



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA

Present by Teleconference:
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley 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)

In Attendance by Teleconference:
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9:48am in open session with Mr Lyttle, Mr Butler and Mr Humphrey present in the Senate Chamber and Ms Kelly and Mr McCrossan present by teleconference.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson and Committee Members recorded their thanks to those schools and childcare settings that remained open over the Easter break in order to accommodate vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 8 April 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Committee adopted a revised agenda

5. Correspondence

5.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

5.2 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Health forwarding information from the Royal National Institute for the Blind on coronavirus and accessible on-line information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking confirmation that all coronavirus on-line information is provided in an accessible format, in line with RNIB guidance.

5.3 The Committee noted a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission briefing paper on the Coronavirus Act 2020.

6. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its draft forward work programme, at this time.

7. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed, at this time.

The meeting was suspended at 9:57am

The meeting resumed at 10:01am with Mr Lyttle, Mr Butler and Mr Humphrey present in the Senate Chamber and Mr Bradley, Ms Kelly, Ms Mullan, Mr McCrossan, Mr McNulty and Mr Newton present by teleconference.

8. Ministerial Briefing - Coronavirus Response – Oral Briefing Session

The Committee noted written correspondence from the Department including its (10 April 2020 update of its) Situation Report on the coronavirus response and information on relevant notices made under the Coronavirus Act 2020.

The Minister and officials joined the meeting by teleconference at 10:01am.

Mr Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education

Mr Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education.

The Minister and officials briefed the Committee on the Department's response to the coronavirus.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 11:03am.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and his officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department of Health seeking: sight of the Department of Health cross-sectoral action plan which is designed to tackle the needs of vulnerable children during the lockdown; and information on the number of vulnerable children on the waiting list for school or childcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information as to how along with its partners, it is reaching out to Special School children and assessing and delivering support as appropriate for their educational and other needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education for further information on the £12m Childcare package of measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking clarification: on the administration and access arrangements for the £12m Childcare package of measures; and in respect of the indemnification and insurance costs for home care and day childcare settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on: the number of substitute teachers currently covered by existing continuity of salary arrangements; the number not benefiting from these arrangements; and those likely to come under a hardship scheme and the associated costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for information on arrangements undertaken by schools to provide access to Information Technology (IT) hardware for pupils in support of distance learning.

The Committee noted that it was anticipated that a public statement would likely follow shortly on examination arrangements devised in response to covid-19 restrictions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to provide a briefing on relevant examination arrangements thereafter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity on the reported review of transport contracts for school buses and taxis and asking whether the costs of fuel are to be clawed back.

9. Forward Work Programme (Resumed)

The Committee resumed consideration of its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive oral briefings on: the 2020/2021 budget (from the Department); examination arrangements (from CCEA); Childcare (from Childcare providers); Special Educational Needs (from the Education Authority); and the teachers' pay and conditions dispute and the impact of the covid-19 restrictions on schools (from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council).

10. Any Other Business (Resumed)

The Committee discussed the Education Authority's audit of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) statementing process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking sight of the final SEN statementing audit report and a written update on its implementation of the report's recommendations. The Committee also agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking sight of the findings of, and the way forward for, the SEN Early Years consultation.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 April 2020 at 9.45am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings and by teleconference.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:03pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
22 April 2020