



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 20 January 2021

Video Conference and Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA
Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (items 5-9)

Present by Video Conference:

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (items 1-5)
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Apologies: None

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

The meeting commenced at 9:08 am in public session.

Mr Butler joined the meeting at 9:09 am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Post Primary Transfer Test

The Committee noted correspondence from the Post Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) and the Association for Quality Education (AQE) declining to attend the Committee meeting to brief the Committee on the consequences of cancellation of the post primary transfer test.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the PPTC and AQE expressing regret that they were unable to attend the Committee meeting, and inviting them to attend a future meeting to present on lessons learnt from this year and preparations for contingencies for future tests.

The Committee noted that the Minister of Education had also been invited to attend the Committee meeting to brief it on Post primary transfer and that he was unavailable to attend the meetings of both 20 and 27 January.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Minister to brief it at his earliest convenience on the urgent matter of alternatives to post-primary transfer exams; and to address comments that non-selective pathways limited children's opportunities.

2.2 Budget

The Chairperson referred members to correspondence from the Committee for Finance Committee about timeframes for provision of January monitoring and budget briefing to Committee to enable timely scrutiny of financial information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a briefing from the Department of Education on this year's budget with particular emphasis on bids for covid-19 recovery and remote learning at its next meeting.

3. Draft Minutes

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

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Impact of COVID 19 - Northern Ireland Teachers' Council and the Association of School and College Leaders Teaching Unions on School Closure and Examinations

The Committee noted briefing papers from Northern Ireland Teachers' Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, National Association of Head Teachers and Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:21am:

Mr Justin McCamphill, NASUWT National Official Northern Ireland; NITC

Ms Caroline McCarthy, Official INTO, Irish National Teachers' Organisation; NITC

Ms Jacquie White, General Secretary, Ulster Teachers' Union; NITC

Mr Mark Langhammer, Regional Secretary, National Education Union; NITC

Ms Jackie Bartley, NAHT and School Principal, St Genevieve's High School; NITC

Mr Stephen Moore, ASCL President / Principal, Friends' School, Lisburn; and

Mr Scott Naismith, ASCL Executive Member / Principal, Methodist College

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the impact of Covid-19, school closure and examinations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Newton joined the meeting at 9:24 am.

Mr McNulty joined the meeting at 9:32 am.

The Chairperson commended the unions and their members and thanked union officials for the briefing.

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

- Expressing concerns regarding the pressure on special schools;
- Asking about funding in respect of schools returning after covid-19 and the success of the engage programme;
- Seeking clarity on how schools might be supported to ensure the welfare of pupils who are not engaging;
- Asking for clarity on the type of information primary schools might ethically and appropriately provide in the absence of transfer testing; and
- Seeking clarity as to arrangements for payment to substitute teachers for the period of school closures due to Covid-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education, the Education Authority and the Public Health Agency to express concerns about the timing and updating of guidance, the adequacy of arrangements to share it with schools and the lack of guidance applicable in the circumstances of special schools; and asking that information is updated regularly and shared more widely.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office seeking a response to issues raised in an 11 January letter from NITC on Special School Provision.

6. Correspondence

6.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

6.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Children's Law Centre on the Rights of the Child.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write asking the Department of Education how it is planning to take this matter forward.

6.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal on its report 'New Decade, New Approach – one year on'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the report to the Department seeking its views on the section of the report relating to education.

6.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on the Coronavirus Act 2020 Temporary Continuity Direction Notices.

6.5 The Committee noted correspondence from concerned parents regarding Special Schools remaining open during the pandemic.

6.6 The Committee noted correspondence from concerned parents about the increased attendance of key worker children in schools.

6.7 The Committee noted correspondence about payments for substitute teachers for the period of school closures due to Covid-19. The Committee has agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on this matter.

6.8 The Committee considered a response from Department of Education regarding looked after children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department again on the 14-19 strategy and alternative education.

6.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding Committee Scrutiny of Common Frameworks.

6.10 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education regarding the Children and Young People's Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting an update on the work of the Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making Project.

6.11 The Committee noted correspondence from ETI on approaches to learning and teaching during the covid-19 recovery phase.

6.12 The Committee noted a further response from the Department of Education on funding arrangements for SCoTEN.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Dr Purdy who raised this matter with it.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as amended.

8. Any Other Business

The Chairperson informed members that the Committee motion on the Adverse Impact of the Pandemic on Access to Special Educational Needs Support for Vulnerable Children has been scheduled for debate in plenary for Tuesday 26 January 2021.

The Committee moved to closed session at 11:44 am.

The Committee discussed the format of its meeting during the covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee returned to public session at 11:56 am.

9. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 27 January 2021 by video conference at 9:30 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:56 am.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
27 January 2020