



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2014
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

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
Seán Rogers MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Karen Jardine (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Sharon McGurk (Clerical Supervisor)
Sharon Young (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Robin Newton MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.04am

1. Apologies

Apologies were recorded as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Area Planning

The Chairperson indicated that the Department had informally advised that although a report has been compiled on the feedback from the consultation on primary school Area Planning (which concluded in June 2013), the relevant revised primary school Area Plans have not been produced. The Committee noted that the relevant revised plans are now not expected to be produced until after April 2014. The Committee also noted that the Department had suggested that the briefing arranged for 2 April 2014 on this subject should be rescheduled.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education indicating that it required a Departmental update on primary school Area Planning on 2 April 2014 in line with previous commitments. The Committee further agreed that the Department should arrange for its officials to be accompanied by other witnesses from the Education and Library Boards; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Area Planning Steering Group (as appropriate) who can give a full account of the progress of primary school Area Planning to-date including an explanation of the previous and current delays and who can also set out the way forward for this important process.

2.2 The Business of Education Report

The Chairperson indicated that he had attended the launch of the Integrated Education Fund: The Business of Education report on Monday 24 March 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to seek its views on the IEF report.

2.3 Pushkin Trust / Ulster Bank

The Chairperson indicated that two organisations: the Pushkin Trust and the Ulster Bank had sought the opportunity to brief the Committee on education issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Pushkin Trust and the Ulster Bank to brief the Committee on education issues at a future meeting.

2.4 Bright Start - Strategic Framework and Key Actions

The Committee noted that the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister was to receive a briefing on Wednesday 26 March 2014 from OFMdFM officials on the NI Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare - "Bright Start".

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister requesting sight of the relevant information on "Bright Start".

2.5 Boards of Governors

Members noted recent reports relating to Departmental appointments to a school Board of Governors (BoG).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to request:

- clarification on its powers to remove and replace governors (and the chairperson of a BoG);
- explanation as to how it confirms that the appointee is committed to the ethos of a school;
- details of the protocol in the event that the existing governors are not willing to accept the proposed new appointee; and

- details of the extent to which these powers have been applied to schools in Northern Ireland in recent years.

3. Draft Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process

The Committee noted a submission from an Associate Assessor to the Committee's Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this submission to its Inquiry report, and to publish the information on the Committee's webpage along with the other Inquiry papers.

The Committee noted further correspondence from the Department of Education which clarified that ETI does not share draft school inspection reports with colleagues in the Department. However the Committee also noted that this response appears to contradict an answer given by the Department to AQW 26136/11-15.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this correspondence to its Inquiry report, and to publish the information on the Committee's webpage along with the other Inquiry papers. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to request an explanation as to why the information appears to contradict the answer given to AQW 26136/11-15 in October 2013.

The Committee noted further confidential submissions to the Inquiry.

5. STEM in Schools – Sentinus – Non-Departmental Briefing

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10.16am:

Jim Stewart CBE, Chairman, Sentinus; Bill Connor, Chief Executive, Sentinus and Dr Rochelle O'Hara, Projects Director, Sentinus.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

10.40am The Chairperson left the meeting and the Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

10.56am The Chairperson returned to the meeting and resumed the Chair.

11.13am Jonathan Craig joined the meeting.

11.18am Jo-Anne Dobson left the meeting

11.28am The Chairperson left the meeting and the Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

11.35am Jonathan Craig left the meeting.

11.36am The witnesses left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sentinus to determine the extent of its interactions with Earth Science Outreach and other similar organisations and to request that the Committee be kept up to date with the ongoing Sentinus programme of events for schools. The Committee also agreed to forward a copy of the report from its recent STEM is Cool event to Sentinus for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the report from the “STEM is Cool” event with the Committee for Employment and Learning, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure; and agreed that the report be published on the Committee’s webpage.

6. STEM in Schools – Education and Library Boards:

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11.38am

Kim Scott, Assistant Senior Education Officer, South Eastern Education and Library Board; John Unsworth, Assistant Senior Education Officer, Southern Education and Library Board and Alison Smyth, Assistant Senior Education Officer, Western Education and Library Board.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

11.39am Jonathan Craig returned to the meeting.

12.03pm Jonathan Craig left the meeting.

12.09pm Jo-Anne Dobson returned to the meeting.

12.09pm The witnesses left the meeting.

12.09pm Trevor Lunn left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education and Library Boards to determine the extent of their interactions with Sentinus, Earth Science Outreach and other similar organisations.

12.11pm Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting.

7. STEM in Schools – Politics Plus MLA/Scientist Exchange:

The following witness joined the meeting at 12.11pm:

Ric Pasquali, Director, Geoserv/Earth Science Outreach.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

12.12pm Trevor Lunn returned to the meeting

12:12pm Jonathan Craig returned to the meeting

12:19pm Stephen Moutray left the meeting

12.29pm The witness left the meeting.

Agreed: Following the STEM briefings the Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- highlighting the relatively low level of financial support for Sentinus and the ELB STEM programmes and the consequent impact on penetration levels in schools;
- highlighting also the importance and apparent absence of Continuing Professional Development opportunities for teachers which are designed to enhance teachers' confidence in the promotion of STEM;
- seeking clarification as to how science is incorporated into primary Initial Teacher Education programmes so as to improve confidence amongst primary teachers in the teaching of STEM subjects;
- seeking information as to whether the teaching materials provided by Earth Science Outreach are promoted by DE in schools; and
- seeking clarity on the Terms of Reference for the Education and Training Inspectorate review of "The World Around Us".

8. Science in the Revised Curriculum – Assembly Research Briefing

12.30pm A representative of Assembly Research joined the meeting.

James Stewart, Assembly Research Officer briefed the Committee on his research paper on "Science in the Revised Curriculum".

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information comparing science teaching time and the use of enquiry-based teaching in other jurisdictions. The Committee also agreed to seek further information on how teaching colleges recruit science specialists and how the teaching of science in the primary curriculum is being addressed by the teacher training colleges.

12.43pm James Stewart left the meeting.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the School of Education at the University of Ulster, Coleraine in response to suggestions that the pool of unemployed graduate English/maths teachers has been exhausted by the recruitment to the Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding shortcomings in the Executive's Investment Strategy Project Delivery Portal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Strategic Investment Board to suggest that the monthly update, provided in respect of DE capital projects, is supplemented with additional information available from the portal.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Our Lady and St Mochua's Primary School regarding concerns raised by Primary School principals in the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) area about end of Key Stage Assessments and Levels of Progression.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on Levels of Progression.

9.4 The Committee noted correspondence from South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) and the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) regarding schools deemed to be "no longer financially viable".

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department along with the related correspondence from the other ELBs for comment.

9.5 The Committee noted an invitation from the 174 Trust to the Launch of the Duncairn Centre for Culture and Arts on Thursday 1 May 2014 at 11.00 am.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the North Eastern Education and Library Board which included an extract from its report to the Department on the handling of a sensitive issue by a Board of Governors at a primary school

9.7 The Committee noted an invitation and related information from the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) in respect of its meeting on Tuesday 17 June 2014 at 10.30 am in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) Headquarters.

9.8 The Committee considered correspondence from a concerned parent regarding the extension of Free School Meals to pupils in P1 and P2 in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department for a response.

9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Department about the use of PiE and PiM and other GL Education Group products.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the GL Education Group including case studies of schools which use their products.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department relating to the February 2014 – Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) in respect of Curriculum Complaints Tribunals.

9.13 The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to a lunch event on Thursday 3 April 2014 with a delegation from the European Economic and Social Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would attend the event, diaries permitting.

12.48pm Jonathan Craig left the meeting.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Members noted correspondence from the Minister confirming that he would brief the Committee on 9 April 2014 on the Education Bill (and related matters) and the Common Funding Scheme in open session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Minister should deal with both subjects in a single briefing in public session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme as amended.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 2 April 2014 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.52pm

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
2 April 2014