



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
TUESDAY 9 April 2013 and WEDNESDAY 10 April 2013
ROOM 29 and the SENATE CHAMBER

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Sheila Mawhinney (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Sharon McGurk (Clerical Supervisor)
Sharon Young (Clerical Officer)
Ursula Savage (Bursary Student)
Caroline Perry (Research Officer) – Items 7 and 8 only
Laura McCourt (Bursary Student) – Items 7 and 8 only

Apologies:

Sean Rogers MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 3.06 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Briefing from the Committee's Special Advisor on Area Planning

The Special Advisor joined the meeting at 3.07 pm.

The Committee received a briefing from Professor Tony Gallagher, Special Advisor, on primary school Viability Audit data and the progress to-date on Area Planning.

Jonathan Craig joined the meeting at 3.13 pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that its Special Advisor should produce a paper on the post-primary school Viability Audit data.

3. Ministerial briefing on Area Planning

The Minister and his officials joined the meeting at 3.29 pm.

John O'Dowd, Minister of Education; John McGrath, Deputy Secretary; Diarmuid McLean, Director of Investment and Infrastructure; and Lorraine Finlay, Area Planning Policy Team, briefed the Committee on the Area Planning process.

Jo-Anne Dobson joined the meeting at 3.30 pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information on a Development Proposal by Orchard County Primary School.

Brenda Hale left the meeting at 3.55 pm

Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 3.55 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the interim reports prepared by its Special Advisor to the Minister for information.

Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 4.13 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update from the Department on the new school build project for Strabane Academy.

Jo-Anne Dobson rejoined the meeting at 4.17 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a Departmental update on the breakdown of surplus places in primary and post-primary schools.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to request a copy of the Department's report on the Certificate of Religious Education.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Governing Bodies Association on the lack of involvement of the voluntary grammar sector in the Area Planning Steering Group.

The Chairperson noted that the pupils at Arvalee Special School had been able return to the original school site pending the construction of a new build at the Lisanelly Shared Education campus. He commended the Minister on the timely and efficient way in which the impact of the fire damage to Arvalee School had been managed by the Department and the Executive.

The Minister and his officials left the meeting at 4.31 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal stakeholder briefing session on primary school Area Planning.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed that the Special Advisor should develop: a potential list of schools to be invited; and a short briefing document for participants including some guidance questions.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 4.37 pm.

The meeting resumed at 10.05 am on Wednesday 10 April 2013 in the Senate Chamber. The following Members were in attendance: Mervyn Storey, Danny Kinahan, Jonathan Craig, Jo-Anne Dobson, Brenda Hale, Chris Hazzard, Trevor Lunn, Michelle McIlveen and Pat Sheehan.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1. The Chairperson reminded Members of the recent extreme weather conditions and the potential adverse impact of the weather on pupils in isolated areas, who were required to complete examination preparation for GCSE and A Level modules.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain if any guidance had been issued to schools to address this situation.

4.2. The Chairperson referred Members to a survey being carried out by CCEA on options for reforming or replacing GCSEs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA to request a copy of the survey.

4.3. The Chairperson advised Members that the Department has recently announced capital funding for the youth sector ahead of the finalisation of the Priorities for Youth policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing on the outcome of the consultation on the Priorities for Youth draft policy.

4.4. Members noted that the Chairperson had met with the All-Party Group on Science and Technology.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite a representative from the Royal Society of Chemistry to participate in the visit to the Northern Ireland Science Park.

4.5. The Chairperson noted recent written questions relating to the development of an Efficient Discharge Scheme for school principals and senior teachers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update on the timescale for the introduction of this measure.

5. Draft minutes of 4 April 2013

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

6. Matters Arising

The following matters were considered:

- 6.1. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Voluntary Grammar Schools' Bursars Association in relation to the Education Bill.

7. Briefing from Assembly Research on School Uniform

Assembly Research joined the meeting at 10.12 am.

Representatives of Assembly Research and Library Services provided the Committee with an overview of school uniform policy in Scotland, England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Michaela Boyle joined the meeting at 10.25 am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Research paper to the Department for comment, and to ascertain if the implications for school uniform stockists have been taken into consideration for the closure or amalgamation of schools under Area Planning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Research paper to PTA–NI for comment on the issues raised.

8. Briefing from Assembly Research on Alternative Measures of Social Deprivation

Representatives of Assembly Research and Library Services briefed the Committee on 'Acorn', an area-based measure of socio-economic deprivation.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 10.38 am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the South-Eastern Regional College for further information on its pilot scheme to identify patterns of socio-economic deprivation among its students.

Brenda Hale left the meeting at 10.42 am.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to request additional information from Assembly Research on alternative measures of deprivation used internationally.

Assembly Research left the meeting at 10.44 am.

9. Departmental Briefing on the Corporate Plan

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.45 am.

John McGrath, Deputy Secretary, and Katrina Godfrey, Director of Planning and Performance Management, briefed the Committee on the DE Corporate Plan for 2012-2015 and the Business Plan for 2012-2013.

Brenda Hale rejoined the meeting at 10.50 am.

Jo-Anne Dobson rejoined the meeting at 10:53am.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 11.02 am.

Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 11.02 am.

Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 11.48 am.

Michelle McIlveen left the meeting at 11.49 am.

Brenda Hale left the meeting at 11.49 am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a paper from the Department on the mutual recognition of qualifications by other jurisdictions.

Trevor Lunn left the meeting at 11.56 am. The Committee continued to take evidence with a quorum of four under Standing Order 49 (5).

Departmental officials left the meeting at 11.59 am.

Trevor Lunn rejoined the meeting at 12.00 pm. The Committee regained its full quorum.

10. Correspondence

- 10.1.** The Committee noted an invitation from Action for Children / Barnardo's NI / Extern to an event in the Long Gallery on 9 May 2013.
- 10.2.** Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on access to school sports facilities.
- 10.3.** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on issues relating to Computer-Based Assessment.
- 10.4.** The Committee considered correspondence from the Department outlining actions undertaken since the discovery of the Legionella bacterium at Hillcroft School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain if alternative provision had been made for pupils during the period of closure of the school.

10.5. The Committee noted comments from the Department in relation to an Assembly Research paper on International Education Studies.

10.6. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education and the Department for Social Development on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) Action Plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Health and Social Care Board for further details of the CYPSP Action Plans.

10.7. The Committee considered a response from the Department outlining its rationale for the selection of additional nurture units which are to be funded under the Signature Project for Delivering Social Change.

The Committee deferred consideration of this correspondence until AOB.

10.8. Members noted a request from the College of Occupational Therapists to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing specifically related to Special Educational Needs.

10.9. The Committee noted correspondence from Bombardier Aerospace Belfast on the new UK aerospace industrial strategy.

10.10. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Association of School and College Leaders to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education in England, on changes to A levels.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this correspondence when responding to the Department's consultation on the reform of A Levels.

10.11. The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers to its Annual Conference on 23 May 2013.

10.12. The Committee noted a response from the Southern Education and Library Board in relation to a frozen food contract.

10.13. The Committee considered a response from the Department on bus safety issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for further information on the transportation-sharing pilot scheme underway in Dungannon and on the Translink 3 for 2 Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on the proposal that insurers should be required to advise schools of significant changes in a transport provider's insurance arrangements.

- 10.14.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on Broadband provision in rural schools.
- 10.15.** The Committee noted correspondence from the All Party Group on Science and Technology.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.
- 10.16.** The Committee noted correspondence from the North Eastern Education and Library Board on the provision of emergency life support training in schools.
- 10.17.** The Committee considered a response from the Department on the compulsory school starting age.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this response to Parents Outloud for comment.
- Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to schedule a briefing on this topic.
- 10.18.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on admissions criteria for St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone.
- 10.19.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on outstanding Post-Project Evaluations (PPEs).
- 10.20.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on additional funding for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
- 10.21.** The Committee noted an invitation from Queen's University, Belfast, and the Science and Technology Facilities Council to a reception on 8 May 2013.
- 10.22.** The Committee noted a response from the Department to issues raised in relation to sport in schools.
- 10.23.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on the establishment of Schools Councils.
- 10.24.** The Committee considered a response from the Department on the co-ordination of school starting and finishing times.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this response to the PTA-NI for comment.
- 10.25.** The Committee noted a response from the Department on workforce planning and related budget reallocation.
- 10.26.** The Committee noted a Report from the Department on Investing Activity up to March 2013.
- 10.27.** The Committee noted an invitation from Families and Schools Together (FAST) to various graduation events.

10.28. The Committee considered a response from the Department on the Entitlement Framework and the Essential Skills qualification.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to the Employment and Learning Committee for information.

10.29. The Committee noted a response from the Department confirming the date of the publication of the Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education as 22 April 2013.

10.30. The Committee noted an invitation from the BELONG programme to a Children's Court and Creative Showcase event on 13 April 2013.

10.31. The Committee noted an invitation to a Celebration of the Sharing Education Programme event on 12 April 2013.

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

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft Forward Work Programme up to 5 June 2013, and agreed that it was content with the Programme as drafted.

12. Any Other Business

The meeting moved into private session at 12.16 pm.

The Committee reconsidered correspondence from the Department on the funding of additional Nurture Units under the Signature Project for Delivering Social Change. Members expressed surprise and disappointment that existing or proposed nurture units were not to be supported in a number of deprived areas.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Northern Ireland Nurture Group Network for comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for further details of the selection criteria for new Units. Members also agreed to copy this correspondence to the Committees for Social Development and for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

13. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 17 April 2013 at 10:00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.24 pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
17 April 2013