



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2020

Room 30 and Video/Audio Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Present by Video Conference:
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA

Apologies: Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 9:31am in open session

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 21 August 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Restart – Northern Ireland Committee – Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) – Oral briefing

The Committee noted a paper from NIC-ICTU's Education Trade Union Group (ETUG).

The following witnesses joined the meeting in person and by video conference at 9:32am:

Ms Maxine Murphy Higgins, Chairperson NIC-ICTU and National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers

Mr Alan Law, Vice-Chairperson NIC-ICTU and Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance

Ms Denise Walker, General Municipal and Boilermakers Union

Mr Thomas McMichael, Unite

Mr McNulty joined the meeting at 9:35am.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 9:42am:

Ms Anne Speed, Unison

Witnesses briefed the Committee on issues relating to school Restart.

Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 10:09am.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Lyttle left the meeting at 11:09am. Ms Mullan assumed the role of Chairperson during Mr Lyttle's absence.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Mr Lyttle rejoined the meeting and resumed the role of Chairperson at 11:13am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Public Health Agency urging it to include appropriate trade union representation on the working groups which devise covid-19 guidance for schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department suggesting that it put in place a review mechanism for its guidance to schools in order to address inconsistencies and to include representations from NIC-ICTU in this process. The Committee also agreed to seek a further breakdown of the additional funding for schools including the quantum of support available for cleaning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority suggesting that it: revises the cleaning protocols for schools and school transport; includes representations from NIC-ICTU in this process; and works with schools and representative bodies in order to flush out the real additional costs of covid-19 cleaning. The Committee also agreed to seek clarity on the provision of face coverings for staff and pupils making use of public transport and on the provision of guidance for classroom assistants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority and Translink urging both bodies to exploit synergies and work together in order to support enhanced and uniform cleaning protocols for all school transport.

6. Restart – Department of Education and Education Authority - Oral Evidence Session

The Committee noted: a Departmental response on Committee queries relating to the timing of the publication of school guidance; correspondence from school principals including Bangor Central Integrated Primary, Drumahoe Primary School, Ballymena Nursery School and Carrowdore Primary School and parents relating to restart concerns; and correspondence from concerned individuals in respect of the impact of restart on post-primary transfer testing.

Officials joined the meeting by video conference at 11:17am.

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

Mr Adrian Murphy, Head of Area Planning North Region, Department of Education

Ms Michelle Corkey, Director of Education, Education Authority

Mr Dale Hanna, Director (acting) Operations and Estates, Education Authority

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Officials briefed the Committee on Restart in schools.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 1:00pm.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 1:01pm.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 1:22pm

The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department urging it to issue clarification to schools and parents in respect of how symptomatic children should be treated and regarding distinguishing the symptoms of the common cold and winter influenza from covid-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- asking it to set out the relevant diary commitments for the Minister and Permanent Secretary which precluded their attendance at the Committee;
- seeking clarity as to whether additional costs associated with covid-19 absences for pregnant school staff members will be covered by the Department;
- further to previous correspondence again seeking the numbers of medically vulnerable children requiring a risk assessment and the progress that it being made in this regard including the provision of out of school / blended learning support;

- seeking information on pupil and teaching and non-teaching staff attendance in schools;
- clarity on the mechanism by which schools can avail of the additional financial support identified in correspondence to the Committee and a timescale by which it will be in place

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and the Education Authority seeking clarity on the timescales and costs associated with the reported additional delays to the post-primary transfer process. The Committee also agreed to seek clarity on the allowance that will be made in the post-primary transfer testing process for primary 7 children who have missed out on schooling owing to the covid-19 lockdown or covid-19 absence following restart.

7. Covid Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this agenda item

8. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this agenda item

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted tabled Departmental correspondence relating to the expert panel on underachievement including a suggestion that the Committee should defer a briefing until after the panel's report is published.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the expert panel on its Terms of Reference.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a revised forward work programme

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 9 September 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:35pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
9 September 2020