



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**

### **Minutes of Proceedings**

WEDNESDAY 7 OCTOBER 2020

Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Robbie Butler MLA  
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

**Present by Video Conference:**

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA  
Mr William Humphrey MLA  
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

**Apologies:** None

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

**In Attendance by Video Conference:**

Ms Louise Close (Outreach Manager– Item 1 only)

*The meeting commenced at 9:33am in open session.*

Mr Butler proposed that Mr Newton act as temporary chairperson. Mr Humphrey seconded this proposal. As there were no other nominees and Mr Newton had indicated his assent, Mr Newton assumed the role of temporary chairperson.

*Proceedings continue in closed session from 9:35am.*

#### **1. Assembly Outreach – Qualitative findings from the on-line survey on post-primary transfer – oral briefing**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Assembly Outreach on the qualitative feedback to the Committee's on-line survey on post-primary transfer testing.

Ms Louise Close briefed the Committee on her paper.

This was followed by a question and answer session

The Chairperson thanked Ms Close for the briefing.

Members indicated their interest in undertaking stakeholder events using appropriate remote meeting technology.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the paper summarising the feedback to the Committee's on-line survey into post-primary transfer should be published.

Members indicated that they would support the proposal to bring forward a Committee motion to plenary relating to the findings of the on-line survey.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer further consideration of a Committee motion relating to the findings of the on-line survey.

*Proceedings continued in public session from 10:11am.*

*A revised order for agenda items was adopted.*

## **2. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 30 September 2020.

## **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

*Mr Lyttle joined the meeting and assumed the role of Chairperson at 10:12am.*

## **4. Correspondence**

4.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

4.2 The Committee considered a response from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in respect of complaints made by concerned parents on the 2020 grade awarding appeals process.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the concerned parents who had initiated the queries.

4.3 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA confirming that it will provide an oral briefing on grade standardisation and moderation.

4.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister indicating that the planned review of the summer 2020 grade awarding models will be independent of his Department and its Arm's Length Bodies.

4.5 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent about the CCEA consultation on curriculum and assessment.

4.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker and the First Minister and deputy First Minister providing guidance on the handling of Statutory Instruments and Statutory Rules arising from EU exit.

4.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Steve Aiken MLA in respect of EU exit arrangements.

*Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 10:14am*

4.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the chairperson of the board of the Education Authority (EA) confirming her attendance at the Committee meeting on 14 October 2020 to discuss issues relating to governance and the provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN) at the EA.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for Members and witnesses to make use of Starleaf as required and for the relevant meeting to be held in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

4.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Business Office enclosing a copy of the recently published Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report on SEN.

4.10 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent about SEN and the education system.

4.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Kellie Armstrong MLA informing the Committee that she is developing a Private Member's Bill on integrated education.

4.12 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent on school starting age flexibility.

4.13 The Committee noted correspondence from a parent about concerns in relation to the seclusion of pupils.

4.14 The Committee noted the Investment Activity Report (September 2020) for the Department of Education.

4.15 The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister about the Coronavirus Act 2020 Temporary Modification of Education Duties (No.13) Notice (Northern Ireland) 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on the position for children on Free School Meals who cannot attend school owing to either a positive test for covid-19 or a requirement to self-isolate.

## **5. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

*Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 10:23am.*

## **6. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

## **7. Chairperson's Business**

### **7.1 Review of Suspension and Expulsion arrangements.**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the recently published NIAO report on SEN referred to an ongoing review of suspension and expulsion arrangements by the Department.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking details of the terms of reference and the timeline for its review of suspension and expulsion arrangements.

### **7.2 Review of the Common Funding Scheme**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that in Assembly Written Questions, the Minister had referred to a review of the Common Funding Scheme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking details of the terms of reference and the timeline for its review of the Common Funding Scheme.

### **7.3 Education Authority: One Programme**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that in Assembly Written Questions, the Minister had referred to the Education Authority One Programme which is understood to be a significant investment project designed to bring together the salary payment processes for schools in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking details of the EA One Programme.

## **8. Restart Issues in Schools, Childcare and Youth Settings - Ministerial oral evidence session**

The following witnesses joined by video conference at 10:27am:

Mr Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education;

Ms Tina Dempster, Head of Childcare Strategy Team, Department of Education;

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

Ms Arlene Kee, Assistant Director, Youth Services, Education Authority.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

*Mr McCrossan rejoined the meeting at 10:30am.*

The Minister briefed the Committee on Restart issues.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Ms Mullan made a declaration of interest that a family member was about to undertake Year 12 studies.*

*Mr Humphrey made a declaration of interest that he was a member of the board of governors of Edenbrooke Primary School and Belfast Model School for Girls, and President of West Belfast District Scout Council.*

*Mr Butler made a declaration of interest that he was a Boys' Brigade Officer.*

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Members recorded their appreciation for the efforts of school staff and principals; the providers of youth services; and Education Authority staff for their unstinting efforts during the lockdown and restart processes.

*Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 12:31pm.*

*Mr Newton left the meeting at 12:32pm.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education expressing concerns in respect of the Engage Programme specifically regarding variations in per pupil funding and seeking an explanation in respect of the funding model that had been adopted. The Committee further agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- information on the numbers of teachers (including particularly primary 7 teachers) that have tested positive for covid-19 or are self-isolating;
- information on the numbers of pupils that have tested positive for covid-19 or are self-isolating;
- clarification as to how covid-19 pupil absence is recorded;
- clarification as to how access to laptops and other IT support is to be widened in order to increase educational engagement by pupils who are unable to attend school;
- details of the number of laptops distributed to and by schools; and
- clarification as to the support provided to teachers in order to allow them to access IT when self-isolating.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education in respect of the Nurture Programme seeking clarity on the criteria under which support was offered to some schools and not to others and also seeking clarification around the definition of a rural school and the Department's plans to revise this in order to ensure that rural disadvantage is consistently addressed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Permanent Secretary congratulating him on his retirement and thanking him for his contribution to education in Northern Ireland.

## **9. Any Other Business**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider a Committee motion in respect of the post-primary transfer survey at its meeting on 14 October 2020.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 14 October 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:50pm.*

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA  
Chairperson, Committee for Education  
14 October 2020**