



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Apologies: Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Bronagh Irwin (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Carla Campbell (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9:56am in open session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend its agenda and discuss all matters in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Committee Composition

The Committee noted a tabled paper setting out the composition of the Committee.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Chairperson's welcome

The Chairperson formally welcomed the Deputy Chairperson and Members to the first meeting of the new Committee for Education.

Committee Members paid tribute to the work of teachers, principals and educational support staff. They highlighted educational priorities including: wellbeing; mental health; suicide awareness; childcare; the resolution of the teachers' pay and conditions dispute; the role of sport in schools; and the importance of schools and youth settings in providing preventative guidance on drug and alcohol abuse and drunk driving.

3.2 Informal Ministerial meeting

The Chairperson informed Members that along with the Deputy Chairperson he had met informally with the Minister for Education on Tuesday 21 January 2020. Discussions covered the Minister's priorities including: tackling underachievement; school budgets; Special Educational Needs; and options for the possible resolution of the teachers' pay and conditions dispute. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson raised issues relating to: underachievement; the capital programme; legacy school deficits; the need for innovative solutions to address childcare demand; and concerns relating to restraint and seclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs.

The Committee adjourned at 10:11am.

The Committee resumed at 10:12am.

4. Committee Procedures and Practices

The Committee noted the following guidance documents:

- Powers and Operation of Statutory Committees for Chairpersons and Members;
- Powers and operation of Standing and Adhoc Committees
- Role of the Chairperson;
- Role and function of the Education Committee office;
- Committee interactions with Department;
- Committee Correspondence;
- Questioning Witnesses; and
- Courtesy in the Committee.

The Committee was briefed by the Clerk regarding committee procedures and practices.

5. Educational Overview

The Committee noted the Department's 2013 OECD Country Background Report for Northern Ireland.

The Committee Clerk provided Members with an overview of education in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 11:08 am.

Ms Mullan left the meeting at 11:13 am.

Ms Mullan rejoined the meeting at 11:16 am.

Mr McCrossan rejoined the meeting at 11:24 am

Mr Butler left the meeting at 11:29 am

Mr Butler rejoined the meeting at 11:42 am

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister inviting him and his officials to provide an oral briefing on key educational matters and including written information in advance of the briefing on the following:

- the 2017-22 Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes, indicators, measures and related actions for education;
- objectives and progress in respect of the Education Transformation Programme including the timescales for the review of the Common Funding Scheme and the implementation of the revised Special Educational Needs Framework;
- the Department's capital projects including a detailed breakdown of expenditure and progress for the Strule Educational Campus as well as details of expenditure and progress relating to projects funded (wholly or in part) by Fresh Start; and
- progress in respect of the resolution of the teacher's pay and conditions dispute including the extent to which additional funding has been secured from HM Treasury.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department in order to determine whether information on parental involvement in children's education is currently being collected and whether the Department envisages developing a new PfG indicator in this regard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Parenting NI to an informal stakeholder meeting in order to discuss the importance and measurement of parental engagement in children's education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an update on its involvement in a working group which is to develop a suicide awareness strategy entitled Protect Life 2.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on Special Educational Needs statementing practices in other jurisdictions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on its Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy with a view to arranging a joint meeting with the Committee for Health in order to take evidence from the Department and the Health and Social Care Board on this and related strategies. The Committee further agreed to pre-empt this briefing with an informal stakeholder event on the Department's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to endeavour to arrange a joint meeting with the Committee for the Economy regarding the 14-19 Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on its policy on sport and physical education in schools and in particular the objectives, cost and status of the Primary Schools Curriculum Sports Programme.

6. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson asked Members if they had any interests to declare.

Members declared the following interests:

Chris Lyttle -	Member of Eastside Learning Partnership
Robbie Butler -	Governor, Killowen Primary School, Lisburn Boys' Brigade Officer, Magheragall Presbyterian Church
William Humphrey -	Governor, Edenbrooke Primary School Governor, Belfast Model School for Girls President, North West Belfast District Scout Council

7. Treatment of Subordinate legislation: Delegation of technical scrutiny to the Examiner of Statutory Rules

The Committee noted guidance on the consideration of statutory rules.

The following question was put and agreed by the Committee:

Agreed: That the Committee for Education, under Standing Order 43, resolves to delegate to the Examiner of Statutory Rules the technical scrutiny of statutory rules referred to the Committee under the above-mentioned Standing Order. The Committee further resolves that in carrying out this function the Examiner shall be authorised to report her technical findings on each statutory rule to the Assembly, and to the relevant Department, as well as to the Committee itself and to publish her report.

8. 2011 - 2016 Committee for Education Legacy Report

The Committee noted the Legacy Report of the 2011-16 predecessor Education Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Terms of Reference for the 2016-17 predecessor Committee's Inquiry into Educational Underachievement should be distributed to Members.

9. Access to Legacy papers

The following question was put and agreed by the Committee:

Agreed: That the Committee for Education agrees to access and publish, as appropriate, all unpublished papers obtained by the predecessor committee.

10. Minister for Education Briefing

The Committee noted that the briefing from the Minister for Education had been rescheduled for the next Committee meeting.

11. Correspondence

11.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

11.2 The Committee considered a response from the Education for Sustainable Development Forum (ESDF) dated 27 January 2017 to the predecessor Committee's Inquiry into Educational Underachievement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish this on its website.

11.3 The Committee noted a response dated 27 January 2017 to the predecessor Committee regarding Home to School Transport. The Committee noted that a briefing on this issue had been included in the draft forward work programme.

11.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing its Section 75 Quarterly Equality Screening Reports for 1 October 2016 – 31 December 2016 and 1 April 2017 – 30 June 2017.

11.5 The Committee noted a Strategic Investment Board (SIB) Investing Activity Report dated January 2017 and covering the Department's capital projects. The Committee noted that the Clerk had requested that SIB reinstitute the capital progress report for the Education Committee.

11.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department dated January 2017 providing a response to the Public Accounts Committee regarding what was described as a student finance whistle blower.

11.7 The Committee considered a Departmental consultation document dated January 2017 on online applications for free school meals and uniform grants.

Agreed: The Committee to write to the Department seeking an update on the outcome of the consultation.

11.8 The Committee considered correspondence from S.D. Little regarding environmental matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department so that it could respond to the correspondent directly.

11.9 The Committee noted correspondence dated January 2017 from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) regarding its review of children's mental health services. The Committee further noted that a briefing from NICCY on this matter was included in the draft forward work programme.

11.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority including notes from the Joint Consultative Forum meeting of 17 May 2017.

11.11 The Committee noted the Executive Office Brussels Report for April-June 2017.

11.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Attorney General for Northern Ireland congratulating the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson on their appointment.

11.13 The Committee considered restricted correspondence from concerned parents regarding a school. Members noted that the predecessor committee had written to both the PSNI and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) regarding the serious allegations that had been made. The Committee noted that the predecessor committee had been assured that all necessary measures had been taken.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that to write to CCMS and the Education Authority seeking an update on this matter.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme / Induction Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a number of changes to the scheduling of departmental and Education Authority briefings. The Committee also agreed to invite the teachers' unions to an informal meeting.

13. Any Other Business

13.1 Education Authority

Members noted that formal and informal briefings with the Education Authority were planned in the next 2 weeks. Some Members reported considerable frustration among schools in respect of their relationship with the Education Authority.

13.2 On-line access to Committee meeting packs

Members noted the current difficulties in accessing Committee meeting packs on-line.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would seek an update on the timing of the provision of laptops and the re-establishment of previous access arrangements for electronic committee meeting packs.

14. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 29 January 2020 at 9.45am in Room 30 Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35pm.

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
29 January 2020**