



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 20 MAY 2015
CEARA SCHOOL, LURGAN

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Hazzard MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Nelson McCausland MLA
Robin Newton MLA
Sandra Overend MLA
Seán Rogers MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paula Best (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Supervisor)
Alicia Muldoon (Clerical Officer)
Caroline Perry (Assembly Research, Item 8 only)

Apologies:

Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.16am.

Peter Weir declared an interest as a Member of a Board of Governors for a number of schools.

1. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Ceara School

The Chairperson indicated his thanks to the Principal, staff and pupils of Ceara School for hosting the Committee's meeting and visit.

2.2 Home Education Northern Ireland (HEdNI)

The Chairperson advised Members that representatives of HEdNI would be visiting Parliament Buildings on Thursday 28 May 2015 and indicated that further details would be provided by Committee staff upon request.

2.3 Education Authority pay rise delays

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel indicating that the business case for the pay increase for Education Authority employees has not yet been received by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Chairperson highlighted his concerns in respect of the continuing delays to the resolution of this matter by the Department of Education.

2.4 Education Committee Twitter Account

The Chairperson advised Members that the Education Committee now had a Twitter account and that information on Committee briefings and reports will be published on Twitter.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 13 May 2015.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Shared and Integrated Education Inquiry

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the most recent relevant findings of the Young Life and Times Survey in respect of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this correspondence to its inquiry submissions.

4.2 Shared Education Bill

The Committee considered its response to the Department of Education regarding the proposed Shared Education Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the response, subject to amendment, to the Department.

5. General Teaching Council NI (Constitution) (Amendment) Regulations

The Committee considered the statutory rule SR 2015/224: The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Constitution) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The following question was put and agreed by the Committee.

Agreed: That the Committee for Education has considered the Statutory Rule: SR 2015/224 The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Constitution) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the rule.

10.27am Nelson McCausland joined the meeting.

6. Correspondence

6.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

6.2 The Committee noted a response from CCEA to Committee queries indicating that there is no sign language GCSE available in Northern Ireland.

6.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to Committee queries in respect of vision problems and educational attainment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Ulster University, Paediatric Vision Research Team, for information.

6.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries in respect of actions relating to the Careers Review Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the author of Careers Review Report for his information.

6.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Carnegie UK Trust to the Chairperson in respect of the Enabling State Challenge – New Prize Fund.

6.6 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education to Committee queries in relation to the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP).

Members reiterated their concerns regarding the reduction in funding to the PMLP and the absence of any corrective Departmental action.

6.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding school bus safety.

6.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding Early Years allocations.

6.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the NIPSO Ad Hoc Committee to the Chairperson in respect of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsperson (NIPSO) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward recent relevant Ministerial correspondence to the Ad Hoc Committee.

6.10 The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson to attend the 'Celebrating Excellence in Primary Science Event' at Stranmillis University College, on Friday 29th May 2015 from 10.30am to 12.30pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to attend this event, diary permitting.

6.11 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education to Committee queries in respect of the Minister's GCSE / A-Level Expert Group.

6.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding a technical transfer of £1m to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for the City of Culture legacy projects.

6.13 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the consultation on the deferral of school starting age in exceptional circumstances.

Members recorded their disappointment that no Departmental legislation during this mandate would be brought forward in respect of the deferral of school starting age.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Parents Outloud and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), for their information.

6.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries in respect of schools which had received School Enhancement Programme funding but which required support for associated equipment and furniture.

6.15 The Committee noted correspondence from BookTrust to the Chairperson in respect of the BookStart funding bid in the June Monitoring Round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department of Education seeking an early indication of its June Monitoring priorities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write seeking information on those schools in the School Enhancement Programme which may benefit following an immediate allocation of monies through June Monitoring. The Committee also agreed to seek clarity as to whether schools in different sectors are treated differently in respect of funding for equipment and furniture associated with the School Enhancement Programme.

6.16 The Committee noted further clarification from the Department of Education on the future of the Delivering Social Change - Literacy and Numeracy project.

6.17 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young Persons to the Chairperson seeking an informal meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet with the Commissioner, diary permitting.

6.18 The Committee noted an invitation from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers to attend an event on 21 May 2015.

6.19 The Committee noted an invitation from St. Angela's College and Ulster University to attend a cross border conference on education and the law in Sligo on 30 May 2015.

6.20 The Committee noted correspondence from Women's Aid in respect of a reduction in funding related to the discontinuation of the Early Years Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Women's Aid in order to explore the opportunity for a briefing on the matters of concern.

6.21 The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend the Early Years International Conference dinner on 5 June 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and/or Deputy Chairperson to attend this event, diaries permitting.

7. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted the summary of non-Departmental written submissions to the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme as amended but agreed also to revisit the scheduling of SEND Bill evidence sessions at next week's meeting.

The Committee noted also that the Department of Education is expected to launch the Teachers' Professional Learning Strategy before summer recess.

8. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill – Committee Stage Assembly Research Briefing

Assembly Research joined the meeting at 10.41am.

Caroline Perry from the Assembly's Research and Information Service briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill.

10.49am Sandra Overend joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission further research on other jurisdictions in respect of ring-fenced SEN funding; transition arrangements for SEN pupils; and training for Boards of Governors etc. in respect of mediation. The Committee also agreed to seek further information on the legal obligations on the Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of children with SEN; and barriers to access to SEN support for children in language immersion education settings.

Assembly Research left the meeting at 11.01am.

9. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill – Committee Stage – Departmental briefing

Officials joined the meeting at 11.04am.

Caroline Gillan, Director of Access, Inclusion and Well-being, Department of Education; Irene Murphy, Head of Special Education and Inclusion Review Team, Department of Education; and Jan Matthews, Special Education and Inclusion Review Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

11.22am Robin Newton left the meeting.

12.03pm Chris Hazzard left the meeting.

Officials left the meeting at 12.04pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department highlighting its concerns in respect of the absence of meaningful detail in respect of anticipated regulations and indicating that in order to facilitate the passage of the Bill, it must have sight of the draft regulations associated with the Bill and the draft Code of Practice at the earliest opportunity.

10. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill – Committee Stage – Children’s Law Centre briefing

The witnesses joined the meeting at 12.05pm.

Kathryn Stevenson, Head of Legal Services, Children’s Law Centre; Liam Mackle, Advice Manager, Children’s Law Centre; and Rachel Hogan, SENDIST Representative, Children’s Law Centre briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

The witness left the meeting at 12.44am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for further information in respect of:

- the support services to be provided for children (under compulsory school age) who wish to make appeals to SENDIST under the pilot scheme;
- the residual rights for parents etc. in respect of appeals made by their children;
- the nature of advocacy arrangements that are planned to support appeals made by Looked After Children;
- the impact and the level of satisfaction for mediation arrangements in other jurisdictions;
- the proposed mediation arrangements for Northern Ireland including the nature of the mediation provider;
- the nature and format of Co-ordinated Support Plans including how the new stages will differ from the current statementing process;
- the legal status of Co-ordinated Support Plans as compared with SEN statements; and
- whether the introduction of Co-ordinated Support Plans is designed to alter the thresholds for access to SEN support and thus reduce both the number of children who can avail of SEN provision and the level of challenge from parents/children who are dissatisfied with that provision.

11. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the Teacher Health and Well-Being Strategy.

12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 27 May 2015 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.48pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
27 May 2015