



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2012
THE SENATE CHAMBER

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)
Ursula Savage (Bursary Student)
Caroline Perry (Research Officer) – *Item 5 only*

Apologies:

Brenda Hale 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 he had attended a seminar arranged by Assembly Research entitled: Delivering Shared Education. The Committee noted relevant papers from the seminar which were included in tabled items.
- 2.2. The Chairperson referred Members to the 2012 General Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) and the issues highlighted in respect of the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update on the issues raised by the C&AG including:

- late payment of invoices by Education and Library Boards;
- late approval of incremental pay awards for non-teaching staff in Arm's Length Bodies;
- late approval of pay increments for teachers; and
- no approval since 2006-2007 of pay remits for non-teaching staff in voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools.

2.3. The Chairperson referred to a number of issues in the Statement made by the Minister on 6 November 2012 entitled: Putting Pupils First: Improving Outcomes; Improving Opportunity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- information on the proposed dedicated governor support service;
- further details on the review which is to be undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) looking into how assessment and evaluation systems deliver improvements for pupils. Members sought clarity as to the review's Terms of Reference; costs and the degree of access which the review would enjoy in respect of the Department; its Arm's Length Bodies and schools; and
- an update on the revised Early Years Strategy.

3. Draft Minutes of 24 October 2012

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2012 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from last week's meeting.

5. Briefing from Assembly Research on Surplus School Places

The briefing commenced at 10.24am.

Ms Caroline Perry, Assembly Research Officer, briefed the Committee on the calculation of surplus places in schools. The Committee also noted relevant correspondence from the Minister and the Department.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The briefing ended at 10.39am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the actual level of surplus places in schools in Northern Ireland. It was further

agreed to seek clarification as to the financial impact of maintaining surplus places both in terms of capital and resource costs.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to determine whether it has access, or the timescale to which it is to develop access, to the Manhattan system which is currently used by the Education and Library Boards to determine the pupil capacity of schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a Departmental briefing on the responses to the post-primary Area Plan consultation and the revised Area Plans on 9 January 2013.

6. Briefing from the Committee's Special Adviser on the Viability Audits and Area-Based Planning Consultation.

Professor Gallagher joined the meeting at 10.40am

Professor Tony Gallagher, Special Advisor to the Committee, presented his Interim Report on the Department's use of Viability Audits and the related Area Planning process.

Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 10.43am.

Michelle McIlveen joined the meeting at 10.46am.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson declared an interest as a member of the Board of Governors of a controlled secondary school.

Professor Gallagher left the meeting at 11.25am.

7. Briefing from the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on Viability Audits and the Area-Based Planning process.

Representatives joined the meeting at 11.26am.

Mr Gavin Boyd, Acting Chief Executive, Belfast Education and Library Board; Mr Gregory Butler, Chief Executive, South-Eastern Education and Library Board; Mr Jim Clarke, Chief Executive, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; Mr Mike Donaghy, Head of Development, Planning and Support Services, Southern Education and Library Board; Dr Clare Mangan, Acting Chief Executive, Western Education and Library Board; and Mr Shane McCurdy, Chief Executive, North-Eastern Education and Library Board; briefed the Committee on the Viability Audits and the Area Planning process.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 12.50pm.

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 12.57pm.

Sean Rogers left the meeting at 1.01pm.

The Committee noted responses to the consultation on the post-primary Area Plans from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; the Ulster Farmers Union; and Drumragh Integrated College.

Representatives left the meeting at 1.18pm.

Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 1.18pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a motion for plenary debate on the Viability Audits and the Area Planning process until after the Departmental briefing scheduled for 9 January 2013.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) seeking detailed information on the actual current and projected level of surplus places in primary and post-primary schools. The Committee also agreed to write to the ELBs and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to determine if they require further assistance from the Department to improve the Area Planning consultation process.

Pat Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 1.20pm.

8. Correspondence

Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 1.21pm.

- 8.1.** The Committee considered a response from the Department on Home to School Transport - Health and Safety issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Justice for comment on AccessNI checks on foreign nationals. The Committee also agreed to forward the correspondence to the Federation of Passenger Transport for information.

Danny Kinahan rejoined the meeting at 1.22pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Southern Education and Library Board for further information on the cost of Translink bus passes.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Belfast Education and Library Board for an update on the recent serious road traffic accident involving school transport.

- 8.2.** Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning regarding the withdrawal of ear-marked funding to schools for the Entitlement Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Minister as requested.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of the withdrawal of support for the Entitlement Framework and the timing of the introduction of the revised Common Funding Scheme.

- 8.3. Members noted an invitation to a conference, *Ambitious for All: Autism, Behaviour Intervention and Learning*, from the Centre for Behavioural Analysis at Queen's University, Belfast.
- 8.4. The Committee considered responses on Departmental Savings Delivery Plans from the Minister for Finance and Personnel and the Minister for Education.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on its progress in achieving its Savings Delivery Plan.
- 8.5. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department relating to the Education Bill.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider this information in more detail when it begins its formal evidence-taking sessions on the Education Bill.
- 8.6. Members noted a response from the North Down Primary Principals Group on Computer-Based Assessment.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the correspondence further at its meeting on 21 November 2012 when the Department is scheduled to provide an update on NILAs and NINAs.
- 8.7. Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on Disability Sports NI
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department as requested.
- 8.8. Members noted correspondence from the Minister to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, on services available in schools to support pupils with allergies.
- 8.9. Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning referring to the progress of the Review of the Common Funding Scheme.
- 8.10. The Committee considered a response from the Department on the cost of school uniforms and guidance to schools on uniform policy.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a paper from Assembly Research on practices in comparable jurisdictions in respect of school uniform costs.

- 8.11.** The Committee considered correspondence from a concerned parent on entitlement to hours of supervision as specified in a Statement of Educational Need.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the level of detail to be included in Statements of Educational Need.
- 8.12.** Members noted correspondence from the Department, enclosing a copy of the report entitled: Comprehensive Study of North South Co-operation in the Education Sector, which was commissioned jointly by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Education (DENI).
- 8.13.** The Committee noted correspondence from a member of the public on the 2012 CCEA A-Level Mathematics paper.
- 8.14.** Members noted correspondence from the Department in response to the Committee's request for clarification on the delivery of the recently-announced signature project to improve numeracy and literacy.
- 8.15.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on the surrender of Translink bus passes.
- 8.16.** The Committee noted an invitation from Youth Action Northern Ireland to a consultation event on the draft Priorities for Youth strategy.
- 8.17.** The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson from Assembly Outreach and Education to meet Ms Heather Smith of 'Rock the Vote', during her visit to Parliament Buildings, on 13 November 2012.

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

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive Departmental briefings on Computer-Based Assessments (scheduled for 21 November 2012) and on Area Planning (scheduled for 9 January 2013).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Education Bill at its meeting on 14 November 2012.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended Forward Work Programme.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 14 November 2012 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.31pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
14 November 2012