



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2015
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Michelle McIlveen MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Hazzard MLA
Trevor Lunn 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:

Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Nelson McCausland MLA

The meeting commenced in private session at 10.04am.

1. Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education – draft findings and next steps

The Committee noted a paper setting out draft findings and the next steps for the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education.

10.07am Sandra Overend joined the meeting.

10.10am Robin Newton joined the meeting.

10.10am Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Department on the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI's) review of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy. The Committee also agreed to seek an oral Departmental briefing on the findings of the consultation on the draft Shared Education Bill and the draft Shared Education policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it required no other formal oral briefings as part of the Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to explore options for a visit or informal meeting with St Columbanus' College, Bangor and Dominican College, Portstewart.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the revised submission from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; the Departmental circular on joint faith schools; and the Departmental correspondence on Peace IV to the inquiry submissions and publish these on the Committee's webpage.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.38am.

2. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Education Authority – Payment of Pay Increases

The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual relating to reported delays to the payment of pay increases to Education Authority employees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity on the timing of the relevant pay increases.

3.2 2015-16 Budget

The Committee noted a response from the Department and correspondence from Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP) tutors.

The Committee also noted a response from the Department including information on: the funding of the PMLP and STEM in schools promotion; the roll-out of Sure Start; the discontinuation of the Early Years Fund; details of the funding for 3rd party organisations; and the budget for the Education Authority etc..

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Department's response to the PMLP tutors for their information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating concerns in respect of the impact of timing constraints on replacement funding for PMLP and seeking clarity on: the correlation between school surpluses and PMLP funding; how the Department is to address the shortcomings in PMLP in respect of the development of teachers' modern foreign language capability; and the Department's strategy for promoting multi-lingualism in primary schools.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Minister seeking information on his plans to tackle reportedly excessive budget surpluses held by a number of schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the funding for Booktrust in 2015-16.

10.52am Sandra Overend left the meeting.

3.3 Delivering Social Change – Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme

The Chairperson advised Members that the Department had clarified that graduates employed under the Literacy and Numeracy Programme will have their contracts terminated in June 2015 and that further recruitment will take place in August 2015 for those schools which have not had a full 2 years of support.

The Chairperson also indicated that the Department had advised of an Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) application for a second phase of funding for the Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to OFMDFM expressing support for the Programme and seeking clarification on the second stage of funding.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking initial feedback on the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme.

3.4 Visit to Limavady

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's visit and inquorate meeting at Limavady on 25 March 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the schools in question, thanking them for their hospitality and apologising for the meeting not being held as planned.

10.55am Chris Hazzard left the meeting.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 24 March 2015.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Anti-Bullying consultation

The Committee considered its response to the Department's consultation on Anti-Bullying measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward its response to the Department of Education.

5.2 SR 2015/170 Teachers' Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (NI) 2015

The Committee noted the final version of SR 2015/170 Teachers' Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (NI) 2015.

10.57am Pat Sheehan left the meeting.

5.3 Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation (ILiAD)

The Committee noted information relating to the ILiAD presentation on Tuesday 31 March 2015.

5.4 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill

The Committee noted a copy of the Delegated Powers Memorandum and the Equality Screening information in respect of the SEND Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the submissions on its webpage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Delegated Powers Memorandum to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for his consideration.

6. Department of Education Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.58am

Michael McGivern, Departmental Information Manager; and Willie Elliott, Departmental Information Officer briefed the Committee on the Department of Education's Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records.

10.59am Sandra Overend re-joined the meeting.

11.03am Robin Newton left the meeting.

The officials left the meeting at 11.09am

Agreed: The Committee agreed to accept Departmental assurances in respect of the retention of records relating to asbestos exposure. The Committee further agreed that it was content not to move the relevant plenary motion regarding the Department's Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records.

7. SL1 General Teaching Council Northern Ireland (GTCNI) Appointments

The Committee considered a draft statutory rule SL1 - The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Constitution) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the proposed rule - The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Constitution) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 - to be laid.

11.12am Robin Newton re-joined the meeting.

8. Ulster University – Vision Science Research Group

The witnesses joined the meeting at 11.13am.

Professor Kathryn Saunders, Professor of Optometry and Vision Science, Ulster University; and Dr. Sara McCullough, Research Associate in Optometry and Vision Science, Ulster University briefed the Committee on paediatric vision research and the interface between vision and learning.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.55am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the briefing paper to the Department of Education seeking: commentary on the issues raised; an update on the relevant aspects of the Vision Strategy 2013-16; and clarification on the funding for the Regional Vision Resource Base. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department suggesting that as part of the Committee Stage of the SEND Bill, it provides commentary on proposed obligations on Health and Social Care Trusts to share relevant vision and other health-related information with schools and/or the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to forward a copy of the briefing paper to the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and to also seek an update on the Developing Eyecare Partnerships strategy and commentary in respect of the provision of parental advice in respect of eyecare following the P1 universal screening. The Committee further agreed to write to DHSSPS in order to determine whether in-school vision testing for Special Schools was under consideration as part of the review of Multi-Disciplinary Support Teams.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in respect of the Savings Delivery Plan 2013/14 Achievement Report and the 2015-16 Savings Delivery Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an explanation in respect of the reference in the Savings Delivery Plan 2013/14 Achievement Report to the Entitlement Framework savings.

9.3 The Committee noted responses from the Department of Education to the Committee in relation to non-teaching and teaching redundancy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on the numbers of expressions of interest and clarification in respect of:

- the reference to non-teaching “SEN posts” and whether this refers to classroom assistants; and
- the timescales for teaching staff redundancies.

9.4 The Committee noted an invitation from CCMS to attend the launch of its new website and 2 new documents relating to Tackling Underachievement and Guidance for School Governors at Parliament Buildings on Wednesday 29th April 2015 between 1.30pm and 3.00pm in room 115.

9.5 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning on the implementation of the Careers Review Report recommendations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the way forward for the e-portfolio and details of the Department’s support for: teachers undertaking careers Continuous Professional Development (CPD); the development of the work experience website; and the career awareness sessions for parents.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council in respect of teachers’ stress related illness figures and costs.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education and DHSSPS to the Parents’ Education as Autism Therapists (PEAT) petition on therapy options for children with autism in schools.

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

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from Investment Strategy Northern Ireland enclosing the March update on the Department of Education’s capital activity report

9.9 The Committee noted a response from CCEA and the Department to Committee queries in respect of: the acceptability of qualifications by universities and employers; new Departmental approval legislation apparently relating some to GCSEs A-Levels and the ongoing GCSE specification review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to CCEA seeking: clarity on the review of GCSE specifications; and advice on the impact and timing of the changes to GCSE/A-Level approval for schools in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Minister seeking an update on the work of the GCSE A-Level Expert Group.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) regarding feedback from pupils on school inspection.

9.11 The Committee noted a response from GTCNI in respect of the Inquiry into ETI and the School Improvement Process.

9.12 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority Western & Belfast Regions to Committee queries in respect of Home to School Transport and the treatment of unsafe routes.

9.13 The Committee considered correspondence from Ballyclare and District, Gorran and Earlview Primary Schools expressing concerns in respect of the Department of Education's 2015-16 Budget.

The Committee also noted correspondence from Holy Family Primary and Nursery School enclosing a copy of correspondence to the Minister in respect of reductions to the Community Education Initiative Programme budget.

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

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education and the Education Authority (Southern Region) providing information on the Development Proposal (DP) for St Ronan's College, Lurgan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the concerned group of parents who initiated these queries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity on restrictions on the use of 'Board Transport' by ineligible children.

9.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries in respect of the Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Programme.

9.16 The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister indicating that it is unlikely that primary legislation relating to school starting age flexibility will be introduced during the present Assembly mandate.

The Committee also noted correspondence from the Minister of Education advising that it is unlikely that primary legislation relating to the GTCNI will be introduced during the present Assembly mandate.

9.17 The Committee noted a request from Children in NI to meet the Chairperson in order to discuss anticipated changes to DE's responsibilities in respect of child care etc..

9.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office referring to the Conflicts of Interest – NIAO Good Practice Guide.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the Levels of Progression stakeholder event to a later date.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA seeking feedback on the 2014/15 Levels of Progression and its progress in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal Politics Plus briefing on the scrutiny of the SEND Bill.

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 22 April 2015 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.14pm.

Michelle McIlveen
Chairperson, Committee for Education
22 April 2015