

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Bief

You are to give an interview to six children from Primet Primary School, Colne, Lancashire tomorrow morning following a survey their class has conducted into water pollution in their area. The interview will be filmed by BBC Schools Television's "Landmarks" for transmission in the autumn when they will be running six programmes looking at air and water pollution, food quality, recycling and conservation of animal and plant habitats. They have been following the children and their project. Part of the interview with the children will be shown on BBC TV's "North West Tonight".

The project is loosely connected with Greenpeace's East/West Educational Project involving 18 schools in nine countries - the USA, Canada, USSR, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. There are computer links between the schools.

The pupils, aged between 10 and 11, who will interview you are:

- Kenneth Bracewell
- Scott Elliott
- Andrew Pinder
- Nicola Edwards
- Carley Ogden
- Gemma Beveridge

and Quratulann Ebrahim will be making a video recording for the school. They will be accompanied by their class teacher, Mrs Stephanie Smith who has been leading them in this project.

Most of the class, of about 30, have been in London all this week. They have visited Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, seen you at Question Time on Tuesday, seen Starlight Express and visited the Natural History Museum.

One of the surveys the children have been doing is in to pollution in Colne Water, which is a tributary of the River Calder. They will be bringing with them samples of the water taken from the area. They will want to talk to you about river pollution, what is being done to stop this and what part the public can play in ensuring that rivers become much cleaner than they are today. They will also ask you about the problems of litter generally.

Water Quality in the Colne Area

The National River Authority are at the moment carrying out a River Quality Survey in the Colne area. The last was done in 1985.

There are two main water courses in the Colne area, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and Colne Water. In 1985 the Canal was Class 1A

(good quality) above Colne, deteriorating to Class 2 (fair quality) at Colne and remaining at that quality for a considerable distance beyond. Colne Water is a river fed by streams running off moorland which becomes Pendlewater below Colne and in return flows into the River Calder some 4 miles south of Colne. In 1985 Colne Water was Class 2 (fair), though the upper reaches and the moorland streams were of much higher quality. Pendlewater deteriorates to Class 3 (poor quality) about 3 miles south of Colne, and the River Calder was Class 3 as far as its confluence with the River Ribble some 10 miles to the south west. The Ribble was Class 1A in its upper reaches, deteriorating to Class 2 below its confluence with the Calder.

In your interview with the children you could point out that in the Colne area there is a very varied river quality, including both clean upland streams and problem areas lower down as a result of industry and disused mines. Recent pollution incidents have been caused by discharges from water treatment works and from leaking sewers. The water authority has been investing heavily in sewage improvements in an effort to clean up the rivers in this area. One of the major problems is pollution from industrial waste. The setting up last September of the independent National Rivers Authority considerably strengthens water pollution control and gives this country the strongest environmental protection agency in Europe. The NRA is responsible for regulating discharges to the water, monitoring water quality and investigating pollution incidents. They also have the power to take action against those who do pollute our rivers and streams. Local councils and people living in the area are free to draw the NRA's attention to local pollution problems that concern them.

You can also point out that a tremendous amount of work is being done in this country to improve the quality of our water. Over the next 10 years the investment programme totals £26.3 million. This includes £11 billion for investment at sewage treatment works and in the system of sewers, of which £1 billion is intended specifically to bring substandard sewage treatment works up to standard.

You can also point out that river quality in Britain is generally very good. 95 per cent of rivers in the UK (90% for England and Wales) are of good or fair quality. For the EEC as a whole the comparable figure is only 75 per cent. Since 1985 there has been a reduction in the length of poor and bad quality rivers in England and Wales and a comprehensive river quality survey is being carried out by the NRA at the moment.

The Government is committed to achieving further improvements in river quality, to achieve a steady reduction in poor quality rivers and eliminate those of bad quality. The remaining problems are largely a legacy of the industrial revolution.

Millions of pounds will be spent over the next ten years to build new sewers, renovating old sewers, eliminating unsatisfactory

storm sewage over-flows and improving our sewage treatment works. But at the same time we must all be vigilant to make sure that others, including industry, do not pollute our rivers and streams, and the surveys of the kind conducted by Primet School can make people aware of the importance of making sure that our rivers are kept clean. This does not just include stopping chemicals and other industrial waste appearing in our rivers but also putting a stop to the tonnes of rubbish which are dumped into some rivers by people who do not care. As one of their surveys says, they found bottles, cans, old metal, polythene sheets, cardboard and wood in Colne Water.

The children could also ask you about Blackpool beaches as they carried out a survey on what tourists thought about pollution in that resort.

The Department of Environment say that quality of water in that area is poor and an improvement scheme was proposed by the beginning of 1989. This is still with the Environment Secretary but in the light of the recent announcement that all sewage discharged in the sea has to be treated he is minded to refuse this application.

You could say that there is an application for a major scheme to improve the bathing waters at Blackpool and this is now being considered by the Secretary of State for the Environment. You could also go on to say that 76 per cent of our bathing waters around Britain comply with European standards and that we will be spending £2.9 billion over the next few years to treat all significant discharges of sewage in to the sea to bring waters up to standard.

The Department of Health have recently confirmed that the risk of contracting serious illness from bathing in the sea around the United Kingdom is extremely small but we are now carrying out research to quantify the possible risks of minor illnesses such as gastro-enteritis.

I have enclosed two of the reports produced by the children. One is by Carley Ogden, aged 10, who looked at pollution in Blackpool and she will be among the children interviewing you tomorrow. The other is by 11 year old Daniel Kegg who looks at pollution in Colne Water.

Content for the interview to take place in the White Room?

T.J.P.

Yes

TERRY J PERKS
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