where the assistance provided by them would work with the parents after school hours. Mrs Orr had also been successful in securing funding from DSD and she had many plans for the school.

14. Mrs Orr was full of praise for the laundry agencies. The Community Foundation, Barnardos, Greater Shankill Initiative, The Vine had all joined forces in helping to secure the DSD money which would also fund a school's co-ordinator. She saw that person taking on the role as described by Robert Irvine rather than someone from the Department of Education.



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15. While the voluntary agencies were providing assistance there was little forthcoming from the Education Sector. Mrs Orr did not wish to be critical of individuals in BELB who were all good people but there was a real lack of understanding and there did not appear to be anyone who cared about the children. There was no-one with the power to make things happen and you were constantly hit with layers of bureaucracy. There had been no contact from BELB since the Minister's last visit.

16. The problems facing the pupils and teachers were still great and the difficulties of lack of education psychology had not improved. The teachers were very dedicated and patient and only referred the child for psychology once all other avenues had been exhausted but they then faced several months of waiting before the child could be seen. That needed to improve greatly.

17. Mrs Orr was very grateful for the assistance which had been forthcoming after the Minister's last visit. The provision of an extra teacher and classroom assistant had made all the difference. Two large classes had been split into three and the teachers had immediately seen an improvement. The separation of the worst of the trouble makers and the provision of more individual attention had paid off. The improvement in behaviour and performance had been significant. The Minister was introduced to three teachers who were very grateful for her intervention. While the problems had not gone away they were now easier to cope with. However, there was still some severely disturbed children and two in particular were mentioned; one had threatened suicide and the other simply could not cope with school or people and only managed to spend part of each day at school before having to go back home.

18. The teachers while noting a great improvement at the minute were concerned about the pupils behaviour in September after the school holidays when they would have lost their routine. School was the only stability they had.

19. The paramilitary influence was still as bad as ever. The murder of Alan McCullough had raised tension in the area. The children were very aware of what was going on and still threatened their fellow classmates whose families might be on the other side of the feud. There was also the fear that some of the children would be recruited; at aged 10 they were allowed to become involved!



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20.

[REDACTED]

Comment

21. The Minister was encouraged by the improvements in both schools but noted that there was still a lot more to be achieved. She was disappointed at the lack of contact from BELB and suggested that she should meet to discuss further. **[Diary Secretary to arrange please]**. She would also like to meet with officials to discuss a strategic plan for the schools in the Shankill. **[Diary Secretary to arrange please.]**

Signed

DOREEN McCLINTOCK

Private Secretary

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cc: Secretary of State (B&L) - O
PS/Jane Kennedy (B&L)- O
Joe Pilling (B&L) - O
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Mark McGuckin - O
Mary Madden - O
Christine Jendoubi (DENI) - E
Peter Lowry (DENI) - E
Brian Hill (DENI) - E
Mary Lemon - O
Kim Martin (DENI) - E
Fiona Barnes (DENI) - E
Patricia Murray (DENI) - E



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MALVERN PRIMARY SCHOOL RE VISIT BY JANE KENNEDY 13 JUNE 2003

Improvements in the school

School is relatively settled. The P6 split has enabled each child to be given a lot more individual time and for volatile combinations to be separated accordingly, the children are now experiencing:-

- A rise in their self-esteem and self confidence
- A rise in their individual attainments
- A rise in expectations – both theirs' and the teachers'
- Slightly better attendance figures
- Improvements in punctuality

The staff morale has also been boosted by the addition of the extra teacher and the support given by DENI. Behaviour is still a major issue for quite a few of the children who are still subject to the tensions of the area. Overall the behaviour of the children is much improved.

Major concerns

- The most pressing concern is the budget for the 2003/2004 year and the level of service we can provide because of the cut in our allocation.
- The school environment should be improved now that BPO may finally (after one year from application) be going to give approval for the playground project.
- The Lower Shankill area is still very tense. Since February the area still has ongoing problems with families facing eviction and intimidation. The Alan McCullough incident increased the tension even more so. Last week the P5 children were coming back to school in a PSNI bus. The driver reported that when the news began the children all fell silent and listened intently. At the end of the week there was a show of strength from supporters of the ousted Johnny Adair who were apparently making themselves known as a still present force and expressed their dissatisfaction with the new "leadership".



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The area is quite volatile, very unpredictable and impossible to give an authoritative statement on. It is possible to say that the children are reflecting that instability.

Personalities

3. My hope is that Ms Kennedy will have a short chat to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] – the two P6 teachers, in their classrooms before talking with me. I have invited the chair of the Board of Governors but he has informed me that he has a prior engagement and will probably not be here.

ROBERT IRVINE
PRINCIPAL

