



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2021

Video Conference

Present by Video Conference:

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9:00 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Budget 2020/2021

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the 2021-2021 budget.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence with the Department's original briefing to the Committee for Finance.

2.2 Public Petition - Save Barnish School

The Committee noted a letter from the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly regarding a public petition titled 'Stop the Proposed Closure of Barnish Primary School, Ballyvoy' which was laid in the Assembly on 1 February 2021.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 3 February 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Committee amended the order of its agenda

5. Correspondence

5.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

5.2 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education on Emotional Health & Wellbeing.

5.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Action for Children seeking funding for its Blues Programme. Members noted that Action for Children would be briefing the Committee on the programme at its next meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the correspondence at its next meeting.

5.4 The Committee noted a response from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) about its Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Hub.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward CCEA's response to Belfast Youth Forum seeking its views.

5.5 The Committee considered correspondence from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on the introduction of a process to record instances of seclusion and restraint to ensure accurate data is available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education asking what consideration it has given to this proposal and seeking an update from the working group looking at seclusion and restraint.

5.6 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Minister for Education regarding the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill.

5.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the Rights of the Child and indicating that the Minister plans to meet with the Children's Law Centre (CLC) about its report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Children's Law Centre for information.

5.8 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Referrals to the Statutory Assessment Panel, completed Special Educational Needs Statutory Statements and open cases.

5.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Health regarding engagement with the Department of Education on research on the Post-primary school experiences of 16-21-year-old people who are LGB&T, published by the Department in September 2017.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on actions taken to support LGB&T people following the publication of this Report.

5.10 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Health asking it bring to the attention of the Education Authority concerns regarding conversion therapy and a social media post by a Member of the Education Authority Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking a response to the issues raised by the Committee for Health.

5.11 The Committee noted correspondence suggesting the adoption of a paperless system for teachers' salaries and pensions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking what consideration has been given to this proposal.

5.12 The Committee noted the Invest NI Investing Activity Report for Department of Education for January 2021.

5.13 The Committee noted correspondence raising concerns about internet and technology poverty and its impact on the education of children and young people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on its actions to combat issues relating to internet and technology poverty.

5.14 The Committee noted correspondence about exams grades and the appeals process.

5.15 The Committee noted a report from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) on Nursery Education.

6. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

The Committee discussed groups to consider inviting to a briefing focusing on the views of young people.

7. Evidence session with the Minister of Education - School Restart, Exams and Grading.

The Committee noted:

- A response from Department of Education regarding Covid-19 issues;
- Responses from the Public Health Agency and the Education Authority regarding the publication of COVID-19 guidance for schools;
- Correspondence from a nursery assistant regarding the safety of non-teaching staff;
- Correspondence from an individual relating to exams;
- Correspondence from the Department of Education, the Children's Law Centre and a concerned individual regarding post-primary transfer;
- Correspondence from NASUWT and concerned teachers regarding the decision that from September 2022, WJEC qualifications will no longer be approved for use in NI schools.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:27 am:

Mr Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education

Mr Ricky Irwin, Director of Inclusion and Well-Being

Ms Karen McCullough, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards

Ms Janis Scallon, Director of Sustainable Schools Policy and Planning

The Evidence session was reported on by Hansard.

There followed a question and answer session.

Mr Bradley joined the meeting at 9:37 am.

Mr Newton joined the meeting at 9:39 am.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education:

- to ask what it is doing in concert with the Departments of Health and Communities to ensure already disadvantaged pupils are not left behind academically;
to ask what additional support is being provided for parents of children in Irish Medium Education and newcomer children who don't speak the language their child is being taught in;
- welcoming the Engage programme roll-out in special needs schools;
- asking with concern to see plans to make a two-tier approach to vaccinations in special schools realistic;
- asking what action is being taken to ensure that any grading process introduced for A-levels is compatible with the entry requirements of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh universities;
- asking how the recharge programme is being co-ordinated by the Department; stressing the importance of a comprehensive "recovery" programme to support pupils to recover emotionally and socially before returning to learning; and asking for clarity on the timing of the Department's papers to the Executive and bids to the Department of Finance in respect of such a programme;
- given the Department's assessment that the Engage programme is not sufficiently tailored to needs of nursery and preschool pupils, asking what additional support and resource might be directed towards pupils impoverished by social and play restrictions;
- seeking clarity on the comparative governance good practice in respect of CCEA's role as both qualifications provider and regulator and the steps taken to identify and manage any perceived conflict of interest in these roles; and
- seeking information on the arrangements for student teacher placements this year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority inviting its Chief Executive to update the Committee on issues relating to Special Educational Needs at its meeting on Wednesday 24 March 2021.

8. Examinations 2021 – CEEA briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from CCEA.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 11:24 am:

Mr Justin Edwards, Chief Executive, CCEA

Ms Esther Martin, Business Manager, Curriculum and Assessment, CCEA

Ms Amanda Swann, Business Manager, Qualifications, CCEA

The officials provided the Committee with a briefing on examination arrangements for 2021.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey made a declaration of interest that he was a member of the Scout Association.

The Committee moved to closed session at 12:00 noon.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 12:27 pm.

The Chairperson thanked witnesses for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA:

- Welcoming improvements in communication and working with other bodies;
- Endorsing the recommendations of the Deloitte Review of Examination Grading, particularly in respect of appeals and asking to be notified of the resolution of the appeals arrangements in line with recommendations;
- Asking CCEA to continue to refine connectivity and communication with students as uncertainty is such a source of anxiety; and
- Inviting CCEA to provide the Committee with an informal walk-through of the five-step process in due course.

9. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 17 February 2021 by video conference at 9:30 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:33 pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
17 February 2020