



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 12 September 2012
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Michaela Boyle MLA
Jonathan Craig MLA
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA
Sean Rogers MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Sheila Mawhinney (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Sharon Young (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Brenda Hale MLA

The meeting commenced at 10.31am in public session.

Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

Chairperson's Business

- The Chairperson thanked Ms Roisin Fleetham for her work as Education Committee Clerk, and welcomed the new Clerk, Mr Peter McCallion.
- The Chairperson welcomed new Committee Members; Mr Pat Sheehan and Mr Chris Hazzard. The Chairperson expressed the Committee's thanks to the previous Members, Mr Daithí McKay and Mr Phil Flanagan.

Agreed: The Committee noted relevant extracts from the Register of Interests in respect of the new Members.

- The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had agreed to publish the report on its Inquiry into School Councils.
Agreed: Members agreed the wording of a press release to announce the publication of the Report.
- The Chairperson proposed that, owing to a busy forward work programme, the Committee meeting should henceforth have an earlier start time.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that all future Education Committee meetings would start at 10:00am.
- The Chairperson expressed his sympathy for the pupils, parents and Board of Governors of Arvalee Special School following the destruction of the school premises by fire.
Agreed: The Committee endorsed the Chairperson's sentiment and agreed to write to the Department to confirm the revised timetable for the planned new-build of Arvalee School and Resource Centre
- The Chairperson drew Members' attention to the recent issues associated with the results of the 2011-12 AQA GCSE English and English Language examinations.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the proposed review by CCEA of the relevant results and on the recalibration process applied to grade boundaries and to request an update on any adverse impact on pupils in Northern Ireland.
- The Chairperson expressed his concerns regarding recent reports relating to proposed wide-ranging reforms of GCSEs in England. The Chairperson indicated that such changes must not lead to a detriment for pupils in Northern Ireland.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister for an update on the review of GCSEs in England and the implications for Northern Ireland.
- The Chairperson referred to recent difficulties with the allocation of places on certain courses at the University of Ulster and expressed his concerns that future 'A' level students should not be disadvantaged.

Michaela Boyle joined the meeting at 10.42am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Employment and Learning suggesting that it seek confirmation that A-level students will not be adversely impacted by the errors at the University of Ulster. It was also agreed that the correspondence should be copied to the Department so as to highlight the Committee's concerns. Members further agreed to request that both Committees meet jointly with representatives of the University of Ulster to discuss the issue.

- The Chairperson drew Members' attention to press reports concerning the possible closure of Artillery Youth Centre in North Belfast. The Chairperson noted that the building in question was leased by the Belfast Education and Library Board to the youth group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Belfast Education and Library Board seeking an update on the proposed closure and confirmation that there had been adequate consultation with the local community and the young people who use the Centre.

- The Chairperson referred to his recent attendance at a Suicide Prevention event. He noted with concern that it had been reported that schools do not always consistently provide learning opportunities for pupils specifically related to the maintenance of good mental health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarification of its policy in respect of learning opportunities for pupils related to the maintenance of good mental health.

- The Chairperson and Members recorded their shock and disgust at recent reports of serious threats made against a Principal of a post-primary school.

- The Chairperson referred to recent press coverage relating to the increasing cost of school uniforms and reports of retailer monopolies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on its policy on school uniforms – particularly in respect of affordability and retailer choice.

- The Chairperson on behalf of the Committee recorded his congratulations to all Northern Ireland pupils, parents and staff on the excellent set of recent GCSE and A-level examination results recorded in the 2011-12 academic year.

- The Chairperson drew Members' attention to recent difficulties within the North Eastern Education and Library Board in respect of the allocation of places at post-primary schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the North Eastern Education and Library Board seeking clarification in respect of the process used for post-primary allocation.

- The Chairperson noted recent press reports relating to the passage of the proposed Education Bill through the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for further information on the progress of the Bill.

1. Draft Minutes of 4 July 2012

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2012 were agreed by the Committee.

2. Departmental briefing on Area Planning

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.56am

Mr Diarmuid McLean, Director of Investment and Infrastructure, and Mrs Lorraine Finlay, Head of Area Planning, briefed the Committee on the on-going consultation on the post-primary Area Planning process.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee expressed concerns relating to the limited time afforded to schools to respond to the consultation or to develop consistent responses involving other schools or sectors in their Education and Library Board area.

Officials left the meeting at 12.18pm

Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 12.18pm

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 12.18pm

Agreed: The Committee unanimously agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister to seek an extension of the consultation period for the post-primary Area Planning process beyond 26 October 2012.

Some Members noted concerns in respect of an apparent timing mismatch between plans relating to the Controlled Sector and those relating to the Maintained Sector and Catholic Voluntary Grammar Schools.

Some Members also sought clarity in respect of the number of surplus school places in the primary and post-primary sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on surplus places and on the timing of the consultation process and the next stages.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed that in order to complement its stakeholder event, it would invite the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards, together with representatives of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, to brief Members on the progress of the consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board expressing its good wishes for his full recovery.

3. Briefing from the Special Advisor on the Viability Audit and Area Planning Process

Professor Tony Gallagher joined the meeting at 12.20pm

Pat Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 12.20pm

Professor Tony Gallagher, Special Advisor to the Committee, briefed Members on his preliminary findings in his consideration of the Department's Viability Audit and Area Planning process.

Members noted the briefing.

Professor Gallagher left the meeting at 1.00pm.

Sean Rogers left the meeting at 1.01pm.

The Committee discussed the importance of considering feedback from schools in respect of the Viability Audit and Area Planning process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Professor Gallagher's research into the Viability Audit and Area Planning process should include feedback from a larger number of relevant schools.

Agreed: The Committee endorsed the attendee list for the stakeholder event on 26 September and agreed to advise Committee staff as soon as possible of other schools which should be invited to attend the event.

Agreed: The Committee endorsed suggested questions which will be considered by attendees of the stakeholder event on 26 September 2012.

4. Correspondence

- 4.1** The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker accepting its invitation to speak at the launch event of the report on Schools Council inquiry.
- 4.2** The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Roger McCune, acknowledging the Committee's congratulation on the award of his MBE.
- 4.3** **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Employment and Learning Committee to request an update on the progress of the Inquiry into Careers Education Information and Guidance.
- 4.4** **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward a response from the Department to the Employment and Learning Committee in relation to the funding of careers and STEM activities by the Entitlement Framework Fund.
- 4.5** The Committee noted a response from the Department on the consideration of contextual factors for ETI reports on schools.
- 4.6** **Agreed:** The Committee noted correspondence from Sir Robert Salisbury, Chairperson of the Review Panel into the Common Funding Scheme and agreed to schedule a meeting with the Panel.
- 4.7** The Committee noted updates from the Department, the Western Education and Library Board and the Belfast Education and Library Board on the Achieving Derry/ Belfast programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this correspondence until its next meeting.

4.8 **Agreed:** Members agreed to forward a response to the Employment and Learning Committee in respect of funding of the Bytes Project.

4.9 **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer consideration of correspondence relating to the administration of medication in schools until its next meeting.

4.10 Members noted a response from the Department on concerns raised by the Rainbow Project regarding inequalities in education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to the Rainbow Project for comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a policy paper setting out its anti-bullying strategy and practices in respect of the recording of bullying in different school sectors.

4.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Mr J Nicholson on errors in CCEA examination papers.

4.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department on capital funding for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain.

4.13 Members noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister outlining legislative proposals to establish a single Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, together with a copy of the response from the Minister to that Committee setting out his views of the proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this correspondence until its next meeting.

4.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department on school transport health and safety issues.

4.15 The Committee noted a response from the Western Education and Library Board on cross-border school transport.

4.16 **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward correspondence, from the Department on concerns raised by members and by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in respect of Special Educational Needs issues, to NICCY for information.

- 4.17** **Agreed:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department and from the Minister on the Early Years consultation and agreed to forward the Department's response to the Early Years Organisation.
- 4.18** Members noted correspondence from the Department, and from the North-Eastern and Western Education and Library Boards, on Budget Allocations.
- 4.19** The Committee noted the copy of a response from the Department to Mr J P Johnston regarding redundancy procedures.
- 4.20** **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a Departmental summary of responses to the EMA consultation and to seek a briefing at the conclusion of the consultation.
- 4.21** The Committee noted a response from the Department to a request for further information on classroom assistants.
- 4.22** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on Programme for Government 2011-2015 Delivery Plans.
- 4.23** The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Food in Schools policy.
- 4.24** The Committee noted a response from the Department on outstanding Post-Project Evaluations (PPEs).
- 4.25** Members noted correspondence from the Department on the June 2012 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.
- 4.26** The Committee noted correspondence from Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School regarding budget issues.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment on the related policy issues.
- 4.27** The Committee noted a response from the Department on Passported Benefits and Free School Meals.
- 4.28** The Committee noted a response from the Department on comparative funding of pre-school provision and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

- 4.29** The Committee noted a response from the Department on concerns raised by APTIS regarding budget cuts.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to APTIS for information.
- 4.30** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding a joint DE/DEL consultation on the General Teaching Council (NI) Bill.
Agreed: Members agreed to forward this correspondence to the Committee for Employment and Learning for information.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a summary of the consultation responses and a briefing when appropriate.
- 4.31** The Committee noted a response from the Department on schools meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework for 2013.
- 4.32** The Committee noted a response from the Department on the EU Cohesion Policy Programme 2014-2020.
- 4.33** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department enclosing details of a consultation on its proposals to cease publication of the statistical press release on participation in full-time education and vocational training by 16 and 17 year-olds in Northern Ireland.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting a summary of responses to the consultation and a briefing on the issue, if appropriate.
- 4.34** The Committee noted an invitation for NICCY to apply for Participation Awards.
- 4.35** The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill. Members expressed concerns in respect of individuals or institutions which might have connections with schools but which might be excluded from the Inquiry.
Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Committee expressing its concerns that schools are excluded from this legislation and suggesting that the terms of reference of the inquiry should allow recommendations to be made relating to future inquiries which might include schools.
- 4.36** The Committee noted a response from the Department on capital funding for schools.

4.37 The Committee noted a response from the Department to the concerns of the trade union representing non-teaching staff regarding service delivery plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to the trade union.

The Committee also noted a number of Department of Education News Releases and publications which were previously emailed to Members.

5. Forward Work Programme

Members noted the relocation of the School Transport - Health & Safety event on 18 September 2012 to Room 144.

Members noted that the visit to Lisanelly on 10 October 2012 would be on a single day and would if possible include an external Committee meeting.

Members noted that a visit to the Fermanagh Shared Education Programme and St. Aiden's School would be scheduled

Agreed: The Committee agreed the forward work programme subject to the amendments above.

6. Any Other Business

Members highlighted concerns relating to school bus passes which it was reported were not valid from the beginning of the school year and tended not to be used near the end of the school year

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Regional Development to seek clarification on this issue from Translink.

7. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 19 September 2012 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.28pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
19 September 2012