



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 26 September 2012
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Michaela Boyle MLA
Jonathan Craig MLA
Brenda Hale MLA
Chris Hazzard 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)
Ursula Savage (Bursary Student)

Apologies:

Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.02am.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

- 2.1.** The Chairperson advised members that the Minister had invited the Chair and Deputy Chairperson to meet with him to discuss the Education Bill which, subject to the Speaker's consent, is expected to be introduced shortly.

Danny Kinahan joined the meeting at 10.07am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, after the Education Bill had been introduced, a public notice should be placed in regional newspapers inviting submissions to the anticipated Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed that electronic media and other means should be employed to ensure the fullest possible participation by stakeholders in the anticipated Committee Stage of the Education Bill.

- 2.2. The Chairperson referred to papers relating to proposed changes in respect of GCSEs and the role of Ofqual, which he had requested from CCEA during a briefing at the Committee meeting of 4 July 2012.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write formally to CCEA to request the relevant papers.

- 2.3. The Chairperson advised Members that Mr Adrian Arbuthnot, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, and Mrs Dorothy Angus, Director of Access, Inclusion and Well-being, have both retired from the Department of Education.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to thank these officials for their assistance to the Committee over the last few years.

- 2.4. The Chairperson welcomed Miss Ursula Savage, a bursary student, to the Committee Office team.

- 2.5. The Chairperson referred to a recent CCEA press statement relating to its ongoing urgent review of AQA English GCSE grades.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity in respect of the current position for Northern Ireland pupils who had taken the AQA English GCSE in 2011-12 and whose progress to AS level might be impacted by the grade boundary issues identified by Ofqual. The Committee also agreed to seek clarity in respect of the impact for Northern Ireland students of the Welsh Exam Regulator's reported decision to adjust relevant grade boundaries.

3. Draft Minutes of 19 September 2012

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2012 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1. The Committee discussed the arrangements for the stakeholder event on Area Planning / Viability Audits scheduled for 26 September 2012.

The Committee noted a press release which had been previously agreed by correspondence.

Agreed: Members agreed that they were content with the arrangements for the stakeholder event.

- 4.2. The Committee noted correspondence from Youthnet requesting an opportunity to provide a briefing on the draft Priorities for Youth strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in addition to feedback from the Department it would also hold an informal stakeholder meeting to discuss the draft strategy.

5. Departmental briefing on the October Monitoring Round

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.29am.

Mr Trevor Connolly, Director of Finance, and Mr Stephen Creagh, Deputy Director of Investment and Infrastructure Division, briefed the Committee on the Department's October Monitoring Round submission.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Officials left the meeting at 11.17am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would write to the Minister to request clarification on his decision not to submit Savings Delivery Plan monitoring returns to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to DFP for further information on the necessity for Savings Delivery Plan monitoring returns and the anticipated impact of non-compliance.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to DFP for an update on the position regarding End of Year Flexibility funds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for further information on the extent and nature of actual and potential asbestos problems in school buildings.

6. Departmental briefing on the Programme for Government Departmental Delivery Plans

The Departmental official joined the meeting at 11.18am.

Mrs Katrina Godfrey, Director of Planning and Performance Management, briefed the Committee on the Programme for Government Departmental Delivery Plans.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 11.40am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule oral and written briefings on the quarterly updates on the Departmental Delivery Plans which are to be returned to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to forward a list of concerns to the Department regarding the electronic assessment programme to be used in determining attainment levels, so that these can be addressed in the Departmental briefing on The Education (Levels of Progression for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3) Order (NI) 2012, scheduled for 3 October 2012.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department in respect of the comparison between Northern Ireland pupils' level of attainment and international benchmarks in respect of English and Mathematics.

The official left the meeting at 12.07pm.

7. Correspondence

- 7.1.** The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on his statutory duty to children with Special Educational Needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to the concerned parent who initiated the correspondence and to the Newry and Mourne Down Syndrome Parental Support Group.

- 7.2.** The Committee considered correspondence from the Integrated Education Fund, enclosing a report on Community Engagement in the Education Policy Debate and requesting an opportunity to brief the Community.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the report as part of the evidence base for its consideration of Area Planning issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer an oral briefing at this time.

- 7.3.** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding funding and class size issues reported at Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School.

- 7.4.** The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, enclosing a report on its Review of Transitions to Adult Services for Young People with Learning Disabilities.

- 7.5.** The Committee noted correspondence from the Pawzitive organisation requesting an opportunity to brief the Committee on its children's literacy programme - Book Buddies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a briefing from Pawzitive on approaches to literacy at a later date as part of its thematic consideration of this issue.

- 7.6.** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning on errors in the allocation of places by the University of Ulster. The Committee advised that the full impact of the errors in respect of current and future students would not be known until December 2012.

Agreed: Members agreed to postpone a joint meeting with the Committee for Employment and Learning and the University of Ulster relating to allocation problems until the New Year.

- 7.7.** Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Social Development, enclosing an extract from an Assembly Research paper entitled, Mapping Poverty and Social Deprivation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the paper to the Department for an update on the relevant policies.

- 7.8.** The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of the Environment on school transport health and safety issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this correspondence until its next meeting on 3 October, when a joint briefing from DE and DoE officials has been scheduled on this issue.

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

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed its draft Forward Work Programme from September to December 2012, and the impact on its workload of the anticipated Education Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive written briefings on the Fermanagh Shared Education Programme and on Shared Education from Assembly Research.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include, if possible, a visit to the site of Arvalee Special School during its planned visit to Omagh on 10 October 2012.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards and the CCMS on 7 November 2012 to discuss the Viability Audits and the Area Planning process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme from September to December 2012.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 3 October 2012 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.17pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
3 October 2012