



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE 2015
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Nelson McCausland MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Robin Newton MLA
Seán Rogers MLA

In Attendance:

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

Apologies:

Danny Kinahan MP MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Sandra Overend MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.07am. In the absence of a decision-making quorum, the running order of the agenda was amended.

1. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

10.11am Chris Hazzard joined the meeting, a decision-making quorum was established.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Tragic death of a school pupil

The Committee indicated its concerns following the recent death of a school pupil in County Tyrone reportedly linked to possible cyber-bullying.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to St Joseph's Grammar School offering its condolences.

Members highlighted the importance of the mainstreaming of up-to-date on-line safety messages for children in the Revised Curriculum as well as the need to ensure effective inter-agency working in this regard while also involving parents and carers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education in respect of the above and seeking a progress update on the development of anti-cyber-bullying guidance (with the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum) and the e-safety strategy (with the Safeguarding Board NI).

2.2 Supply Resolutions

The Chairperson advised Members that plenary debates had been scheduled for supply resolutions on: an Excess Vote relating to larger than expected Department of Education cash drawdowns in 2013-14 and the 2015-16 budget.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would comment on both matters in plenary on behalf of the Committee.

*The meeting moved into private session at 10.12am.
10.15am Seán Rogers joined the meeting.*

3. Confidential Correspondence

The Committee noted confidential correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of governance and Data Protection issues in a primary school which had been the subject of review by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

*10.22am Robin Newton joined the meeting.
10.22am Jonathan Craig joined the meeting.*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Comptroller and Auditor General seeking clarification as to the substance of the allegations and the need for referral to other authorities.

Agreed:

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on its guidance to Boards of Governors regarding governance issues etc. and on the oversight duties and powers of the Education Authority in respect of Boards of Governors and the frequency of their use.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.27am.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 3 June 2015.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Shared and Integrated Education Inquiry

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education relating to mixing in Integrated and non-Integrated schools; identity issues and the assessment of educational progress for Shared Education projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the response on its webpage and add it to its report on the inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education.

5.2 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence including the Keeling schedule for the SEND Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the Keeling schedule and reiterate its request to the Department in respect of annotations to the schedule.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education relating to enhanced support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder following the passage of the Autism Act (NI) 2011.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Autism NI for comment during the oral evidence session on the SEND Bill, scheduled for 17 June 2015.

6. NITPS consultation – Departmental briefing

The Departmental official joined the meeting at 10.38am.

Seamus Gallagher, Head of Pensions Policy Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee on an ongoing consultation on the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme (Additional Voluntary Contributions) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2015.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

The official left the meeting at 10.42am.

7. Committee Stage – Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill - Health and Social Care Board / Education Authority / Public Health Agency

Witnesses joined the meeting at 10.44am.

Tony Rodgers, Assistant Director, Children's Services, Health and Social Care Board; Kieran McShane, Social Care Commissioning Lead, Health and Social Care

Board; Clare McGartland, Lead Allied Health Professionals Consultant, Public Health Agency; Dr Clare Mangan, Regional Managing Director (Belfast), Education Authority; and Ruth Bell, Assistant Senior Education Officer, Education Authority briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

11.22am Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.36am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in order to seek an update on the Early Intervention Transformation Programme

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education to seek their views on the application of further statutory obligations on Health and Social Care Trusts (as well as Memoranda of Understanding or Service Level Agreements) in respect of the delivery of health services related to Special Educational Needs and to establish if scoping work had been undertaken in order to determine the impact of additional statutory obligations etc. in this regard.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an overview of its research into anomalies and variations in the provision of SEN-related services within Northern Ireland. The Committee also agreed to seek further information on the support provided in schools to unstatemented SEN pupils and how this might be expected to change following the passage of the SEND Bill.

8. Field Studies Council - Outdoor Learning

Witnesses joined the meeting at 11.42am.

Rob Lucas, CEO, Field Studies Council; Noel Elliott, Head of Field Studies Council, Northern Ireland; Craig McGuicken, CEO, Northern Ireland Environment Link; and Dr Karen Kerr, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast briefed the Committee on the importance of fieldwork and outdoor learning.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

12.06pm Maeve McLaughlin re-joined the meeting.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12.12pm.

12.12pm Trevor Lunn left the meeting.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to the Minister for Education regarding registration of defibrillators in schools with the Community Resuscitation Strategy.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Investment Strategy NI enclosing the May 2015 update on the Department of Education Capital Activity Report.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries in respect of examination and study leave for Year 12 pupils.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education welcoming the apparent positive impact on attainment in participating schools and seeking clarification as to whether the improvement in Year 12 5 good GCSE attainment including English and maths in 2013-14 was indeed a consequence of the DSC programme.

12.14pm Seán Rogers left the meeting.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister enclosing a copy of the Hansard of OFMDFM evidence on the DSC Signature Projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to OFMDFM seeking an update on its resource bid in the June Monitoring Round for the continuation of the DSC Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project.

12.15pm Seán Rogers re-joined the meeting.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education indicating that the Teacher Health and Wellbeing Strategy is currently under negotiation by managing authorities with the Teachers' Negotiating Committee.

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority to Committee queries regarding the reported possible planned changes to provision at Strandtown Primary School.

Members noted that Strandtown Primary was a unique, popular and academically successful school that was to be the subject of a Development Proposal and required resolution of on-going problems with parking and school meal facilities.

9.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries in respect of the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI's) Evaluation of the Special Educational Needs Capacity Building – Early Years Settings Pilot.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on the timing of its consideration of ETI's recommendations.

9.10 The Committee noted an invitation from the Irish National Teachers Organisation to attend the annual Vere Foster lecture on Shared Education on Friday 19 June 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would attend on behalf of the Committee.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Parents Outloud asking that the Committee urge the Department to:

- circulate advice in respect of deferral of school starting age and provide clarity on the relevant legal position; and
- revise and shorten the post-primary school allocation process and provide more support for parents.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking commentary on the proposals from Parents Outloud.

9.12 The Committee noted an invitation from Mencap in Northern Ireland to attend the LiveNet's #YouConnectMe showcase and celebratory event at The Playhouse Theatre on the 16 June 2015.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an oral briefing on recent press reports regarding legacy costs associated with Public Private Partnerships (PPP) / Private Finance Initiative (PFI) school builds and its plans in respect of financing options for future new school builds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department seeking further clarification on the use of the phrase 'Equality of Identity' within the Shared Education policy.

12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 17 June 2015, at 9.30am in Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.26pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
17 June 2015