



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2020

Room 29 / Teleconference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)

Present by Teleconference:

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: None

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 9:03am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Association of School and College Leaders

The Chairperson advised Members that he had met informally with the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). The Committee noted that

an increasing number of organisations including ASCL wished to brief the Committee on covid-19 Restart matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the scheduling of possible Committee briefings including from ASCL as part of the consideration of its forward work programme.

2.2 Mental Health Action Plan

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department of Health had recently published its Mental Health Action Plan. The Chairperson noted that the Plan includes a review of restraint and seclusion and the development of a multi-disciplinary support team. The Chairperson indicated that the latter is presumably designed to improve Department of Education / Department of Health co-operation in the identification and provision of mental health services for young people in transition.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department of Health asking them to set out how the Plan will improve co-operation between education and health bodies in the provision of mental health services and also seeking information on the restraint and seclusion review.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 20 May 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards Directorate (CQSD) Contingency Programme – Department of Education / Education Authority - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted Departmental papers on the CQSD Contingency Programme.

Officials joined the meeting by teleconference at 9:06am.

Mrs Faustina Graham, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, Department of Education;

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

Mr Raymond Caldwell, Assistant Chief Inspector, Education and Training Inspectorate; and

Ms Michele Corkey, Director of Education, Education Authority.

Officials briefed the Committee on the Department's CQSD Contingency Programme.

Mr Butler joined the meeting at 9:15am

Mr Bradley joined the meeting at 9:15am

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

6. Pre-School Enrolment - Department of Education / Education Authority - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted relevant Departmental papers.

Officials joined the meeting by teleconference at 10:32am.

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

Mrs Christine Leacock, Head of the Pre-School Education Programme Team, Department of Education;

Ms Siobhan O'Hanlon, Regional Co-ordinator, Pre-School Education Programme, Education Authority; and

Ms Mairead Kerr, Admissions Officer, Education Authority

Officials briefed the Committee on pre-school enrolment progress.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 11:03am.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 11:23am.

7. Department of Education - Coronavirus Response – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted: The Department's 22 May 2020 Situation Report on the coronavirus response; a paper from the National Association of Head Teachers on the return of schools; further notices associated with the Coronavirus Act 2020; correspondence from Department of Education on Free School Meals; a reply from the Finance Minister on the substitute teacher hardship scheme; and correspondence from concerned individuals on remote learning and post-primary transfer.

Officials joined the meeting by teleconference at 11:23am.

Mr Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education; and

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education.

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 11:50am

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

Mr Newton left the meeting at 12:18pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Department of Education indicating its concerns in respect of the absence of Restart guidance for schools, childcare and pre-school settings, parents and children and seeking:

- information on the membership of the DE Practitioners' Group and confirmation that it has been "stood-up" in order to support the development of Restart guidance;
- confirmation that teachers graduating this summer will be able to start teaching in schools in September 2020 and will be given support to do so;
- an update on the multi-disciplinary panel and an explanation as to the general reasons why children may not be permitted to return to Special Schools at this time, as well as details of the outreach support that such children will receive;
- information on the Department's plans for voluntary and compulsory redundancy programmes in 2020-21 and whether associated funding has been allocated;
- clarification on the provision of guidance for parents and children and young people on the new approach for A-level and GCSE examinations; and
- further information and access to rich data on distance learning and educational engagement by pupils during the lockdown.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a summary table of responses to covid-19 correspondence was accurate and complete.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department expressing concerns relating to the adverse impact of lockdown on 2021 GCSE and A-level examinations and seeking:

- the terms of reference and timeline for the recently commissioned Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) review of 2021 GCSE and A-level examinations;
- information on the ICT devices that have been lent, transferred or re-purposed for use by school pupils including the criteria under which ICT devices will be lent to school pupils;
- an update on the Department's broadband roll-out programme for school pupils including a discussion of its consideration of related General Data Protection Regulations and on-line safety issues;
- sight of case studies on good distance learning practice which is to inform the development of related guidance for schools;
- an update on C2k procurement process; and
- information on the Department's scoping work in respect of options for schools to undertake work with pupils during the summer months.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Department of Education expressing its concerns in respect of the reported delay to the development of the Childcare Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department again expressing its concerns in respect of the absence of Restart guidance for pre-school and

childcare settings and for parents and urging the Department to establish a reference group (as it has done for childcare) in order for it to develop and issue informed guidance forthwith. The Committee further agreed to seek:

- information on the Department's plans to engage with pre-school parents in order to communicate meaningful Restart guidance for pre-school;
- information on the likely impact of Restart restrictions on class sizes, staffing and finance for pre-school providers;
- information on the qualifications required by pre-school staff and the impact covid-19 will have on these qualifications requirements;
- information on the number, location and identification of over-subscribed settings including geographical hotspots;
- clarification on the changes to pre-school eligibility that the Department of Education is considering for 2022-23; and
- sight of the Education Authority's response to the consultation on pre-school special school provision and the related arrangements for premature birth children.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee considered correspondence from a concerned parent relating to seclusion and restraint linked to covid-19 concerns in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the covid-19 guidance on seclusion including whether it is envisaged that children will be secluded alone and unsupervised and if this is in line with best practice.

8.3 The Committee considered a response from the Education Authority in respect of: Special School enrolments; staffing and estate pressures; and related reports and literature.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Research to source some related publications by Dr Barry Carpenter and the Rochford Review.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing an assurance that the consultation on the new youth funding arrangements was inclusive with no adverse consequences for critics of the scheme.

8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Farmers for Action seeking an opportunity to brief the Committee on rural school issues including the impact of covid-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the scheduling of possible Committee briefings including from Farmers for Action as part of the consideration of its forward work programme.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority on autism provision and Exceptional Teaching Arrangements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Education Authority correspondence on autism provision to the chairperson of the autism All Party Group, for information.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to start proceedings at 9am on Wednesday 3 June 2020 in order to accommodate an oral briefing, if required, on the June Monitoring Round.

The meeting moved to closed session at 12:32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from ASCL on 3 June 2020 in respect of covid-19 examination arrangements, pending receipt of a written brief in advance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek written briefings from Farmers for Action and from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in respect of covid-19 issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to endeavour to schedule an oral briefing from the Education Authority Youth Service on its covid-19 response before summer recess.

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 3 June 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by teleconference at 9:00am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:52pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
3 June 2020