



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 9 OCTOBER 2013  
SENATE CHAMBER

**Present:**

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)  
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Michaela Boyle MLA  
Jonathan Craig MLA  
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA  
Stephen Moutray MLA  
Robin Newton 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:** Chris Hazzard MLA; Trevor Lunn MLA.

*The meeting commenced in public session at 10.07am.*

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

**2.1** The Chairperson provided a summary of the Committee's recent visit to schools, the Scottish Parliament; and the Scottish Qualifications Authority in Edinburgh.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to explore the possibility for further engagement with the Commission for the Delivery of Rural Education and asked the Clerk to develop proposals for an Area Planning event which would involve the Commission.

**2.2** The Chairperson referred Members to the publication of the Learning to Learn final report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department and seek a briefing on the report and an update on the recently completed report on the Early Years Fund.

**2.3** The Chairperson reminded Members of the recently published CCEA report and DE consultation on GCSEs and A-Levels.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department and seek a briefing in January 2014 following the conclusion of the relevant DE consultation.

Members also noted that NISRA data for Year 12 GCSEs and Year 14 A-Levels will be available at the end of November 2013.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk should circulate this information once it becomes available.

**2.4** The Chairperson reminded Members of Departmental correspondence which advised of a reallocation of £15.8m to the Aggregated Schools Budget in 2014-15.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department and ask that the spreadsheets published in support of the consultation on revisions to the Common Funding Scheme be revised to provide projected school budgets in 2014-15 which would include the £15.8m reallocation.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to seek confirmation that the proposed VAT arrangements for the Grant Maintained Integrated and Voluntary Grammar sectors will not lead to any financial detriment for the schools in question.

**2.5** The Deputy Chairperson referred Members to recent media reports about an OECD comparative study on levels of numeracy and literacy in Northern Ireland, England and other countries in Europe and Asia, which indicated that ability in young adults locally lags behind other areas.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Employment and Learning to request more information on this study.

*Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 10.21am.*

**2.6** The Deputy Chairperson referred Members to concerns which had been raised about the future of St. Mary's Primary School, Brollagh and the role of CCMS in dealing with school closures.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite CCMS to brief the Committee on how it deals with proposed school closures across the sector.

Members noted that the Committee does not involve itself in matters relating to specific schools, but that Members may elect to meet privately with the stakeholders involved with this particular school.

### **3. Draft Minutes of 30 September 2013**

**Agreed:** The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. Briefing from Assembly Research on the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement Inquiry**

*A representative of Assembly Research joined the meeting at 10.25am.*

Caroline Perry, Assembly Research Officer briefed the Committee on her research papers on “Assessing value added in school inspection and supporting improvement”; and “Approaches to school inspection” as part of the Committee Inquiry on the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

*Stephen Moutray left the meeting at 10.27am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request further information from Assembly Research on the educationally relevant measures of social deprivation employed in other jurisdictions identified in the research paper.

The Chairperson expressed the Committee’s best wishes to Caroline as she goes on maternity leave, and thanked her for the invaluable work she has carried out on behalf of the Committee.

*Caroline Perry left the meeting at 10.42am.*

### **6. Orangefield High School/Area Planning Knock Dual Carriageway**

*The following witness joined the meeting at 10.43am:*

Gavin Boyd, former interim Chief Executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

*Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 11.22am.*

*The witness left the meeting at 11.38am.*

*Stephen Moutray left the meeting at 11.38am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Belfast Education and Library Board seeking information on the current and planned dispersal of former students, teaching staff and non-teaching staff from Orangefield High School. The Committee also agreed to seek clarification as to how enrolment arrangements had been altered at Orangefield High School for 2013-14 without an approved Development Proposal.

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

- its dissatisfaction at the treatment of schools, staff, parents and pupils as a consequence of the Area Planning process in East Belfast and the surrounding area to-date;
- its belief that the Belfast Education and Library Board did not adequately plan Controlled provision in East Belfast and the surrounding area and failed to undertake a critical path analysis or basic risk assessment of its proposals;
- its concern over Belfast Education and Library Board's failure to communicate adequately or in a timely manner with the Board of Governors, staff, parents and pupils of Orangefield High School; and
- its concern at the surprisingly unprofessional attitude from the Belfast Education and Library Board with regard to this matter.

*Stephen Moutray returned to the meeting at 11.39am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the reported review of the Development Proposal process.

*Jo-Anne Dobson returned to the meeting at 11.47am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the lessons learned from the experience at Orangefield High School should contribute to the Committee's consideration of the Area Planning process including planning, consultation, and the development of options including amalgamation and closure. The Committee agreed that the Clerk should develop appropriate proposals which will exploit the learning from the Committee's visit to Edinburgh and its planned further engagement with the Commission for the Delivery of Rural Education in Scotland.

## **7. Briefing from the Department on the Public Service Pensions Bill**

*The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 11.50am:*

Ian Gallagher, Head of Pay Remit and Pensions Policy Team, Department of Education; and Seamus Gallagher, Teachers' Negotiating and Pensions Policy Team, Department of Education.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

*The witness left the meeting at 12.13pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the relevant evidence on the Public Service Pensions Bill to the Committee for Finance and Personnel (CFP). The Committee also agreed to write to CFP noting:

- the sensitivity of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) liability estimates to the HM Treasury discounting rate;
- the complexity of assumptions relating to the NITPS liability estimates;
- concerns about the impact which the proposed new arrangements may have on female teachers, and other teachers, who owing to caring responsibilities may have gaps in their career history;
- concerns about the proposed alteration of the age at which teachers may retire and the potential impact on staff morale and the educational experience for pupils; and
- concerns about the impact on employment levels for newly qualified teachers when the age at which teachers may retire is altered (to 68 years old).

## 8. Correspondence

**8.1** The Committee noted a response from the Department on the proposed extension of Free School Meal eligibility in England. The Committee also noted that the Minister appeared to advise that the finalisation of the PEDU Action Plans (including the plan for school catering) is linked to the establishment of ESA.

**8.2** The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on Development Proposals for the Craigavon Area Plan. The Committee also noted that the Minister had advised that he is unable to meet with any interested party, including the Committee, outside of the consultation period before a final decision is made on the proposal.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek legal advice on the constraints facing the Minister in respect of Development Proposals and consideration of evidence from the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Southern Education and Library Board to express its frustration at the unsatisfactory pre-consultation process for the Development Proposals for the Craigavon Area Plan and to request an update on the timeline for the publication of the relevant Development Proposals.

**8.3** The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding queries on School Starting Age Flexibility..

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further clarity on the timescale for the development of relevant proposals.

**8.4** The Committee noted correspondence from Parents Outloud providing further information on studies relating to flexibility in School Starting Age.

**8.5** The Committee noted correspondence from the Institution of Engineering and Technology on female participation in STEM education and careers.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to take the correspondence into consideration in planning for the STEM event on 29 January 2014; and to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Employment and Learning for information.

**8.6** The Committee noted a response from the National Science Learning Centre (NSLC) including information on the NSLC Enthuse Awards and responding to queries raised by the Committee regarding professional development opportunities for science teachers.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to determine if the Enthuse Awards had been publicised in schools.

**8.7** The Committee noted a response from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to suggested changes to the qualifying criteria for Nurture Unit funding under the Signature Projects.

**8.8** The Committee noted the DE Investment Strategy Report for September 2013.

**8.9** The Committee noted tabled correspondence from the Minister following the Minister's recent announcement about Levels of Progression.

**8.10** The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment relating to the proposed closure of the Exploris Centre in Portaferry, and inviting the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Education Committee to a meeting on 17 October 2013.

The Committee also noted associated correspondence from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment; advise that it is content for that Committee to remain in the lead for this issue; and ask to be kept updated on any developments.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a tabled version of the draft Forward Work Programme.

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

*Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 12.21pm.*

## **10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 12.24pm.*

## **11. Recommendations for the CEL Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Committee - Written Briefing**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Committee for Employment and Learning regarding the recommendations for its Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance.

*Danny Kinahan returned to the meeting at 12.28pm*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning to advise that it endorses the recommendations of the Committee's Inquiry and to request further information on the benchmarking of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance provided during the transition between post-primary and third level education.

## **12. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 16 October 2013 at 10:00 am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.32pm.*

**Mervyn Storey**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**16 October 2013**