



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2014
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
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)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.34am

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

10.35am Chris Hazzard left the meeting.

2.1 Common Funding Scheme

The Chairperson advised that the Department intends to brief the Committee on the responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme at the meeting on 12 February 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend its agenda for 12 February 2014 so as to include the briefing on the Common Funding Scheme and to commence proceedings at 9.30am.

10.36am Chris Hazzard returned to the meeting.

2.2 Vacancy Control - Education and Library Boards

Members noted that the Minister of Education had indicated during Topical Questions on Tuesday 4 February 2014 that he is to review the policy of vacancy controls within Education and Library Boards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to seek information on how the policy of vacancy control within Education and Library Boards is to be changed; and to request an oral briefing, in closed session if appropriate, on the barriers to progress on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

2.3 Guidance to schools on post-primary transfer

The Chairperson referred Members to guidance on unregulated transfer tests issued by the Department and previously noted by the Committee in June 2013. Members noted that the guidance indicates that where a parent believes that the Revised Curriculum is not being followed by a school, they can complain in the first instance to the principal; then to the Board of Governors and then to a Curriculum Complaints Tribunal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask Assembly Legal Services to update its advice on the status of the relevant Departmental guidance.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to each Education and Library Board seeking information as to the use of Curriculum Complaints Tribunals.

2.4 Chinese New Year - Speaker's event

The Chairperson advised Members that he had attended the Speaker's event on Tuesday 4 February 2014 to mark Chinese New Year and the launch of the Zhejiang Photography Exhibition in Parliament Buildings.

2.5 STEM is Cool event

Members noted that a report on the "STEM is Cool" event, held in Parliament Buildings in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP) on 29 January 2014, would be issued by NISP within a few weeks.

10.47am Stephen Moutray left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Joanne Stuart thanking her for organising the "STEM is Cool" event and to request a link to the video presentation from NISP Connect with a view to asking the Department to circulate this to schools as part of the promotion of STEM in Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Clerk to set out existing Assembly social media strategies and identify ways in which the work and activities of the Committee could be shared with a wider audience.

2.6 ESaGS.tv

The Chairperson reminded Members of NEELB's Every School a Good School television resource which provides schools with access to best practice videos.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NEELB so as to arrange a visit and tour of the ESaGS.tv facilities in Antrim.

3. Draft Minutes of 22 January 2014

Agreed: The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted further information relating to its Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process.

This included:

- a draft summary of the issues raised at the informal briefing event with District Inspectors' on 23 January 2014;
- further information from Parents' Outloud following their oral briefing on 8 January 2014, including that organisation's transcript of the Chief Inspector's interview on Radio Ulster, also on 8 January 2014;
- a response from the Department to the Committee's queries regarding IME inspectors, parental questionnaires, ETI resources, data requirements and self-evaluation; and
- a response from the Department on ETI independence; third party assessment of schools; and the customer service review undertaken of ETI by EMQC Ltd.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the draft summary of the informal briefing event on 23 January 2014 with the District Inspectors for comment; and to forward the draft summary to the Department of Education for information.

11.01am Stephen Moutray returned to the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the most recent submission from Parents' Outloud to the Department for comment.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity on:

- the qualifications, teaching and school leadership experience of ETI Inspectors;
- the apparent increases in ETI's budget;
- the ratio of ETI inspectors to the actual number of school visits as compared with other jurisdictions;

- the Chief Inspector's reported remarks on Radio Ulster relating to the frequency of "sustaining improvement" inspections;
- why District Inspectors are no longer the Reporting or Deputy Reporting Inspector for inspections of schools within their districts; and
- whether District Inspectors have seen a reduction in so-called "District Time".

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write again to the Department to seek its view in respect of increased independence for the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the correspondence from Parents' Outloud and from the Department with regard to the Inquiry should be published on the Committee's webpage along with the other Inquiry papers.

The Chairperson advised Members that Antrim Grammar School had kindly agreed to facilitate a visit at lunchtime on Tuesday 4 March 2014, during which staff will explain the self-evaluation and inspection process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive, in the coming weeks, a briefing from junior ETI officials on self-evaluation and the school inspection process. The Committee further agreed that at this briefing it would defer more general questions on ETI and the School Improvement process until the evidence session with the Chief Inspector on 12 March 2014.

5. Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement Process – Formal Intervention Process – Consultation Feedback

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 11.07am:

David Hughes, Director of Curriculum, Qualification and Standards Directorate and Karen McCullough, Head of Standards and Improvement Team.

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

11.11am Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting.

11.36am Pat Sheehan left the meeting.

11.55am Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting.

11.58am Seán Rogers left the meeting.

12.00pm Robin Newton left the meeting.

The Departmental officials left the meeting at 12.07pm.

12.07pm Chris Hazzard left the meeting.

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

- the number of schools that responded to the consultation which are in, or have recently been in, the Formal Intervention Process; and
- further information on the seven schools which will enter the Formal Intervention Process once the revised policy is introduced.

12.08pm Stephen Moutray left the meeting.

12.08pm Robin Newton returned to the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reserve its position on the proposed changes to the Formal Intervention Process pending the conclusion of its Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process.

6. SL1 Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) Cap and Share Reform Proposals - Departmental Briefing

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 12.08pm:

Ian Gallagher, Head of Pay Remit and Pensions Policy Team; Seamus Gallagher, Pay Remit and Pensions Policy Team; and, Brian Quinn, Pay Remit and Pensions Policy Team.

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

12.09pm Chris Hazzard returned to the meeting.

12.11pm Chris Hazzard left the meeting.

12.12pm Pat Sheehan returned to the meeting.

The Departmental officials left at 12.33pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the proposed statutory rule:

The Teachers' Superannuation (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

to be made.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from Departmental officials in respect of another SL1 relating to increased employee contribution rates from April 2014 to the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme.

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Culture Arts and Leisure Committee regarding the launch of its Inquiry into the Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Employment and regarding the launch of its Inquiry into Post-School Provision for Individuals with Learning Disabilities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Employment and Learning requesting that it be kept apprised of relevant evidence and findings.

7.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education following its queries about enrolment changes in Orangefield High School in the absence of an approved Development Proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to again request clarification in respect of the legal cover for BELB's decision to reduce enrolment at Orangefield High School in the absence of an approved Development Proposal; and to ask whether, lessons had been learned from the current outworking of the post-primary Area Plans in East Belfast.

7.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding its queries about the absence of any resource or capital bids in the recent January Monitoring Round.

7.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education following a request for sight of the Extended Schools Annual Report 2012-13.

7.6 The Committee noted a response from the South Eastern Education and Library Board concerning its engagement with the Children and Young Peoples' Strategic Partnership.

7.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel which included a Department of Finance and Personnel summary of Departmental Savings Delivery Plans progress for 2013-14.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on Savings Delivery Plan progress for 2013-14.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding its queries about guidance provided to schools in respect of communicating sensitive issues to parents, which advised that the North Eastern Education and Library Board had launched an urgent investigation into the incident of concern to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) to request feedback on the urgent investigation and any subsequent actions to be taken.

7.9 The Committee noted a late response from North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) to its queries regarding Minor Works relating to the June Monitoring Round.

7.10 The Committee noted the monthly "Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland Investing Activity Report" which highlighted progress on capital build projects by the Department of Education; and further noted that 27 projects are in pre-procurement; 7 projects are in procurement; 4 projects are in construction/delivery; and that 44

projects are completed, but that much of the information provided is more than 90 days old.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing on its capital projects and their status.

7.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the December 2013 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

7.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education following its request for clarity on references in a report by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to delays relating to equality issues in respect of the literacy and numeracy Signature Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for information.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Western Education and Library Board to seek information on actions that are being taken to complete recruitment of teachers for this Project.

7.13 The Committee noted a letter from National Association of Head Teachers highlighting a factual inaccuracy regarding a written answer to AQW 29579/11 relating to Kirkinriola Primary School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for information.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Michael Gilsenan, providing further information on School Vision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Mr Michael Gilsenan to brief Members on School Vision as part of the Committee's wider consideration of interfaces between education and health.

7.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding a mid-year progress report on European Priorities

7.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department responding to its queries regarding parents who choose not to engage with the pre-school placement process.

7.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department requesting that the briefing in EU related issues, scheduled for 12 February 2014, be deferred.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the briefing on EU related issues, and to write to the Department to seek a detailed written briefing on the development of the education-related projects for which EU funding is to be sought.

The Committee further noted that the Clerk was in discussion with the British Council regarding a proposal for a Committee sponsored event showcasing EU funded, and internationally funded projects, with which local schools can engage.

7.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Newtownbreda High School Concerned Parents Group, inviting Members to a public meeting on 26 February 2014.

7.19 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Science Park to the “Generation Innovation, Annual Night of Ambition 2014! “ at the Ulster Hall on Wednesday 12 February at 5.30pm.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold its meeting on 26 February 2014 at the West Belfast Partnership Board, following which WBPB will present informally to Members on its Education and Training Forum.

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, Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 February 2014 at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.41pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
12 February 2014