



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2013
SENATE CHAMBER

Present:

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

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10.02am.

1. Legal Advice - School Starting Age

A representative from Assembly Legal Services joined the Committee at 10.03am.

Simon Kelly, Assembly Legal Services, provided legal advice regarding flexibility within existing legislation in respect of the minimum school starting age.

Danny Kinahan joined the meeting at 10.07am.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Simon Kelly left the meeting at 10.19am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification in respect of young-in-year, or emotionally less mature children who are home-schooled for 1 year, or remain in pre-school for an extra year, and their subsequent entry into a formal school setting. The Committee also agreed to seek further information in respect of children who are “held back” at primary school.

The meeting moved to open session at 10.29am.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson’s Business

3.1 The Chairperson noted that during the recent debate on school enrolment, the Minister had indicated that the Department was to undertake a review of school enrolment procedures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek the terms of reference, framework and the timeline of this review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include consideration of enrolment pressures in its consideration of Area Planning matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek comment from its Special Advisor on enrolment issues, including the particular challenges faced by Special Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the procedures and pressures in respect of enrolment in Special Schools.

3.2 The Chairperson welcomed the recent statement by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation and noted the important role of schools and the education system in limiting child sexual exploitation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to seek confirmation that the Education and Training Inspectorate will support the Inquiry, and that the Minister will be a recipient of the Inquiry recommendations once it has completed.

3.3 The Chairperson referred Members to an information pack prepared for the Committee’s informal stakeholder event on the Common Funding Scheme, to be held on 6 November 2013.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to permit the press to attend the Common Funding Scheme informal stakeholder event.

4. Draft Minutes of 23 October 2013

Agreed: The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

5. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the following responses to the Committee's ongoing Inquiry:

- a response from the Department following the evidence session on 16 October 2013, including:
 - an update on a school which was placed into the Formal Intervention Process in May 2013;
 - a link to the area-based inspection report in West Belfast (2009);
 - a link to the report on Full Service schools (June 2013);
 - ETI case studies relating to 2 schools;
 - a copy of the most recent NISRA post-evaluation report on ETI; and
 - information in respect of the proposed changes to the Formal Intervention Process.

Robin Newton left the meeting at 10.26am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the West Belfast Partnership Board to seek further information on the work that has been undertaken to support the findings of the area-based inspection, with a view to a Committee visit at a later stage.

Robin Newton returned to the meeting at 10.28am.

The Committee also noted the following further submissions to the Committee's Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate:

- a response from the General Teaching Council NI following the evidence session on 23 October 2013;
- a response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers following the evidence session on 23 October 2013;
- a copy of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council submission on the Workforce Review; and
- a submission to the Inquiry from the organisation, Altram.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a summary issues paper highlighting the emerging themes from the Inquiry at a future meeting and for the correspondence to appear on the Committee webpage.

6. Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement Process - Oral Evidence from NIPSA

The following witnesses from NIPSA joined the meeting at 10.40am:

Tony McMullan, Assistant Secretary, NIPSA and Janette McNulty, DE Secretary, NIPSA.

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

Michaela Boyle joined the meeting at 10.59am.

Stephen Moutray joined the meeting at 11.20am.

Robin Newton left the meeting at 11.42am.

Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 11.43am.

Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 12.02pm.

Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 12.03pm.

Seán Rogers left the meeting at 12.06pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12.08pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NIPSA to seek:

- clarification on whether it believes that the 20% proposed reduction in the budget for the Education and Training Inspectorate is to be supported by increased self-evaluation within schools and the use of Associate Assessors;
- its comments on the Education Scotland inspection model; and
- examples of recommendations provided by ETI inspectors in respect of Development Proposals.

Seán Rogers returned to the meeting at 12.09pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek information as to how ETI determines the frequency of inspections and the size of its inspection teams.

7. Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement Process - Oral evidence from the Education and Library Boards

The following witnesses from the Education and Library Boards joined the meeting at 12.10pm:

Kim Scott, Senior Education Officer, South Eastern Education and Library Board; Ray Gilbert, Senior Education Officer, North Eastern Education and Library Board; Paddy Mackey, Senior Education Officer, Western Education and Library Board;

Board (also representing the Southern Education and Library Board); and Gerry McGuinness, Senior Education Officer, Belfast Education

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

Jo-Anne Dobson returned to the meeting at 12.24pm.

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 1.03pm.

Seán Rogers left the meeting at 1.04pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 1.16pm.

Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 1.16pm.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Environment providing an update on the Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary.

8.2 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the Department of Education on the Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on the September 2013 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from St. Mary's Limavady on the availability of free sessional bus passes to pupils at Loreto College, Coleraine, following its redesignation as a Catholic non-selective school

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity on its policy in respect of free sessional bus passes following the redesignation of a school.

8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the National Deaf Children's Society including a briefing paper on educating deaf children.

8.6 The Committee considered a response from the Department following its query about participation in the Enthuse Awards.

The Committee noted a paper on the BELB strategic partnership with the National Science Learning Centre and references which indicated that "little science was being carried out in some schools" and how changes to the curriculum "have downgraded the importance of science".

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if these statements reflect ELB or Departmental policy.

8.7 The Committee considered a response from the Department to the Committee's queries on the October Monitoring Round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek a projection for the reduction in the urgent or very urgent maintenance backlog in schools, including details of how much of this relates to health and safety issues.

Jonathan Craig returned to the meeting at 1.20pm.

8.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department to the Committee's queries following the briefing on progress towards Programme for Government targets and the 2012/13 Business Plan update.

8.9 The Committee noted an invitation from the Department to the launch of its Traveller Child in Action Framework; and noted that the event clashes with the next meeting of the Education Committee on Wednesday 13 November 2013.

8.10 The Committee noted correspondence from CCMS in response to Committee queries following press reports on CCMS recruitment policy proposals.

8.11 The Committee noted an invitation to the 'Promoting Health and Wellbeing in Schools' event, hosted by Queen's University, Belfast, on Thursday 14 November 2013.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Committee staff would attend the event, and provide feedback to the Committee to inform its future consideration of health and education issues.

8.12 The Committee noted an invitation to the event 'Should the State withdraw funding from Religious Schooling', hosted by Queen's University, Belfast, on Thursday 28 November 2013.

8.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the Southern Education and Library Board which provided an update on Development Proposals in the Craigavon Area.

The Committee noted that Development Plans are expected to be published in January 2014 and expressed its concerns at the continuing uncertainty in respect of the impact of Area Planning on Dickson Plan schools.

Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 1.23pm.

8.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister providing feedback on the Joint Ministerial Council Europe meeting held in March 2013.

8.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Western Education and Library Board following a Committee query on the involvement of Education and Library Boards in the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships (CYPSP).

8.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department following a Committee query on its involvement in Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships (CYPSP).

8.17 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent including a copy of an online petition to the Minister regarding the Common Funding Scheme and entitled "Don't Reduce Funding at my Local Primary School".

8.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on access by statutory committees to Barroso Taskforce Desk Officers.

8.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister which included the European Priorities 2012-13 Implementation Report.

8.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department which included the Capital Activity Investment Progress Report - October 2013.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Strategic Investment Board to determine if information has been updated by the Department as required.

8.21 The Committee noted an invitation from the Field Studies Council to attend a joint FSC/RSA debate entitled "Reaching into the outside" in London on Tuesday 5 November.

8.22 The Committee noted correspondence from Moneynick and Duneane Primary Schools highlighting a business plan in support of further sharing between both schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NI Commission for Catholic Education to seek its views on the specifics of the design of shared education campuses as highlighted by Duneane and Moneynick Primary Schools.

8.23 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA following Committee queries with regard to science in the Primary School curriculum.

8.24 The Committee noted further correspondence from St. Francis of Assisi Primary School, Castlederg in respect of a proposed school closure.

9. Forward Work Programme

9.1 The Committee considered planned oral evidence sessions for its ongoing Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting on Wednesday 13 November 2013 should commence at 9.30am in private session so as to accommodate oral evidence from a representative of a group of school principals.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed that the session would not be recorded by Hansard.

9.2 The Committee considered planned briefings in support of its response to the Common Funding Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive an interim briefing from Professor Tony Gallagher at its meeting on 20 November 2013 on alternatives to FSME as a measure of social deprivation in schools.

9.3 The Committee considered its draft forward work programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commence meetings at 9:30am:

- on 27 November 2013 to accommodate an additional briefing; and

- on 11 December 2013 to accommodate oral evidence from Professors Borooah and Knox on the Committee's ongoing Inquiry.

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

9.4 The Chairperson reminded Members of a previous invitation to attend a round table event organised by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the Delivering Social Change: Signature Projects on Wednesday 13 November at 2.30pm in the Long Gallery.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 November 2013 at 9.30 am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.27pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
13 November 2013