



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

15 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
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

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

Apologies: None



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The meeting commenced at 9:35am in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Flexible School Starting Age

The Chairperson informed the Committee that members met informally with stakeholders on the Department's proposals to allow flexibility in school starting.

The Committee noted a record of the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the note of the meeting with the witnesses and the Department of Education to facilitate discussions on the proposed bill.

Mr Sheehan joined the meeting at 9:37am.

2.2 Period Products (Free Provision) Bill

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Bill's sponsor for clarification of issues raised regarding oversight and consistent implementation of the Bill.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 7 December 2021, 8 December 2021 and 9 December 2021.



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4. Matters Arising

4.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) providing speaking notes from the Committee meeting on Tuesday 7 December 2021.

5. Correspondence

5.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

5.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Integrated Education Fund regarding the publication of the new Ulster University Transforming Education report, entitled “Same Difference? Shared Education and Integrated Education”.

5.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal seeking to brief the Committee on of its report, entitled “Should I stay or should I go? Reasons for leaving Northern Ireland for study or work”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Pivotal to brief it on this report.

5.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors seeking a meeting on the performance of buildings and issues relating to ventilation and thermal performance in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors to brief it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Finance seeking an update on a review of Building Regulations.

5.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission regarding the publication of its 2021 Annual Statement on Human Rights in Northern Ireland.



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5.6 The Committee noted an invitation from Westminster Food and Policy Forum to a conference on the next steps for science and technology in UK agriculture on 26th April 2022.

5.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry regarding its 'Brexit: One Year On' report.

5.8 The Committee noted correspondence from a child suffering from long covid raising concerns about transmission in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Minister of Education in advance of its meeting with her on Friday 17 December 2021. The Committee also agreed to seek clarification re guidance to schools about school trips during the pandemic.

5.9 The Committee noted correspondence about its engagement with the Panel charged with the Independent Review of Education.

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6. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

7. Independent Review of Education - Oral Briefing from the Independent Review of Education Panel

Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 9:51am.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Independent Review of Education Panel.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 9:51am:

Dr Keir Bloomer, Chairperson, Independent Review of Education



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Sir Gerry Loughran, Vice-Chairperson, Independent Review of Education

Ms Marie Lindsay, Panel Member, Independent Review of Education

Mr Robin McLoughlin, Panel Member, Independent Review of Education

Ms Isabel Nisbet, Panel Member, Independent Review of Education.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Independent Review of Education.

Mrs Dodds joined the meeting at 9:57am.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Lyttle left the meeting at 10:11am.

Mr Sheehan took the Chair at 10:11am.

Mr Lyttle rejoined the meeting at 11:13am and resumed the Chair.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to urge public engagement in the Review Panel's survey. The Committee also agreed to write to the panel acknowledging its engagement; urging its engagement with all stakeholders and with a strong evidence base; forwarding the letter considered at item 5.9 above; and asking for its perspective on north/south alignment or an all-island approach to education.

8. Special Schools Area Planning - Oral Briefing from the Education Authority

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 12:00pm:

Ms Michele Corkey, Director of Education, Education Authority

Ms Kim Scott, Assistant Director, Education, Education Authority

Mr Michael McConkey, Head of Community Planning & Community and Schools,
Education Authority

The witnesses briefed the Committee on Special Schools Area Planning.



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This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Dodds left the meeting at 12:24pm.

Mr Newton left the meeting at 12:33pm.

Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 12:37pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority expressing concerns at the cited 2.67% rise in pupils presenting with special educational needs; asking that it detail the complexity of the needs represented in that rise; seeking further information on how Special Educational Need units are located and resourced; and asking the Education Authority to provide it with early sight of the SEN Strategic Area Plan and a synopsis of responses to the consultation on the Plan before the end of the current mandate.

Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

9. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 16 December 2021 by video conference at 9:15am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:14pm.

Chris Lyttle MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
12 January 2022**