



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
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:

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9.59am in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Special Educational Needs (SEN) briefings

The Chairperson advised Members that the Education Authority had indicated that it would not provide a briefing as requested on 11 March 2020 on SEN delivery including particularly issues with statementing. It was understood that the Education Authority had informally indicated that it would be inappropriate to provide the briefing until the relevant internal audit report on statementing is available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating its disappointment that the Education Authority was unable to provide a public briefing on the important question of SEN statements and seeking the earliest possible sight of the internal audit report and an early date for the oral briefing on SEN delivery and statementing issues. The Committee also agreed to seek a further and more detailed breakdown of recent SEN allocations.

2.2 Informal Meetings

The Committee discussed scheduling of upcoming informal meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to endeavour to restrict informal meetings to the last two Tuesdays of every month when the Assembly is in session.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 12 February 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Department of Education – 2020-21 Budget Recap and 2017-22 Programme for Government (PfG) out-turns – Evidence Session

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.08am

Mr Gary Fair, Director of Finance, Department of Education;

Ms Susan Anderson, Assistant Director of Finance, Department of Education;

Ms Pauline Donnan, Head of Analytical Services Unit, Department of Education;

Ms Karen McCullough, Head of School Improvement Team, Department of Education;

Ms Alison Chambers, Director of Promoting Collaboration and Tackling Disadvantage, Department of Education; and

Mr Paul Brush, Director of Youth and Early Years, Department of Education

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Officials provided the Committee with an overview of the Department's 2020-21 budget submission and its current 2017-22 PfG out-turns.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee noted: a copy of the Department of Education's 2020-21 budget submission to the Department of Finance; relevant extracts from the Spring Supplementary Estimates and Vote on Account documents; and recent forwarded correspondence from the Minister of Finance in respect of end of year 2019-20 allocations.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 12:02pm

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department in respect of teaching and non-teaching redundancies, requesting an oral briefing and seeking:

- teaching and non-teaching redundancy figures for previous years and information on the Department's plans in this regard going forward;
- further information on the current number of classroom assistants and the probable impact of the Department's plans on the numbers of these non-teaching employees;
- an analysis of the value for money for previous and planned teaching and non-teaching redundancy schemes; and
- clarification on the Department's plans for the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding issues related to underachievement requesting an oral briefing on Extended Schools and the Partners in Education programme and seeking:

- further clarification in respect of related budget bids;
- information on the level of inter-departmental and inter-agency cooperation undertaken as part of the delivery of the Extended Schools programme;
- clarification on the nature of and timescale for its planned consultation on Partners in Education;
- further details on the North Belfast Extended Schools pilot which includes thematic autonomy for principals; and
- information on Extended School schemes in the North West of Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking information on and examples of fee-paying schools with charitable status which are entitled to claim rates relief.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on how school maintenance is prioritised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding school deficits and seeking details of the schools that have cumulative deficits of around £1m or higher as well as estimates of their ongoing in-year deficits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its support for nurture provision in schools and the maintenance of effective funding structures. The Committee further agreed to indicate its opposition to the discontinuation of funding for nurture in the existing 31 schools and to seek clarity on how the £2.5m of proposed nurture funding is to be allocated.

Mr McCrossan rejoined the meeting at 12:08pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking access to further information on 2017-22 PfG out-turns and a briefing on the development of the system-level education dashboard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on the attainment gap indicators and clarification on the number of children in receipt of Free School Meals and otherwise excluded from the PfG GCSE statistics.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department on the role of Physical Education (PE) in the curriculum and the PfG in respect of emotional health and wellbeing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on Sure Start and Early Years Pathway funding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to forward Departmental briefing papers to the Committee for Finance.

6. BookTrust NI – Bookstart Funding - Oral Briefing

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 12:12pm

Ms Liz Canning, Head of BookTrust NI;

Mr Conor McArdle, Project Manager, South Armagh Sure Start;

Dr Kate Mairs, Parent and Academic (QUB and Newcastle University);
and

Ms Shona Johnston, Family Nurse Partnership Manager South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Witnesses provided the Committee with an overview of the work of BookTrust NI.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 12:51pm

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Mr McNulty left the meeting at 12:59pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating its support for BookTrust NI's bid for £50,000 towards the costs of its Babypack programme. The Committee further agreed to ask the Minister to consider: the considerable value for money benefits of the different BookTrust NI packages; their impact on tackling limited rural access to library resources; the usefulness of including programmes of this kind in a future PfG (as a way of supporting parental involvement in children's

education); and the scope for cooperation with other departments in order to fund these complementary early intervention measures.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Committee for Health seeking its support for the BookTrust NI bid.

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to BookTrust NI in order to arrange further literacy promotion engagement.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 1:00pm

7. Correspondence

Mr McNulty rejoined the meeting at 1:01pm

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Paul Armstrong regarding improvements to the education system.

7.3 The Committee considered correspondence from the Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Network providing a list of questions in respect of the new Education Authority funding arrangements for youth provision

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority forwarding the issues raised for response.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 1.02pm

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools providing the 2017 report of the independent review of safeguarding at De La Salle College, Belfast.

7.5 The Committee considered an invitation from the Education Authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend the Youth Services' Oscars on Monday 23 March 2020 at 6:30pm in the Millennium Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend the event, diaries permitting.

7.6 The Committee considered a response from the Minister regarding the Strule Campus.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the relevant ongoing related projects including the range of shared education initiatives which are being led by local schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a visit to the Strule Campus and Arvalee Special School.

7.7 The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Fresh Start and School Enhancement capital projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the estimated timing and projected expenditure for each of the Fresh Start projects

7.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding legacy financial deficits and capital eligibility.

7.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding barriers to Area Planning.

7.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Development Proposal progress.

7.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Information Technology and Shared Education.

7.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Special Educational Needs provision in Irish Medium schools.

7.13 The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding sport and Physical Education (PE) in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the Terms of Reference and the timelines for the reviews of the Sports Programme and PE in the curriculum. The Committee further agreed to write to the Department indicating that it believed that the current level of funding for the Sports Programme should be retained until the relevant review is complete.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association to provide a joint oral briefing on the Sports Programme and PE in schools.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Health regarding joint meetings on the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

7.15 The Committee considered correspondence from Aware

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Aware to the invitee list for its upcoming mental health and emotional wellbeing event.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Forward Planning – Inquiry options

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a possible Committee inquiry.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a revised draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange visits to Oakgrove Integrated Post-Primary, Triax and Sure Start projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a joint oral briefing from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Integrated Education Fund

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake training in committee questioning strategies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as amended.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 February 2020 at 9.45am in Room 30 Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:16pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
26 February 2020