



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2013  
SENATE CHAMBER

**Present:**

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)  
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Jonathan Craig MLA  
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA  
Chris Hazzard MLA  
Trevor Lunn MLA  
Maeve McLaughlin 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:** Stephen Moutray MLA

*The meeting commenced in closed session at 10.01am.*

The Chairperson advised Members that the Department was unable to provide a paper to accompany a planned briefing on the responses to the consultation on the Common Funding Scheme (CFS).

**Agreed:** The Committee therefore agreed to defer the CFS briefing and adopt a revised agenda for the meeting.

*Danny Kinahan joined the meeting at 10.04am.*

**1. Consideration of draft Committee response to the Common Funding Scheme consultation**

The Committee discussed a draft response to the Common Funding Scheme consultation and considered potential amendments.

*Jo-Anne Dobson joined the meeting at 10.06am.*

*Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 10.08am.*

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

- request an explanation of his recent comments reported in the press regarding the allocation of an additional £15.8m to schools reportedly outside of the Common Funding Formula;
- seek clarity in respect of additional funding for the Aggregated Schools Budget in the next 3 years;
- seek confirmation that if in future VAT costs associated with VG and GMI schools cannot be successfully recouped from HM Treasury that the Department will absorb those losses with no detriment to the schools in question;
- request the advice which the Department provides to the Education and Library Boards and schools on the management of surpluses and deficits within school budgets; and
- request an oral briefing, with supporting written material, from Departmental officials on the responses to the consultation on the Common Funding scheme in January.

*The meeting moved into open session at 10.49am.*

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were recorded as above.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

**3.1** The Chairperson welcomed Ms Maeve McLaughlin MLA as a new Member of the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Ms Michaela Boyle MLA to thank her for her contribution to the Education Committee.

**3.2** The Chairperson advised Members of a reception in the Long Gallery hosted by the Department of Education for students who entered the BT Young Scientist Competition, and also the STEM Bus, stationed outside Parliament Buildings which Members were welcome to visit.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an update on proposals discussed in the previous mandate to fund three STEM Buses.

*Robin Newton left the meeting at 10.53am.*

**Agreed:** Members agreed to advise the Clerk of their availability to attend the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition in Dublin in January 2014.

**3.3** The Chairperson advised Members that he and the Deputy Chairperson received an informal briefing from officials on Tuesday 3 December 2013 on the latest PISA report which gives Maths, English and Science capabilities for 15 year olds in 65 countries. Members noted that the results for English and Science were similar to previous reports but that Northern Ireland had slipped down the rankings for Maths.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing on the next steps to address the findings of the PISA report, during the scheduled briefing on 15 January 2014 on the reform of GCSEs and A-Levels; and to ask for a breakdown of the schools in Northern Ireland that participated in the PISA survey.

*Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 11.01am.*

**3.4** The Chairperson referred Members to the Terms of Reference for the Department's Home to School Transport review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to determine if the review will also consider the relevant Central Management Support Unit review (2000) and the relevant PEDU recommendations. The Committee also agreed to seek clarification as to whether the review will consider changes to free sessional bus passes which would link costs to actual usage by pupils during term time.

*Chris Hazzard returned to the meeting at 11.02am.*

*Jonathan Craig joined the meeting at 11.02am.*

#### **4. Draft Minutes of 27 November 2013**

**Agreed:** The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted correspondence from the West Belfast Partnership Board relating to the Committee's Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the West Belfast Partnership Board to seek confirmation that the new Education and Training Forum has been established; and to ask the Clerk to report back on provisional arrangements for a visit to consider relevant educational interventions which are being promulgated in West Belfast.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the correspondence should be published on the Committee's webpage with the other Inquiry papers.

## 6. 2013-14 Business Plan - Departmental briefing

*The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 11.03am:*

John McGrath, Deputy Secretary; Katrina Godfrey, Deputy Secretary; and Fiona Hepper; Deputy Secretary.

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

The Chairperson expressed his thanks to John McGrath for his interaction with the Committee during his time with the Department of Education, and wished him well in his new role with the Department for Regional Development. The Chairperson also welcomed Katrina Godfrey and Fiona Hepper to the Committee in their new roles within the Department.

*Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting at 11.45am.*

*Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 11.50am.*

*Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 12.08pm.*

*Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 12.27pm.*

*The Departmental officials left the meeting at 12.41pm.*

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

- a briefing paper on the shared education baseline developed from the most recent School Omnibus survey;
- a briefing paper on the Department of Education's contribution to PfG targets where it is not in the lead, and on the contribution of other Departments to meeting PfG targets for which the Department of Education is in the lead;
- an analysis of why a small number of parents have not engaged with the process to allocate pre-school places to all eligible children;
- information on the costs associated with pupils from the Republic of Ireland accessing education in Northern Ireland and vice versa; and
- a briefing paper on Looked After Children and Personal Education Plans.

## 7. Correspondence

**7.1** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education in response to queries from the Committee in respect of the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) "Our Life in Care" Report.

**7.2** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment providing links to the transcripts of evidence sessions relating to the Exploris Aquarium.

**7.3** The Committee noted correspondence from Rt. Rev Alan Harper, providing further information on the proposed Armagh Educational Village.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite representatives of the proposed Armagh Educational Village to an informal briefing in Spring 2014; and to request further information about the level of response to the proposal from parents and pupils in Markethill.

**7.4** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education responding to queries from the Committee in respect of the maintenance backlog in schools.

**7.5** The Committee noted an invitation to the 'Shaping a Generation' seminar on the Contested Spaces/Interface programme hosted by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the Stormont Hotel on Wednesday 4 December 2013.

**7.6** The Committee noted correspondence from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) which included the Education and Training Inspectorate Final Evaluation Report of 19 shared education projects developed and delivered through the IFI Sharing in Education Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the IFI and request a briefing on the Sharing in Education Programme as part of the Committee's anticipated Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

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

## **9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 December 2013 at 9.30am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.44pm.*

**Mervyn Storey**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**11 December 2013**