



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 1 JULY 2020

Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video Conference:

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

Apologies: Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

In Attendance by Video Conference:

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9:04am in open session

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Condolences

The Chairperson noted the recent and tragic death of Noah Donohoe.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to formally record its condolences to the school, friends and family of Noah Donohoe following his recent tragic death.

2.2 June Monitoring and Childcare

The Chairperson noted that the Department of Finance had allocated £39m to the Department of Education in support of the extension of Free School Meal payments; summer activities and childcare.

Members welcomed the change to the definition of key worker which is designed to allow all working parents to avail of childcare. Members also particularly welcomed the allocation of £10.5m to a new childcare support scheme in the monitoring round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding the new childcare support scheme seeking details of the overall funding quantum and the criteria under which payments will be made to childcare settings and confirmation that the application process will be simplified and accessible.

2.3 ETI Report on Distance Learning

The Chairperson noted that the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) had recently published a report on distance learning. The report found a variation in pupil engagement with remote learning across year groups and schools. ETI also reported gaps in learning and differences in progress between children who engaged in remote learning and those who did not. ETI also noted the difficulty in supporting children with Special Educational Needs in literacy and numeracy, through blended learning approaches.

2.4 National Deaf Children's Society

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that Members had met informally with the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) on Monday 29 June 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department forwarding the NDCS paper; noting the concerns in respect of generic on-line and other material produced by schools which does not support deaf children's learning; and seeking clarity in respect of the use of assistive technology at home and the development of an NI-wide protocol to support this. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department in respect of an initial teacher education bursary for teachers of the deaf.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking a breakdown of late statements including the number of deaf children affected and to ask it about the workforce plan for the teaching for the deaf service, in response to reported planned retirements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NDCS and ask it to share its research on the impact of statements and of assistive technology as well as its soon to be published report on deaf education in Northern Ireland. The Committee also agreed to invite the NDCS to provide a briefing on the "Deaf Works Everywhere" campaign.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the NDCS papers with the Committee for Health, for its information.

Ms Kelly joined the meeting at 9:08am.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 24 June 2020.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted suggested amendments and additions to the draft on-line survey on post-primary transfer, as suggested by the Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to submit further amendments to the Clerk as soon as possible and to defer consideration of the draft survey until 8 July 2020.

5. Distance and On-line Learning – Stranmillis University College – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Stranmillis University College and a copy of the report on its recent on-line survey of home schooling.

Witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:20am.

Dr Noel Purdy, Director of the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement, Stranmillis University College

Dr Bronagh McKee, Senior Lecturer and the Child Protection and Safeguarding Coordinator, Stranmillis University College

Dr Glenda Walsh, Head of Early Years Education, Stranmillis University College

Ms Celia O'Hagan, Senior Lecturer in professional learning and teacher education, Stranmillis University College

Witnesses briefed the Committee on distance and on-line learning.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 10:24am.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

6. Youth Sector Funding and Covid-19 issues – Youth Work Alliance and Irish Medium Youth Sector – oral briefing session

The Committee noted papers from the Youth Work Alliance and the Irish Medium Youth Sector.

Witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 10:46am.

Ms Mary Field, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Work Alliance

Professor Sam McCready, Chairperson, Youth Work Alliance

Ms Aoife Nic Colaim, Regional Co-Ordinator, Fóram na nÓg

Ms Orliath Mhic Leannáin, Youth Co-Ordinator, Glór na Mona

Witnesses briefed the Committee on funding and covid-19 issues.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Butler made a Declaration of Interest that he is an officer in the Boys Brigade.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking details of the funding available to Irish Medium youth groups and the status of the 2019 review of the Irish Medium youth sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority forwarding the Youth Work Alliance paper and asking how the EA Youth Service is to develop a policy development partnership with youth organisations.

7. Covid-19– Minister for Education– oral briefing

The Committee noted DE correspondence on Restart guidance and an updated Department of Education Covid-19 situation report, dated 26 June 2020

The Minister and officials joined the meeting by video conference at 11:35am.

Mr Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education, Department of Education

Mr Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

The Minister and his officials briefed the Committee on covid-19 matters.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister for the briefing.

Mr Newton left the meeting at 12:40pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the Terms of Reference for the Special Educational Needs steering group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking whether bonuses for directors in the Education Authority were to be paid in 2019-20 following the identification of significant governance failings associated with the SEN statementing process.

The Committee noted an update on outstanding Departmental Covid-19 correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content that the Departmental Covid-19 correspondence update is correct.

The Committee noted correspondence from a school principal on the use of remote devices.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond indicating that it has scrutinised the Department's use of technology for deprived and vulnerable children in transition years but that it is understood that the costs and the logistics of extending this support to all children would be very significant.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking whether it is to provide access for teachers to a Virtual Learning Environment and the Canvas platform and training for teachers and parents on supporting on-line learning including for Early Years children.

The Committee noted correspondence from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta on Covid-19 issues facing the Irish Medium sector and inviting the Committee to visit an Irish Medium school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a visit to an Irish Medium school in the autumn and to forward the relevant correspondence to the Department for a response.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal Society of Biology on the impact of Covid-19 on bioscience education in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment seeking clarity on the guidance to schools in respect of practical enquiry-based learning when schools restart.

The Committee noted correspondence from Unite's registered childminders branch.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the scheduling of an informal meeting with Unite's registered childminders branch.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Parentkind seeking a meeting with the Committee on its survey with parents on home schooling during the covid-19 lockdown.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the scheduling of an informal meeting with Parentkind.

8.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department on the report by the Northern Ireland Children and Young Person's Commissioner (NICCY) into Special Educational Needs provision in mainstream schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the NICCY report as part of its scrutiny of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Framework.

8.4 The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman on the use of restrictive practices, restraint and seclusion in schools.

8.5 The Committee also noted a response from NICCY on the use of restrictive practices, restraint and seclusion in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to the important question of restrictive practices, restraint and seclusion in schools in the next Assembly session.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing a copy of its Annual Report and Accounts for 2018-19.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department providing a copy of its Shared Education report.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Children's Law Centre (CLC) seeking an opportunity to brief the Committee. The Committee also noted that the Chairperson intended to meet with CLC as an MLA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Children's Law Centre to an informal meeting in the autumn in order to inform its scrutiny of the SEND Framework.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a revised forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit Bunscoil an Luir, when possible.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 8 July 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:00am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:03pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
8 July 2020