



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2013
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
Seán Rogers MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Karen Jardine (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Sharon McGurk (Clerical Supervisor)
Sharon Young (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: None

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.01am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 The Chairperson offered the Committee's best wishes to Michelle McIlveen and Brenda Hale who it is anticipated will be leaving the Education Committee as of next week.

2.2 The Chairperson noted the extension of entitlement to Free School Meals to children enrolled at all 15 independent non-grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland.

Mervyn Storey declared an interest as a governor and secretary of Ballymoney Independent Christian School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it welcomed the extension of eligibility to Free School Meals to independent schools.

3. Draft Minutes of 4 September 2013

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

4. Matters Arising

The following matters were considered:

4.1 The Committee considered the anticipated publication of the Development Proposal(s) relating to the Area Planning process in Craigavon.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would seek a briefing from the Department and the Minister on the responses to the Development Proposal(s) consultation and the way forward, respectively, prior to the final Ministerial decision being made.

4.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Belfast Education and Library Board regarding the reported "lock-out" of some pupils at Hazelwood Integrated College.

5. Briefing from the Department on the Programme for Government / 2012-13 Business Plan update.

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.07am:

John McGrath, Deputy Secretary; Katrina Godfrey, Director of Planning and Performance Management; David Hughes, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards briefed the Committee on progress in meeting Programme for Government commitments and on the 2012-13 Business Plan update.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Kinahan joined the meeting at 10.46am.

Pat Sheehan joined the meeting at 10.55am.

Departmental officials left the meeting at 11.47am.

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

- (i) Early Years
 - an update on the “Early Years - Learning to Learn” consultation;
 - clarification on the previously reported temporary moratorium on new funded full-time pre-school places;
 - an update on the timing of the review of Sure Start;
 - clarification as to the allocation of funding to those Early Years education providers with budgetary surpluses; and,
 - clarification on what is considered to be a reasonable distance for parents to travel to avail of a funded pre-school education place.
- (ii) GCSE / A-level attainment
 - an update on the 2012-13 GCSE results, including the level of STEM entries (at both GCSE and A-Level); and
 - information setting out pupil pass rates for GCSE English and Maths in Year 13 or Year 14.
- (iii) Special Educational Needs
 - the implications for proposed SEN legislation following the outcome of a recent court ruling regarding a pupil with dyslexia.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a Committee visit to the DE headquarters at Rathgael House, Bangor.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further briefing from Departmental officials regarding the 2013-14 Business / Corporate Plan during which further details would be sought on a wide-range of issues including: School Workforce Review; Governor Support Service; and Shared Education.

Mr Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 11.48am.

6. Briefing from the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council – Public Service Pensions Bill

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11.48am

Seamus Searson, NASUWT; Avril Hall-Callaghan, UTU; and Nuala O’Donnell, INTO briefed the Committee on the Public Service Pensions Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 12.30pm.

Witnesses left the meeting at 12.40pm.

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

- information on the 2012 Revaluation of the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Pension Scheme (NITPS) and the development of relevant comparators;

- clarification on the reported exclusion of the Northern Ireland teachers' unions from the England and Wales public sector pension negotiations;
- clarification on the commencement date of the 10 years transitional protection as set out in the Bill;
- clarification on the apparent absence of an Equality Impact Assessment for the Bill; and
- commentary on the NITC proposed amendments.

7. Briefing from Parents Outloud and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers on School Starting Age

Witnesses joined the meeting at 12.42pm

Dr Liz Fawcett, NI Representative, Parents Outloud; Mark Langhammer, NI Director, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL); Mary O'Brien, parent and grammar school teacher, (Parents Outloud), Esther Waugh, parent, (Parents Outloud); Julie Thomas, Principal, Clandeboye Primary School, Bangor (Parents Outloud) briefed the Committee on School Starting Age.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 1:14pm.

Seán Rogers left the meeting at 1:14pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education:

- advising that it is minded to support the rapid implementation of proposals for greater flexibility on school starting age, subject to consideration of any significant practical barriers;
- seeking details of the pupil numbers, costs and impact of Parents Outloud / ATL's proposals in respect of greater flexibility regarding school starting age and the provision of additional pre-school places; and
- clarification as to whether the proposals could be implemented via guidance or if they would require new legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek advice from Assembly Legal Services regarding the relevant legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to ATL and Parents Outloud to request the following:

- information outlining the impact on educational attainment of being 'young in year' for looked-after children;
- details of any interaction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in respect of educational attainment for 'young in year' looked-after children;

- legal advice obtained by ATL regarding the relevant legislation; and
- research material relating to Northern Ireland cohorts of 'young in year' or other relevant groups including the enriched curriculum study in the Shankill area of Belfast.

Witnesses left the meeting at 1.37pm.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning regarding an Invitation to the Apprenticeships Showcase Event on 24 September 2013 in the Long Gallery.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would attend the event, diaries permitting.

8.2 The Committee considered correspondence from the Attorney General for Northern Ireland regarding an invitation on to a Colloquium on Legislative Quality on 3 October 2013.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that owing to a clash with its visit to Scotland, Members would be unable to attend.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Integrated Education Fund regarding the "lock-out" of some students at Hazelwood Integrated College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward recent relevant correspondence from bELB to Hazelwood integrated College for a response.

8.4 Following the earlier briefing from Departmental officials on the Programme for Government / Business Plan, Members discussed matters relating to the proposed Lisanelly Shared Education campus.

The Chairperson noted particular concerns in respect of school ownership issues.

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

- clarification as to why a Level 4 risk has been assigned to the financing of this project;
- detail on the emerging risks related to the project; and
- clarification as to the way forward for participating schools with different arrangements for school building ownership.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that:

- the Common Funding Scheme event would be scheduled for Wednesday 6 November 2013;

- the “Stem is cool” event, organised by the NI Science Park, would be scheduled for Wednesday 29 January 2013;
- the Effective Questioning Workshop would be scheduled for Wednesday 11 December 2013; and
- Gavin Boyd, previous interim Chief Executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board, would be invited to brief the Committee with the current Chief Executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board on 9 October 2013 on the closure of Orangefield High School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft itinerary and costs for the forthcoming visit to Scotland.

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

10. Any Other Business

The Committee noted an invitation from Danny Kinahan to attend an informal meeting organised with the Immaculate Conception College, Derry / Londonderry following the meeting of the Education Committee on 18 September 2013.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 18 September 2013 at 10:00 am in the Senate Chamber.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.45pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
18 September 2013