



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY 2015
POINT BOARD ROOM, W5

Present:

Michelle McIlveen MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Nelson McCausland MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Robin Newton MLA
Sandra Overend MLA
Seán Rogers MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paula Best (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Supervisor)
Alicia Muldoon (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Chris Hazzard MLA

The meeting commenced in private session at 10.05am.

1. Committee's inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process – written briefing

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the Committee's previous inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the School Improvement Process.

10.06am Seán Rogers joined the meeting.

10.16am Nelson McCausland joined the meeting.

10.17am Sandra Overend joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, owing to the Department's apparent failure to address concerns in respect of the need for enhanced support for the school improvement process, it could not support proposed Departmental changes which would extend the Formal Intervention Process to other categories of schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education highlighting the importance of sharing good practice with schools and the value of longitudinal studies. The Committee also agreed to seek: sight of the new inspection overview document; details of the complaints procedure review; details of the consultation on the new inspection descriptors; an update on the dashboard measures for schools; an update on measures the Department or the Education Authority is to adopt in order to better consult with parents; and information on the longitudinal studies previously undertaken by ETI.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed that, pending a satisfactory response from the Department it would, at a later date, give consideration to bringing forward a further Committee motion for debate relating to the report of its inquiry into ETI and the School Improvement Process.

The meeting entered public session at 10.32am.

2. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 W5 – Committee Meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to Judith Harvey, General Manager of W5 thanking her for hosting the Committee's meeting on 28 January 2015.

3.2 GTCNI Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14

The Chairperson advised Members that the GTCNI Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14 has been laid in the Business Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on a proposed statutory rule previously considered by the Committee (in September 2014) and relating to the deregistration of teachers and seeking also further information on the staff structural issues referenced in the GTCNI Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14.

3.3 Elmgrove Primary School

The Chairperson referred to the recent temporary closure of Elmgrove Primary School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the principal of Elmgrove Primary School offering its support and commending her on her management of a difficult situation.

3.4 2015-16 Budget – Teacher Release

The Chairperson highlighted concerns in respect of the lack of clarity for schools regarding redundancy arrangements and the adverse impact on staff morale.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister seeking details of the Department's teacher/non-teaching staff release scheme for 2015-16 and urging the provision of clarity for all schools on the 2015-16 Budget position as soon as possible.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 21 January 2015.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Momentum Digital Strategy – Action Plan

Witnesses joined the meeting at 10.42am.

Rob McConnell, Chairman of Momentum; Michael Noble, Chief Executive of Momentum; Tom Gray, CTO Kainos; and Barry Turley, public affairs consultant briefed the Committee on the Momentum Digital Strategy Action Plan.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee noted an Assembly Research paper on STEM Festivals and Events and correspondence providing information and inviting the Committee to attend the NI Science Festival.

The Committee noted correspondence from Down High School regarding the teaching of Computer Science.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a future meeting in Down High School.

11.38am Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.56am.

11.57am Pat Sheehan left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a press release highlighting its support for enhanced access to computer coding opportunities for school children in primary and post-primary schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA expressing concerns in respect of the relevance of general course content to computing qualifications and seeking:

- clarification on the rationale for the introduction of the Software and Systems Development A-Level without a supporting GCSE qualification;
- information on what CCEA is to do in order to address the reported low take-up of the Software and Systems Development A-Level;
- confirmation that this qualification is recognised and accepted by in the Republic of Ireland and other jurisdictions; and
- clarification as to whether the ongoing CCEA revision of GSCE specifications will include the development of an appropriate GCSE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- information on the number of primary and post-primary schools that teach computer coding either in formal or informal settings;
- information as to how the Department is to enhance teacher confidence in respect of teaching computer coding by amending the Initial Teacher Education curriculum;
- details of Departmental research on the teaching of computer coding in other jurisdictions; and
- clarification on any actions that the Department has taken or plans to take in order to support the Momentum Digital Action Plan including support for the Ambassador Programme.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to Sentinus seeking information on the number of primary and post-primary schools that teach computer coding either in formal or informal settings.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to commission an Assembly Research paper on the teaching of computer coding in schools in other jurisdictions.

12.00noon Pat Sheehan re-joined the meeting.

7. Careers Review 2014

The witness joined the meeting at 12.02pm.

Brian Ambrose, Chairperson of the Careers Review Panel, briefed the Committee on the Career Review 2014 Report.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

12.10pm Danny Kinahan left the meeting.

The Committee noted the Engineering UK 2015 Report - 'The State of Engineering'.

The witness left the meeting at 12.27pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update regarding the implementation of the relevant recommendations from the Careers Report and in particular the development of e-portfolios.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put down the following motion for debate in plenary:

“That this Assembly notes the recent publication of the Education and Training Inspectorate’s review of the Implementation of ‘The World Around Us’, the CBI Northern Ireland Step Change Report, the Momentum Digital Strategy Action Plan and the Engineering UK 2015 Report, all of which highlight the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in schools; recognises the role of STEM as a key driver of the economy; and calls on the Minister of Education to support and encourage the full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum in order to bring about high quality learning for all children”

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted an invitation from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to attend the Landscape Seminar, 'Designing and Delivering Shared Space in Places of Conflict', on Monday 9 February at 12.30-2.30pm in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Youth Forum regarding the impact of the Draft Education Budget 2015-16.

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

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding delays to minor works at St. Louis' Grammar School, Killeel.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking: an update on the urgent minor works at St Louis'; information on the Area Planning concerns in Killeel; and clarification as to whether any other minor works are on hold elsewhere owing to Area Planning difficulties.

8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment regarding its Inquiry into Jobs and Growth in a Low Tax Environment.

12.33pm Robin Newton left the meeting.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker's Office enclosing a public petition to increase the capacity of Dromore Central Primary School's new building from the planned 25 classrooms to the required 28 classrooms.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking for clarification in respect of the alignment of the School Building Handbook with the sustainability requirements for schools.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Collegiate Grammar School seeking a meeting to discuss the recent Ministerial decision on a development proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to host an informal meeting with Collegiate Grammar School.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the EU Affairs Manager enclosing the monthly newsletter on European Issues.

8.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister seeking information on the Committee for Education's planned scrutiny of the EU Commission's 2015 work programme.

8.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department to Committee queries in respect of teachers' laptops and the C2K Transformation Process.

12.39pm Robin Newton re-joined the meeting.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the attendee list for the Area Planning event on Wednesday 4 February 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, owing to plenary business, it would reschedule its visit to Ceara Special School which was planned for 11 February 2015.

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

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Tuesday 3 February 2015 at 3.30pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.39pm.

Michelle McIlveen
Chairperson, Committee for Education
4 February 2015