



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2015  
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**Present:**

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)  
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Jonathan Craig MLA  
Trevor Lunn MLA  
Maeve McLaughlin MLA  
Robin Newton MLA  
Seán Rogers MLA

**In Attendance:**

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)  
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)  
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)  
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)  
Caroline Perry (Assembly Research – item 5)  
Eilis Haughey (Bill Office – items 6 and 7)

**Apologies:**

Chris Hazzard MLA  
Ross Hussey MLA  
Nelson McCausland MLA

*The meeting commenced in public session at 10:10am.*

**1. Apologies**

Apologies are as indicated above.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

**2.1 Sexual Assault in Schools**

The Committee noted with concern recent press reports regarding alleged sexual assaults in schools in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity, if available, on the data relating to the alleged assaults and information on the Department's policy and guidance to schools in order to proactively protect children including measures relating to the use of the internet at school.

## **2.2 Informal meeting with Association of Educational Psychologists**

The Deputy Chairperson briefed the Committee on an informal meeting with the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking: information on the number of Educational Psychologists per pupil in Northern Ireland as compared with other jurisdictions; clarity on the role of the AEP as a key policy consultee; and an update on the status of the relevant outstanding pay award.

## **3. Minutes of previous meeting**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 2 September 2015.

## **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **5. Committee Stage – Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill – Oral Briefing by Assembly Research**

*Assembly Research joined the meeting at 10.20am.*

The Committee considered a briefing on an Assembly Research paper covering a number of issues highlighted during the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Assembly Research left the meeting at 10.40am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Research to prepare a briefing paper comparing the funding for SEN pupils in Finland with Northern Ireland.

*The meeting moved into private session at 10.40am*

## **6. Committee Stage – Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill Procedural Advice – Assembly Bill Office**

*Assembly Bill Office joined the meeting at 10.40am.*

The Committee consider procedural advice relating to the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

## **7. Committee Stage – Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill – Informal Deliberation Phase**

The Committee informally discussed proposed amendments to Clauses 1-3 of the SEND Bill.

*Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 12.24pm*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek legal advice in respect of a number of matters relating to the SEND Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further information from the Department in respect of:

- its plans for SEN capacity development for Boards of Governors;
- the consequences of the inclusion of an explicit reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the SEND Bill;
- how the SEN Code of Practice will guide the Education Authority in properly considering the views of the child and giving due consideration to the maturity and age of the child;
- the inclusion in SEN plans of the non-statutory pre-school sector; and
- Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) including the degree to which ownership and control sits with either parents or the school and the obligations on schools in respect of the transfer of information in PLPs at key transitions.

*The meeting moved into public session at 12.36pm.*

## **8. Correspondence**

**8.1** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

**8.2** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister enclosing a copy of the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels Director's Report for the period January to June 2015.

**8.3** The Committee noted correspondence from Investment Strategy NI enclosing a copy of the Department of Education's Investment Strategy Procurement Activity Report August 2015.

**8.4** The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister enclosing extracts from the Northern Ireland Human Rights' Commission Report on Alternative Care and Children's Rights in Northern Ireland.

## **9. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted that the Department is to table draft regulations associated with the SEND Bill at the Committee's meeting on 23 September 2015.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to receive an oral briefing from the Assembly Youth Panel, established under the Erasmus+ programme, in January 2016, regarding its findings on mental health in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

*Robin Newton left the meeting at 12.40pm*

## **10. Any Other Business**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of schools which had reportedly been declined funding under the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Programme as a consequence of industrial action leading to non-compliance with the Levels of Progression policy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek information as to how it has funded current redundancies and the budgetary impact of the recent announcements relating to the public sector voluntary exit scheme.

## **11. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting**

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 16 September 2015, at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12.45pm.*

**Peter Weir**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**16 September 2015**