



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 3 JULY 2013
The SENATE CHAMBER

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Michaela Boyle MLA
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA
Seán Rogers MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Christopher McNickle (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Sharon McGurk (Clerical Supervisor)
Sharon Young (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Jonathan Craig MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 9.37am.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 The Chairperson informed the Committee of the work of Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle in respect of Shared Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle on Shared Education.

Danny Kinahan joined the meeting at 9.40am

2.2 The Chairperson informed the Committee that he had recently met informally with representatives of the Children's Law Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Children's Law Centre to brief the Committee, at an appropriate juncture, on recent legal proceedings involving the Department and matters relating to Special Educational Needs.

2.3 The Chairperson considered possible Freedom of Information requests during summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson in respect of the release of Committee papers sought under a Freedom of Information request during summer recess.

3. Draft Minutes of 25 and 26 June 2013

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meetings held on 25 and 26 June 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Briefing from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

Witnesses joined the meeting at 9.43am

Helen McLaughlin, Vice Chair, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE); Jill Houston, former Principal, Hazelwood Integrated Primary School; Peter McCreddie, Associate, NICIE; and Olwen Griffith, Senior Development Officer, NICIE briefed the Committee on pre-school integrated provision and "A Positive Pathway to Integration".

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Jo-Anne Dobson joined the meeting at 10.02am

The Chairperson declared an interest as a member of the Board of Governors of Ballymoney Controlled Integrated Primary School.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 10.21am and the Deputy Chairperson chaired the meeting from this point.

*Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 10.47am
Witnesses left the meeting at 10.52am*

*Proceedings were suspended at 10.52am
Proceedings were resumed at 10.54am*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its feedback on the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education's "A Positive Pathway to Integration" document.

6. Briefing from the Department on the Revised Common Funding Scheme

Officials joined the meeting at 10.56am

John McGrath, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education; Roisin Lilley, Head of Common Funding Scheme Implementation Team, Department of Education; and Michelle Thompson, Common Funding Scheme Implementation Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee on the Revised Common Funding Scheme (CFS).

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Jo-Anne Dobson returned to the meeting at 11.13am.

Seán Rogers declared an interest as the Chairperson of the Board of Governors of Grange Primary School.

Officials left the meeting at 11.25am

The Committee noted changes to the revised CFS in respect of schools with high concentrations of FSME pupils and how this will effect budgetary allocations to schools. Members noted particularly the impact of this change in respect of rural schools.

Agreed: Given the importance of FSME as an indicator of deprivation in schools, the Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek information as to how it is to encourage improved identification of FSME pupils or the guidance it has given to ELBs and CCMS in this regard.

The Committee noted that it was to arrange an informal stakeholder briefing event following summer recess on the revised Common Funding Scheme.

*Proceedings were suspended at 11.28am
Proceedings resumed at 11.31am*

7. Briefing from voluntary groups on education services for the visually impaired

Witnesses joined the meeting at 11.31am

Rosaleen Dempsey, Child and Youth Services Manager, Royal National Institute for Blind People; Anne Magee, Principal, Jordanstown School; Andrew Murdock, Policy and Engagement Manager, The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (NI); and Orla O'Sullivan, Vice Chairperson, Angel Eyes briefed the Committee on education services for the visually impaired

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Michaela Boyle declared an interest as a person with a visual impairment.

Officials left the meeting at 12.14pm

The Committee noted its recurrent and serious concerns in respect of the provision of joined-up education and health services for pupils.

Agreed: The Committee therefore agreed to write to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to suggest a joint study on this subject with a view to the production of an agreed short report and joint Committee motion during the next session of the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Health and Social Care Board to seek an update on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership as to how the CYPSP will:

- improve the provision of joined-up educational and other services for the Visually Impaired;
- lead to better management of key educational transitions for the Visually Impaired; and
- develop a consistent and positive experience for parents in securing the necessary educational support for Visually Impaired children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the briefing paper to the Health Minister and to seek information on the review of ophthalmic services.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning to seek information on career pathways and related services for Visually Impaired school leavers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek the following:

- an update on the work of Priority Action Group (PAG) 3 of the Vision Strategy Implementation Group (NI);
- information in respect of the operation and efficiency of the interface between its ALBs and those of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the provision of services for visually impaired pupils;

- details of the Department's funding of, and plans for the Regional Vision Resource Base;
- information on a recent iPad pilot developed for Visually Impaired school children; and
- an assurance that following CCEA's apparent failure to adopt changes to NILAs and NINAs as recommended by Special Schools such as the Jordanstown School, that the Department will take action to ensure proper consultation with Special Schools by its ALBs in future.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Education and Library Boards to seek confirmation of the level of staffing and other support for Visually Impaired pupils and the funding of, and plans for the Regional Vision Resource Base.

8. Written briefing– Education and Skills Authority Business Case

The Committee noted the approved Full Business Case for the Establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

9. Written briefing - Entitlement Framework Directions

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department on directions to schools on the Entitlement Framework.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the differing approaches to the establishment of statutory and voluntary pre-school provision.

10.2 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding funding for theatre projects in schools including the Replay Theatre Company's Bliss Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Replay Theatre Company and to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

10.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the application of VAT to new school builds.

10.4 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the on-going Review of Teacher Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an interim oral briefing on the Review of Teacher Education.

10.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister regarding the timescales for schools to participate in the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project.

10.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program.

10.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Southern Education and Library Board regarding Area Plans in Craigavon.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister on the recent decision of the SELB in respect of Area Plans in Craigavon.

10.8 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from MLAs to the Minister regarding a proposed expansion of St Colman's Primary School, Lambeg.

10.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding school transport and Access NI checks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek more information on its revised advice and guidance on the pre-employment vetting of staff in respect of residents from the south of Ireland and non-British/Irish nationals.

10.10 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on the facilitation of sharing of best practice across Area Learning Communities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its view that the Department should play a more active role in the facilitation of the sharing of best practice across all of the Area Learning Communities.

10.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the June Monitoring Round.

10.12 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding the proposed merger of Portora and Enniskillen Collegiate.

10.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding a consultation on revisions to the Formal Intervention Process.

10.14 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA regarding its policy relating to potentially sensitive aspects of the school curriculum.

10.15 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA regarding examination errors and the limited impact which the G8 Summit has had on examinations.

10.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Foyle Learning Community regarding transport issues.

10.17 The Committee noted the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland Investing Activity Report June 2013 for the Department of Education.

10.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding EU funding and the Peace IV programme.

10.19 The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People regarding its consultation with children on shared education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People to schedule an oral briefing to the Committee following summer recess.

10.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the University of Ulster regarding its views on possible changes to A-levels and GCSEs.

10.21 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding admissions to the Boys Model School in Belfast.

10.22 The Committee considered correspondence from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools regarding the oversubscription of Catholic Maintained primary schools and from the Department advising that all future Development Proposals will be tested against relevant Area Plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an oral briefing on the oversubscription of primary schools.

10.23 The Committee considered correspondence from the Replay Theatre Company.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Replay Theatre Company correcting any misunderstanding in respect of the extent of any joint working on relevant subjects between the Education Committee and the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

10.24 The Committee considered correspondence from Foyle College regarding proposed changes to the Building Handbook.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

10.25 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker to advise that a public petition had been lodged regarding the future of the Dickson Plan.

10.26 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister regarding a response he has sent to the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment regarding the Northern Ireland Science Park's recommendations for promoting culture and talent among young people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Employment and Learning (CEL) in respect of the Education Committee's contribution to the CEL review of careers guidance.

10.27 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding an analysis by Assembly Research on Departmental expenditure.

11. Forward Work Plan

The Committee agreed that it was content with the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 4th September 2013 at 10:00 am in the Senate Chamber.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.38pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
4 September 2013