



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2020

Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video Conference:
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Apologies: None

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

In Attendance by Video Conference:
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Louise Close (Outreach Manager– Item 1 only)

The meeting commenced at 9:32am in closed session

1. Assembly Outreach – Post-Primary Transfer Survey Findings – Oral Briefing

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

Ms Louise Close briefed the Committee on her paper.

Mr Newton joined the meeting at 9:35am.

This was followed by a question and answer session

The Chairperson thanked Ms Close for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the qualitative findings from the survey on post-primary transfer testing on 7 October 2020. The Committee also agreed to seek further information on parents/guardians who had responded to the survey and clarification on the numbers of respondents who had suggested differing ways forward for post-primary transfer testing.

2. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a revised forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive an oral briefing in closed session from the Education Authority (EA) Board chairperson and relevant EA sub-committee chairpersons on 14 October 2020 in respect of governance issues relating to the Special Educational Needs statementing process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme, as amended.

Proceedings continued in public session from 10:25am.

3. Apologies

There were no apologies.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Departmental Business Plan 2020-21

The Committee noted the Department of Education's 2020-21 Business Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the commencement of the Addressing Bullying Schools Act (NI) 2016 and the status of the working groups which had previously considered how anti-bullying measures could be implemented in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister noting the overlap between the DE transformation programme and the New Decade New Approach independent review of education and seeking clarity on the apparent timescales for the commencement of the review of March 2021.

4.2 DoH Consultation: Covid-19 and Vulnerable Children

The Committee noted a Department of Health (DoH) consultation on its cross-sectoral covid-19 support plan for vulnerable children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DoH, DE and the EA stressing the value of joined-up working and seeking a briefing at the end of the consultation on the education-related issues in the DoH covid-19 draft support plan for vulnerable children.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 16 September 2020.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt a revised order for agenda items.

7. Post-Primary Transfer – Department of Education / Education Authority – Evidence Session.

The Committee noted an Assembly Research paper on academic selection and a Departmental equality screening document relating to a proposed Ministerial direction to the EA in respect of post-primary transfer timescales.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 10:39am.

Mrs Janis Scallon, Director of Sustainable Schools Policy and Planning, Department of Education

Mr Scott Harbinson, Head of School Admission Team, Department of Education

Mr Sam Dempster, Head of Curriculum and Assessment Team, Department of Education

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

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Officials briefed the Committee on issues relating to post-primary transfer timescales and budgets.

Mr McNulty left the meeting at 10:45am.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Butler made a declaration of interest that he was a member of the board of governors of Killowen Primary School, Lisburn.

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.

The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 11:56am.

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

- information on the level of over-subscription and allocation of additional places in post-primary schools by sector and by geographical area in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021;
- a report on post-primary transfer appeals including the numbers and nature of appeals, the frequency of non-attendance by schools at appeal hearings, and

information on the nature and effectiveness of the Department's follow-up with schools;

- sight of the Department's letter to post-primaries that have set aside the transfer test for 2020-21 and which is designed to establish whether Development Proposals will be required for these changes to enrolment criteria;
- the timescale for and nature of the change to legislation that may be required in order to alter the statutory period etc. of the Development Proposal process in order to facilitate those schools which have set aside transfer testing in 2020-21;
- details of the contingency advice which is to be provided to schools in respect of post-primary transfer if testing is curtailed or cancelled entirely;
- details of the new post-primary transfer timescales;
- details of the costs and nature of the changes to transfer processes including: the new on-line portal, the new special circumstances arrangements, the additional appeals process and the new systems for transferring information to the EA; and
- confirmation that additional funding for the above is being sought by the Minister from the Executive.

8. CCEA – Curriculum and Assessment 2021 Consultation – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) response detailing the feedback to its consultation on proposed changes to the curriculum and assessment of GCSEs, AS and A-levels in 2020-21.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on grade awarding models adopted in 2020.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11:58am.

Mr Justin Edwards, Chief Executive, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Ms Margaret Farragher, Director of Education, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Officials briefed the Committee on the CCEA consultation on curriculum and assessment 2021.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 12:50pm

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 1:01pm.

The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA seeking information on and the timeline for the broader contingency planning work that it is undertaking with schools in respect of curricular delivery and assessment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister suggesting that the review of the grade awarding model be an independent review.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to CCEA seeking clarification in respect of the timing of the adoption of the grade awarding models for 2020 and the communication of that information to the Committee.

9. Correspondence

9.1. The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council regarding funding for St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education about its 2020-21 Business Plan.

9.4 The Committee noted correspondence in respect of the payment of examination invigilators in 2020.

9.5 The Committee considered correspondence relating to support for substitute teachers if they are required to self-isolate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarification as to whether support will be provided for substitute teachers if they are required to self-isolate.

9.6 The Committee noted a response from the Public Health Agency in respect of consultation with unions on the development and application of specific guidance on covid-19 for schools.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority about Restart and cleaning protocols in schools.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence on school governance from a concerned individual.

9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent in respect of reported delays to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) assessments.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on well-being and physical activity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the progress of the independent evaluation of the Curricular Sports Programme.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education announcing additional funding for the Nurture Programme.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education providing an update on the Childcare Recovery Support Fund.

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 30 September 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15pm.

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
30 September 2020**