



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2013
SENATE CHAMBER

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Michaela Boyle MLA
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Trevor Lunn 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: Jonathan Craig MLA and Chris Hazzard MLA.

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.03am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 The Chairperson noted concerns raised by the National Deaf Children's Society (last week during the Committee's visit to the Listening Bus) in respect of participation by the Department of Education and the Education and Library Boards in the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) Action Plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and the Education and Library Boards to confirm their continuing participation with the CYPSP Action Plans.

2.2 The Chairperson referred Members to the answer to AQ0 4726/11-15 in which the Minister has indicated that the Department is working with the NSPCC to bring forward an effective preventative education programme designed to keep primary school children safe from sexual exploitation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and seek a written briefing on the relevant education programme and how the Department's policy in this regard has been informed by events in other jurisdictions.

2.3 The Chairperson reminded Members that, following the Committee's Inquiry into School Councils, the Department was to produce a circular to help schools to set-up school councils. Members noted that the circular had apparently not been published.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the production of the new DE Circular relating to the establishment of school councils.

3. Draft Minutes of 9 October 2013

Agreed: The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 The Chairperson referred Members to correspondence in Tabled Papers from the Minister declining the Committee's request that the consultation period for the revised Common Funding Scheme be extended.

Seán Rogers declared an interest as Chairperson of a Board of Governors of a school.

Mervyn Storey declared an interest as a member of two Boards of Governors of schools.

Michaela Boyle joined the meeting at 10:32am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to indicate its disappointment regarding his decision not to extend the consultation period and asking for this to be reconsidered. The Committee also agreed to seek an undertaking from the Minister that the outcome of the relevant consultation is not pre-determined, and that he will take account of the views of all parents, teachers and principals before coming to a final decision. Members also agreed to request details from the Minister of the educational benefits achieved to-date as a result of additional funding provided to schools based on levels of Free School Meal Entitlement.

Stephen Moutray joined the meeting at 10.37am.

4.2 The Chairperson referred Members to draft terms of reference for external research in respect of alternatives to Free School Meal Entitlement as a measure of deprivation in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a Special Adviser to:

- review the availability and usefulness of the following data sets:
 - Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures;
 - other area-based census information including rurality, unemployment, local authority housing, level of lone parenthood, numbers of Travellers and number of large families etc.;
 - PISA / TIMSS & PIRLS background information; and
 - Special Educational Needs Register.
- advise on the benefits / shortcomings / sensitivities of using such information in identifying deprivation among school pupils and the feasibility of developing an appropriate poverty index; and
- comment on how such an index might compare with FSME as an indicator of poverty in schools.

The Committee noted that the timescale for this work could be approximately one year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek interim findings in respect of the above at the earliest possible juncture and in line with the timescale for the consultation on the revised Common Funding Scheme.

5. Oral Evidence from the Education and Training Inspectorate on the Committee's Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement Process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish written submissions and any additional material relating to the Inquiry, apart from the confidential submissions, on the relevant pages of the Committee's website.

The following witnesses from the Education and Training Inspectorate joined the meeting at 10.43am:

Noelle Buick, Chief Inspector; Faustina Graham, Assistant Chief Inspector; Paul McAlister, Assistant Chief Inspector; and John Anderson, Managing Inspector.

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

*Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 11.13am.
Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 11.21am.*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the following information from the Education and Training Inspectorate:

- an update on a school which was placed in the Formal Intervention Process in May 2013;

Jo-Anne Dobson joined the meeting at 11.25am.

- information on the area based inspection undertaken across West Belfast in 2009, now being taken forward by the West Belfast Partnership Board;

Danny Kinahan returned to the meeting at 11.43am.

Stephen Moutray left the meeting at 11.48am.

- case studies of schools where practical advice from the Education and Training Inspectorate following an inspection has led to school improvement;

Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 12.18pm.

Stephen Moutray returned to the meeting at 12.20pm.

- a copy of the most recent evaluation of the ETI conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA); and
- information on the number of schools which will potentially be affected following the implementation of the proposed revisions to the Formal Intervention Process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an update on the consultation on proposed revisions to the Formal Intervention Process.

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 1.00pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 1.01pm.

6. Departmental Briefing - Community Access to School Premises

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the Departmental briefing on Community Access to School Premises until a later date.

7. Committee Visit to Scotland - Written Briefing

The Committee noted a written report of the Committee's recent trip to Scotland.

Agreed: Following the visit and the Committee's consideration of STEM issues in Scotland, the Committee agreed to write to CCEA and seek detailed information on the science curriculum for primary schools.

Seán Rogers left the meeting at 1:02pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the report, and any additional information received, on its webpages.

The Committee also noted that on foot of the visit, there would be further:

- co-operation with the Scottish Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education in a future Area Planning event; and
- consideration of the potential benefits and disadvantages of shared educational campuses (as part of the Committee's Inquiry into shared and integrated education).

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance and Personnel following a query from the Committee about the use of a Contingency Fund by the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the letter to the Department requesting information on the size of its contingency fund; the reasons for its use; and to remind the Department that any funds above the de minimus level should be surrendered.

8.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education indicating the publication of the final 'Learning to Learn' report.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Robin Swann MLA, a member of the Board of Governors of Ballee Community High School, requesting a meeting to discuss the Area Planning process in Ballymena.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from the Board of Governors of Ballee Community High School to an informal meeting with Committee Members.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent requesting to meet the Committee to discuss the closure of the Woodlands Language Unit.

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education following a Committee query regarding ownership issues associated with the Lisanelly Shared Educational Campus.

8.6 The Committee noted an invitation forwarded by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the UK/EU 40 Years Event on Friday 18 October 2013 at the Great Hall, Queen's University Belfast.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Employment and Learning regarding cross border student access to higher education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the DEL letter to the originator of the correspondence – the President of the Letterkenny Institute of Technology - for his information.

8.8 The Committee noted an invitation from the University of Ulster to the 'Tick the Box - supporting young people to University and Further Education' event on Wednesday 30 October 2013 at the Ulster Museum.

8.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker advising that a petition entitled 'Cross-border Area Learning Community to provide post-primary education in North and West Fermanagh' was presented to the Assembly on Tuesday 8 October 2013.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a visit to St. Mary's, Brollagh as part of a future wider visit to the Fermanagh area.

8.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister including the most recent Barroso Task Force Desk Officer Progress Reports.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule a briefing from Departmental officials on EU funding, originally due to be taken on 25 September 2013.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a tabled version of the draft Forward Work Programme, and noted new timings for the briefings on the Inquiry into ETI and School Improvement.

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

10. Any Other Business

10.1 The Committee noted that an approach had been made by the Association of Members of Education and Library Boards with regard to a possible meeting with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Clerk to investigate this further.

There was no other business.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 23 October 2013 at 10:00 am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.10pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
23 October 2013