



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE 2020

Room 29 and Video/Teleconference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

Present by Video/Teleconference:

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

In Attendance by Video/Teleconference:

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

The meeting commenced at 9:23am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Committee condolences

The Chairperson informed Members that the Permanent Secretary had suffered a recent family bereavement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to record its condolences to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education at this difficult time.

2.2 BookTrust

The Chairperson advised Members that the Department of Education has agreed to fund the BookTrust BookStart programme. The Chairperson reminded the Committee that Members had unanimously supported the funding of this low cost high impact programme and had lobbied the Minister in this regard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to record its contentment with this outcome.

2.3 On-line survey post-primary transfer

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had written to relevant post-primary schools asking them to identify contingency plans or alternative arrangements relating to unregulated post-primary transfer tests. The Chairperson noted that schools had generally indicated that this is a very busy period for them and that responsibility for enrolment planning lies with their Boards of Governors. The Committee noted that further correspondence is to be sent to post-primary schools allowing for more time to respond.

The Chairperson referred Members to a draft on-line opinion survey in respect of post-primary transfer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would review the draft survey and return to this issue at its next meeting. The Committee further agreed that the agreed survey would be issued in late June 2020.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 3 June 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. SENDIST Transfer of Functions Order – Department of Education / Department of Justice – Oral Briefing

Officials joined the meeting by videoconference at 9:27am.

Mr Ricky Irwin, Director, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Department of Education

Ms Sharon Lawlor, Head of Special Education and Inclusion Review Team,
Department of Education

Ms Clare Irvine, Head of Judiciary and Mental Capacity Branch, Civil
Justice Policy Division, Department of Justice

Officials briefed the Committee on the proposed Transfer of Functions Order in respect of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST).

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice (DoJ) seeking sight of its guidance information for appellants to SENDIST in respect of disability matters. The Committee further agreed to write to DoJ seeking information on the Northern Ireland Court Service's customer service survey for SENDIST as well related improvements and changes which have been made in order to enhance access to SENDIST for appellants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to indicate that it is generally content for a Transfer of Functions Order to be brought forward in respect of the transfer of responsibilities for SENDIST from DE to DoJ.

6. Report into Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in mainstream schools - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) - Oral Briefing

Witnesses joined the meeting by videoconference at 9:55am.

Ms Koulla Yiasouma, Commissioner, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Ms Mairead McCafferty, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Witnesses briefed the Committee on NICCY's "Too Little, Too Late" report on SEN provision in mainstream schools.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking: sight of its implementation/action plan relating to the NICCY report; written commentary relating to how it is to benchmark SEN provision with other jurisdictions; and commentary on progress in respect of the NICCY report recommendations, when it next briefs the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking: sight of its implementation/action plan relating to the NICCY report; an explanation as to the role of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) in respect of the provision of medical support to children in Special Schools; and an indication as to the timescale for the commencement of the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (NI) 2016 which relate to co-operation with the Department of Health and RQIA.

7. Department of Education - Coronavirus Response – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted:

- the latest DE covid-19 situation report dated 5 June 2020;
- correspondence from the Department of Education on: holiday hunger, school starting age, the CCEA review of 2021 GCSEs/A-levels, ICT audit

of schools, general guidance to schools on distance learning, guidance on A-Levels/GCSEs on the CCEA website, and notices made under the Coronavirus Act 2020;

- responses from Bangor Grammar, Campbell College, St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School Belfast, Enniskillen Royal Grammar School, Foyle College, St. Malachy's College, Methodist College, Our Lady's and St Patrick's College Knock, St Dominic's Belfast, the Royal School Dungannon, Banbridge Academy, Rathmore Grammar School Belfast and the Post-Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) on post-primary transfer issues; and
- correspondence from the Committee for Finance on covid funding streams.

The official joined the meeting by videoconference at 11:57am.

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:59am.

Proceedings resumed at 12:05pm with Mr Lyttle and Mr Butler present in Room 29, and Ms Mullan, Mr Bradley, Mr Humphrey, Ms Kelly, Mr McCrossan, Mr McNulty and Mr Newton present by teleconference.

The official briefed the Committee on the Department's response to the coronavirus.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the official for his attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- seeking details of the membership of the Practitioners' Group and the Restart Stakeholder Forum and urging the Department to include parents and young people in the latter;
- urging it to provide assurance and guidance to schools and parents on school transport;
- asking that, further to previous correspondence, it sets out the factors that it is considering with the Chief Medical Officer prior to re-opening schools and childcare settings including the relevant R factor;
- seeking confirmation that the C2k provision for schools will have the capacity to support enhanced distance learning in September; and
- urging it to issue guidance to the Youth Sector on Restart.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- clarity on childcare issues including the numbers of different families for which childminders can provide their services and how this will change over the coming months;
- information on the staff resource which is being employed to process childcare setting applications to the Childcare Support Scheme; and
- information as to how its Restart plans will consider the impact on families with children in different age groups requiring childcare or access to school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking it to indicate how it is to measure, assess and address the adverse impact on children of the lack of Physical Education during the lockdown.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority asking it to clarify or revise the Free School Meal and school uniform application forms on its website in order to show the appropriate date.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) seeking: assurance that exam results will be based on teacher assessment rather than a statistical model and confirmation that the model will be statistically relevant to Northern Ireland and will also recognise schools on an improving trajectory.

The Committee considered an update on Covid-19 correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the status of its covid-19 correspondence had been accurately recorded.

The Committee considered correspondence from Unite and a concerned parent raising issues of concern in respect of the Restart programme for childcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Unite asking it to set out its concerns formally and in writing with a view to further consideration by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from the concerned parent to the Department asking it to respond to the issues raised and copying its reply to the Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence from concerned parents relating to post-primary transfer in Newry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should draft a letter to the relevant post-primary schools seeking clarification on their post-primary transfer plans including whether the Department of Education's suggested criteria are to be used. The Committee further agreed to review the draft correspondence at its next meeting.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted a report providing an update of DE's capital project progress.

8.3 The Committee noted an update on equality matters from the Education Authority's Equality and Diversity Unit.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal Public Policy Forum referring to its 'Moving out of Lockdown' paper.

8.5 The Committee considered a response from the Education Authority regarding new funding arrangements for youth organisations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Youth Work Alliance which initiated the enquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Fóram na nÓg asking it to set out its concerns regarding funding.

8.6 The Committee considered correspondence from Farmers for Action relating to school closures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Farmers for Action to an informal meeting in the autumn.

8.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education providing further information on its 2020/21 budget allocations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DE asking for a further budget breakdown including e.g. redundancy, school meals and transport costs etc..

8.8 The Committee considered correspondence from concerned parents relating to the provision of Special Educational Needs in North Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity in respect of the policy relating to the reported re-categorisation of enrolments to Cedar Lodge Special School. The Committee also agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity in respect of the funding position for Mercy College and whether its changes to the definition of SEN used by schools will adversely impact on children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Ms Mullan left the meeting at 1:30pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to PPTC seeking clarity as to why it has not given consideration to the health and safety consequences for the staging of unregulated post-primary transfer tests in primary or post-primary schools.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise its forward work programme, and subject to the availability of the Education Authority Chief Executive, to re-schedule the SEN statementing update to 24 June 2020 and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Education Authority Youth Service briefings to 17 June 2020.

The Committee noted a list of youth groups.

The Committee noted the Assembly Research and Information Service briefing paper on Computer Based Assessments.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 17 June 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by teleconference at 9:00am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:32pm.

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
17 June 2020**