



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

8 December 2021

Meeting Location: Teleconference

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mrs Diane Dodds MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Marcus Matthews (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Craig Mealey (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA



Northern Ireland Assembly

The meeting commenced at 9:37am in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Oral briefing from the Minister for Education

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the Department of Education had indicated that the Minister of Education would not be available to provide it with an oral briefing on covid-19 in schools until 12 January 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to contact the Department of Education seeking an earlier date for the briefing.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 1 December 2021.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 The Committee noted correspondence from a teaching nursery school principal about difficulties with getting substitute teachers and CO2 monitors for classrooms.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the issues raised in this correspondence in correspondence to the Minister agreed at the Committee meeting on 7 December 2021.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an update on the availability, allocation and uptake by schools of CO2 monitors and air filtration devices.

5. Correspondence

5.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

5.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the publication of the Department's Business Plan mid-year report for 2021-22.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on projects that were incomplete or showing slippage in its business plan update, and a briefing alongside general budget issues in early February.

5.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing an update on the Estimates Restructuring exercise undertaken by the Department in the context of the ongoing Review of Financial Process.

5.4 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Health to the Department of Education seeking information on how they provide access to information to people affected by hearing loss, sight loss, and/or other sensory impairments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking to be copied into the reply to this.

5.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council regarding the publication of its comprehensive report on public finances in Northern Ireland.

5.6 The Committee noted correspondence regarding the pressures facing Modern and Foreign Language Teachers in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) regarding the issues raised and copying the Committee's letter to the Minister of Education.



Northern Ireland Assembly

5.7 The Committee noted correspondence regarding an upcoming session on Deaf Awareness, facilitated by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID).

5.8 The Committee noted correspondence from THRiVE seeking a meeting with the Committee on a place-based community approach to reduce educational disadvantage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to THRiVE seeking a written briefing on the issues concerned.

5.9 The Committee noted correspondence from Parenting NI requesting to present to the Committee regarding the findings of the Big Parenting Survey which will be released in February 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a briefing on the survey.

5.10 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) to the launch of 'A Child's Rights Review of the Use of Restrictive Practices in Educational Settings in Northern Ireland'.

5.11 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the launch of its 2021 Annual Human Rights Statement.

5.12 The Committee noted an invitation from the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland to a conference on the next steps in education in Northern Ireland pending the independent review of education

5.13 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education for November 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the teaching unions thanking them for their work and that of all school staff throughout the year.

6. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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



Northern Ireland Assembly

7. School Uniform Survey – Oral briefing from Parentkind

The Committee noted the Parentkind / Parent Engagement Group, Northern Ireland School Uniform Poll Report.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 10:19am:

Mrs Jayne Thompson, Head of NI Parentkind, Parent Kind Northern Ireland.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 10:56am

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

8. School Uniform Policy - Oral Briefing from the Department of Education

The Committee noted:

- A briefing paper from the Department of Education; and
- A Research Paper on School Uniforms: Cost, Gender and Behavioural considerations

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 11:23am:

Ms Margaret-Rose McNaughton, Director of Transport and Food in Schools, Department of Education

Ms Jill Fitzgerald, Head of Food in Schools Team, Department of Education

The witnesses briefed the Committee on school uniform policy.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking if increasing school uniform grants would have any impact on other benefits received by parents and indicating its view that the review of school uniform policy should consider:



Northern Ireland
Assembly

- Moving guidance on school uniform to a legislative footing;
- The benefits of the removal of V.A.T from school uniforms;
- The benefits of schemes to promote access to pre-loved uniforms;
- That the uniform grant review take into account the impact of pandemic on repeat cleaning of uniforms in a context of rising fuel costs; and
- The role of Boards of Governors in responding with alacrity, annually to the guidance on school uniforms provided to them, and in particular the importance of early conversations with parents in this regard.

9. Flexible School Starting Age - Oral briefing from the Department of Education

The Committee noted:

- A briefing paper from the Department of Education; and
- A Research Paper on School Starting Age: Policy and Practice in the United Kingdom.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 12:26pm:

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards,
Department of Education

Mr Adrian Murphy Head of School Age Flexibility Team, Department of Education

Mr Sam Dempster, Head of Curriculum Policy, Department of Education

The witnesses briefed the Committee on school uniform policy.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 1:00pm.

Mr McNulty left the meeting at 1:05pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

10. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 9 December 2021 by video conference at 9:00am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:16pm.

Chris Lyttle MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
15 December 2021**