



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2020

Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

Present by Video Conference:
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Apologies: Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 9:10am in closed session.

A revised order for agenda items was adopted.

1. Special Schools Area Planning consultations – Department of Education and Education Authority - oral briefing

The Committee noted: an Education Authority briefing paper; a draft copy of the Education Authority 'Lessons Learned' report; and correspondence from Special School principals.

The following officials joined the meeting by video conference at 9:10am:

Michele Corkey, Director of Education, Education Authority;

Michael McConkey, Head of Community Planning and Community and Schools, Education Authority;

Una Turbitt, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority;

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

Lorraine Finlay, Delivering Schools for the Future, Department of Education;

Brenda Shearer, Head of Special Education, Department of Education.

The officials provided a briefing on the Education Authority consultations on Special Schools area planning and specialist provision in mainstream schools.

Mr Butler joined the meeting at 9:19am

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority expressing its dissatisfaction in respect of the lack of useful answers provided by officials at the briefing on 4 November 2020 and indicating its concerns regarding the gulf between Special School principals' reported experience of engagement prior to the consultation and related evidence given by officials. The Committee further agreed to write to the Education Authority:

- asking the Education Authority to set out its previous engagement with Special Schools and its future plans in this regard;
- urging the Education Authority to engage meaningfully with the Strategic Leadership Group in order to facilitate co-design of a workable model for Special School education;
- seeking clarity as to the Education Authority's definition of a meaningful consultation;

- indicating concern and confusion in respect of the timing and purpose of the consultation
- seeking clarity as to the model for Special School provision that is being consulted upon;
- seeking clarity in respect of the projected increased demand for Special School places and specialist provision in mainstream schools;
- seeking information on the timescale and savings associated with the implementation of the new model of Special School education;

- seeking sight of the criteria for the mainstream specialist provision pilot; and
- seeking sight of the 2018 Special Educational Needs Early Years framework consultation report.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to commission the Assembly Research and Information Service to produce a paper on the Carpenter and Rochford reports and Special School models in other relevant jurisdictions.

Proceedings were suspended at 10:40am.

Proceedings resumed at 10:46am with Mr Lyttle and Ms Mullan present in Room 29, and Mr Butler, Mr Humphrey, Mr McCrossan and Mr McNulty present by videoconference.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking information on the professional development programme which is to support the enhancement of specialist provision in mainstream schools.

2. October Monitoring Round and 2021-2024/25 Budget Information Gathering Exercise – Department of Education - oral briefing.

The Committee noted: revised Departmental briefing papers on October Monitoring; Department of Education correspondence to the Committee for Health in respect of covid-19 support for carers; and restricted Department of Education correspondence to the Public Accounts Committee relating to indemnification issues.

The following officials joined the meeting by video conference at 10:47am:

Gary Fair, Finance Director, Department of Education;

Neil Palmer, Head of Budgeting Team, Department of Education;

Philip Irwin, Investment and Infrastructure Director, Department of Education.

Mr Newton rejoined the meeting at 10:49am.

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 11:00am.

The officials briefed the Committee on the October Monitoring Round and the 2021-2024/25 budget information gathering exercise.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its general support for the proposed new budget lines identified in the budget information gathering exercise including those addressing food poverty, period poverty and supporting the development of children likely to experience poor outcomes. The Committee expressed concerns in respect of the apparent absence of a projected increase in capital funding for Youth Services. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department:

- seeking clarity on capital major works generally and in particular regarding Special Schools and those in Belfast;
- seeking clarity on the status of the Strule project and the related value for money considerations that necessitated a Ministerial direction;
- seeking confirmation that resource and capital will be provided to support the new Special Schools Framework;
- expressing concerns and seeking confirmation that Special Educational Needs (SEN) spending has been appropriately targeted and is reaching SEN children during lockdown and restart;
- seeking clarity on additional resource support for the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); and
- seeking clarity as to whether the £5m of additional wellbeing support for schools will be made available to Special Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on the development of the proposed Engage Programme for Special Schools.

3. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Guidance to schools on Physical Education (PE)

The Chairperson noted that the Department of Education had lately issued revised guidance to schools in respect of the delivery of PE lessons.

4.2 Committee motion

The Chairperson thanked Members for their contributions to the plenary debate on Monday 3 November 2020 on the Committee motion relating to post-primary transfer.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 21 October 2020.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education regarding his upcoming retirement.

7.3 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Health to the Department of Education about delays to scheduled flu vaccinations in schools owing to the extended Halloween break.

7.4 The Committee considered correspondence from the Health Minister and the Education Minister on a joint strategy for Looked After Children and Care-Experienced Children and Young People.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Department of Education on the relevant aspects of the joint strategy for Looked After Children and Care-Experienced Children and Young People.

7.5 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education providing information on the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to see an oral briefing from the Department on the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

7.6 The Committee considered a response from the Department of Education on the review of suspension and expulsions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the report of the previous (2004) review into suspension and expulsions.

7.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the provision of free school meals to eligible pupils who are required to isolate. The

Committee noted that food parcels are to be made available to pupils in these circumstances.

7.8 The Committee noted a response from the Public Health Agency to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) in respect of the covid-19 guidance and information to schools.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Evangelical Alliance NI on the impact of lockdown on children with Special Educational Needs.

7.10 The Committee noted correspondence from Action for Children NI providing a copy of a UK-wide report on vulnerable children and information on access to an emergency grant fund in Northern Ireland.

7.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Parentline NI providing the results of a survey on the impact of lockdown and the continued restrictions on children and parents across Northern Ireland.

7.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding training for teachers for the deaf.

7.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) indicating concerns about the operation of the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) and c2k information technology system in school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a summary of the issues raised to the Department for response.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists regarding this year's Occupational Therapy Week on 2-8 November 2020.

7.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Education advising that the independent review into the CCEA grade awarding methodology will report at the end of November 2020.

7.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing information on the consultation in respect of assessment and examinations for 2021.

7.17 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent in respect of the recent CCEA consultation on assessment and examinations for 2021.

7.18 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of the absence of payments to senior examiners and moderators for CCEA exams in 2020.

7.19 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent in respect of the removal of the speaking and listening component from the English GCSE and the adverse impact on students with dyslexia.

7.20 The Committee noted correspondence from a parent regarding concerns about exams for current Year 12 pupils in 2021.

7.21 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent opposing school closures owing to covid-19.

7.22 The Committee noted further correspondence from another concerned parent opposing school closures owing to covid-19.

7.23 The Committee noted correspondence from a childcare provider regarding the closure of childcare facilities linked to schools owing to covid-19.

7.24 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding transfer tests.

7.25 The Committee noted further correspondence from another concerned parent regarding transfer tests.

7.26 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Children's Activities Association to the Minister regarding covid-19 measures which prevent children aged under one from attending activity classes.

7.27 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent about school starting age.

7.28 The Committee noted correspondence from St Teresa's Primary School about reduced admission and enrolment in the Speech and Language Centre.

7.29 The Committee noted the Department of Education Investing Activity Report for October 2020 from the Strategic Investment Board.

7.30 The Committee considered correspondence from Dr Noel Purdy in respect of the loss of funding for the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS)

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on funding for SCoTENS.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted correspondence from the office for Committee and Members Services at the Northern Ireland Assembly and from the Assembly Speaker.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to: finish early once every 3 weeks; change its meeting room as required; and suspend proceedings on 11 November 2020 in order to allow Members to attend an Armistice Day commemoration event.

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed a revised Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Minister of Education on Restart issues.

9. Any Other Business

Ms Mullan referred to Ms Kelly's recent resignation as an MLA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Kelly indicating its appreciation for her service to the Committee.

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 November 2020 in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:00am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
11 November 2020