



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 22 APRIL 2015
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Michelle McIlveen MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig 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:

Chris Hazzard MLA

The meeting commenced in private session at 10.03am.

1. Area Planning – draft position paper

The Committee noted and discussed changes to the draft position paper on Area Planning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to re-consider the amended paper at next week's meeting.

10.04am Danny Kinahan joined the meeting.

10.43am Sandra Overend joined the meeting.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.44am.

2. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Early Years Allocations

The Chairperson advised Members that stage one of the pre-schools admission process had concluded and that although reportedly 95% of children had been placed, it was reported that some of the placements are not satisfactory.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on Early Years allocations including the availability of places: in reasonable proximity to home addresses and for the children of working parents. The Committee also sought clarity on the reported allocation of children of non-Irish speaking parents to Irish Medium Education Early Years settings.

3.2 Deaf Youth Forum

The Chairperson advised Members that the Deaf Youth Forum is to launch its manifesto on 18 May 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA seeking information on a reported pilot Sign Language GCSE and plans (if any) to make this available throughout Northern Ireland.

3.3 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and Development Proposals

The Chairperson referred Members to a recent written question wherein the Department indicated that ETI had 'not supported' a number of Development Proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department again seeking clarity as to ETI's involvement in the Development Proposal process.

3.4 School Bus Safety

The Chairperson advised Members of a recent press article regarding the detection of safety non-compliances on Home to School transport.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the safety of Home to School transport and the relevant schedule of inspection.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 15 April 2015.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) BILL

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in respect of the Committee Stage of the SEND Bill.

6. Review of Sure Start – written briefing

The Committee considered the report on the Independent Review of the Sure Start Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister:

- seeking his views on the recommendations and a timescale for the conclusion of his deliberations;
- expressing concerns in respect of the complex governance structure for Sure Start and suggesting that consideration be given to simplification, in order to secure savings;
- seeking clarification as to whether consideration is being given to the better governance and improved delivery of programmes like Sure Start as part of the planned reorganisation of Departmental responsibilities; and
- highlighting the important role that Sure Start plays in overall Early Years provision and seeking clarification in this regard for the Early Years Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the report with the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

7. ETI evaluation: Special Educational Needs Early Years Identification Capacity Building Pilot – written briefing

The Committee considered the ETI evaluation of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Identification Capacity Building pilot in Early Years settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking: his views on the recommendations and the associated costs; and a timescale for implementation.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on: references to a review of the practice of prioritising referrals in primary schools etc. and the transfer of SEN pupil records from primary to post-primary schools and post-primary schools to Further Education colleges.

8. School Starting Age – Departmental Briefing

Officials joined the meeting at 11.07am.

David Hughes, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, Department of Education; Dale Heaney, Head of Assessment and Qualifications Team, Department of Education; Heather Robinson, Head of Early Years (Pre-School) Team, Department of Education; and Florence McCaw, Transfer Officer, Education Authority briefed the Committee on the feedback from the consultation on flexibility in respect of school starting age.

11.48am Pat Sheehan joined the meeting.

11.49am Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting.

The officials left the meeting at 11.53am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister expressing its disappointment that this important issue is not to be the subject of legislative scrutiny in the current mandate.

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

- a breakdown of the costs and man hours associated with the consultation;
- an update on the issuing of school starting age guidance; and
- information on the Departmental review of the Foundation Stage.

11.57am Danny Kinahan left the meeting.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Home Education Northern Ireland (HEdNI) including a briefing paper.

9.3 The Committee noted a Ministerial response to Committee queries on proactive incentivisation of participation in the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition

9.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel indicating employer and employee contributions to Public Sector pension schemes.

9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries in respect of the safety recommendations included in the Home to School Transport Review.

9.6 The Committee considered a response from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) on the designation and consultation process in respect of the St. Ronan's Development Proposal. Members noted that CCMS did not appear to have consulted with prospective parents regarding the Development Proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the concerned parent who raised the issue.

9.7 The Committee noted an update from the Department of Education on Computer Based Assessment.

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the NAHT (NI) Challenging Behaviour Report.

9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing a copy of the joint DE/DEL Careers Review Action Plan.

9.10 The Committee noted an invitation from the Minister to attend the reception to celebrate “Outstanding” and “Very Good” schools and pre-school providers on Wednesday 3 June 2015 in the Long Gallery from 2.00-3.30pm.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister enclosing a copy of the consultation document on the future of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking clarity on the relevant timescales and details of the legislative vehicle for the proposed changes.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum enclosing its NIABF 2013 report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet informally with the Northern Ireland Anti- Bullying Forum, diaries permitting.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 29 April 2015 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.04pm.

Michelle McIlveen
Chairperson, Committee for Education
29 April 2015