



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2015
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Trevor Lunn 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 public session at 10.03am.

Peter Weir declared an interest as a Member of the Boards of Governors of a number of primary schools in Bangor.

1. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Ceara School

The Chairperson noted the very useful Committee visit to Ceara School on 20 May 2015 which included an informative, informal tour of the school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ceara School to express its appreciation to the staff, pupils and principal for their hospitality and for hosting the Committee's meeting on 20 May 2015.

10.05am Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting.

2.2 St. Columbanus' College

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's informal meeting with representatives of St. Columbanus' College on 26 May 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the College thanking the principal and the chairperson of the Board of Governors for sharing their views on Shared Education and "supermixed" schools.

2.3 GCSE / A-level School Leaver Results

The Chairperson noted the recently published school leavers' results at GCSE and A-Level for 2013-14. He indicated particularly:

- an increase of 1.3% in the proportion of school leavers attaining 5 good GCSEs including English and maths;
- an increase of 1% of school leavers attaining 3 or more A-levels (A* to C);
- the continuing improvement in GCSE results for non-grammar schools;
- a significant fall in the number of school leavers with no qualifications;
- a continuing increase (to nearly 70%) of Year 12 pupils staying on at school to study A-levels etc.; and
- a steady number – around 88% - of school leavers going on to Further or Higher Education or training.

The Chairperson also noted that:

- attainment for Free School Meal Entitled (FSME) children at GCSE (including English and maths) has remained at 34.9% - the same as 2012-13 and well short of the 2013-14 Programme for Government target of 45%;
- the attainment gap between FSME Protestant children and FSME Catholic children has widened to about 10%; and
- the attainment gap between boys and girls has widened to 10% at GCSE and 14% at A-level.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education stressing the continuing importance of funding for the Delivering Social Change - Literacy and Numeracy Programme and the Extended Schools Programme in order to address the attainment gap for socio-economically deprived children. The Committee also agreed to seek information on any additional measures that the Department intends to adopt in order to address the attainment gap.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 20 May 2015.

10.09 Pat Sheehan left the meeting.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Primary Science Teaching Trust – “The World Around Us”

Witnesses joined the meeting at 10.13am.

John Sandford, Fellow, Primary Science Teaching Trust; Lesley Hunter, Fellow, Primary Science Teaching Trust; Kathy Schofield, College Director, Primary Science Teaching Trust; and Jim McDade, Fellow, Primary Science Teaching Trust briefed the Committee on the Education and Training Inspectorate’s (ETI’s) report on “The World Around Us”.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

10.23am Sandra Overend joined the meeting.

10.57am Robin Newton left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department the Primary Science Teaching Trust’s suggested questions in respect of the ETI report on “The World Around Us” for response on 3 June 2015.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.05am.

6. Correspondence

6.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

6.2 The Committee noted an invitation from the Fermanagh Trust to Members to attend the celebration of Shared Education in Fermanagh on Wednesday 10 June 2015 in the Lough Erne Resort, Fermanagh at 12.45pm.

6.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education advising of a consultation on the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Pension Scheme - Additional Voluntary Contributions.

6.4 The Committee noted a request from the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) to meet with the Chairperson in order to discuss the work of the NIABF and their report and proposed legislation.

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

6.5 The Committee noted an invitation from the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast for Members to attend the launch of findings from the evaluation of the life-start programme for parents in Ireland on Monday 22 June 2015 in the Great Hall, Queen's University Belfast from 9.45am-1.15pm.

6.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Controlled Schools Sectoral Support Body Working Group enclosing a copy of the 9th edition of the Working Group Newsletter.

6.7 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education to Committee queries reiterating that legislation relating to school starting age flexibility will not be brought forward in this mandate.

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

6.8 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education providing no further information on the likely legislative vehicle or probable timescale for the dissolution of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI).

6.9 The Committee noted an invitation from the Department of Education to a reception to celebrate "Outstanding" and "Very Good" schools and pre-school providers on Wednesday 3 June 2015 between 2.00pm-4.00pm in the Long Gallery.

6.10 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education to Committee queries regarding the review of Sure Start indicating that the Minister is considering the relevant report.

6.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the EU Affairs Manager enclosing a copy of the monthly newsletter on European issues.

7. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its concerns regarding reported Area Planning problems in Controlled post-primary schools in Belfast – specifically, over-subscription leading to alternative schooling arrangements involving excessive travelling times. The Committee highlighted concerns regarding the apparent failure to plan for demographic changes and inflexibility in respect of enrolment levels in popular schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority suggesting that, in response to concerns in respect of varying access to Educational Psychology services in schools, it should initiate a review and

make amendments to provision in order to ensure equality of access regardless of geographical location of children.

8. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 3 June 2015 at 9:30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting moved into private session at 11.23am.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered how to take forward the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill.

11.28am Robin Newton re-joined the meeting.

11.28am Nelson McCausland left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on how the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 has improved provision for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to postpone its planned SEND Bill stakeholder event and to consider rescheduling the event in September 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in order to inform its scrutiny of the SEND Bill, it would write to the Department of Education seeking a Keeling Schedule - setting out the final form of the proposed legislation after the amendments have passed – and to also seek additional commentary to show how the objectives of the SEND Bill as set out in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum will be given effect by the Bill.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11.35am.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
3 June 2015