



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 7 OCTOBER 2015
BOARD ROOM, MAIN BUILDING
STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Danny Kennedy MLA
Nelson McCausland 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)

Apologies:

Jonathan Craig MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

The meeting commenced in private session at 10:09am.

1. Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Framework – draft regulations

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:11am.

Caroline Gillan, Director of Access, Inclusion and Well-being, Department of Education; and Jan Matthews, Special Education and Inclusion Review Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee on draft regulations relating to the SEN and Inclusion Framework.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the definition of ‘parent’ that was to be used in the SEND Bill and associated regulations and Code of Practice.

The Committee informally agreed, pending the Department's response, to seek the formal inclusion of the definition in the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the Education and Training Inspectorate's evaluation report on the Certificate of Educational Competency Testing.

The officials left the meeting at 11:09am

The meeting was suspended at 11:13am

The meeting recommenced in public session at 11:23am

2. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Ethnic Minority Attainment / Refugee Support

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to recent press reports suggesting that attainment in schools by children from ethnic minorities was poorer than average.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on the attainment of children from ethnic minorities.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department in order to seek clarity on its plans in respect of additional places and support for refugee children in schools including the provision of ring-fenced funding from the Westminster government.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed, pending responses to the above, to give further consideration to a possible oral briefing from the Equality Commission on its recent report relating to inequality in education.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 30 September 2015.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Programme for Government / Business Plan / Savings Delivery Plan

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 11:30am.

David Hughes, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, Department of Education; Gary Fair, Director of Planning and Performance Management, Department of Education; Trevor Connolly, Director of Finance, Department of Education; and Laverne Montgomery, Director of Education Workforce Development, Department of Education briefed the Committee on the Programme for Government progress, DE Business Plan and DE Savings Delivery Plan.

The Committee noted correspondence both from the Department of Education on redundancy and other queries and from the Minister for Education regarding the results of an internal October Monitoring Round.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Nelson McCausland joined the meeting at 11:50am

The officials left the meeting at 12:54pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department in order to seek:

- further information in respect of its actions to improve the uptake of Free School Meals by eligible children;
- clarity on the numbers of SEN classroom assistants expected to participate in the voluntary exit scheme in 2015-16;
- details of the Department's intentions in respect of legislation relating to school starting age flexibility; and
- case studies and further information showing how interventions by the Department have successfully contributed to improved attainment and its plans to follow-up and undertake further initiatives.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the Department's Programme for Government commitments, Business Plan 2015-16 and Savings Delivery Plan at its next meeting.

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority (EA) to Committee queries in respect of EA oversight powers relating to Boards of Governors.

7.3 The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Audit Office to Committee queries relating to alleged data protection and governance issues in a primary school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to its expectations in respect of the Education Authority's actions when schools deviate from their Management Schemes and particularly where they

exceed their budgets. The Committee also agreed to seek the Department's views on the suggestion that disbarred directors should be prevented from becoming school governors.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to forward all relevant responses to the originator of the queries.

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education advising of updated guidance on post-primary transfer.

7.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Programme and June Monitoring delays.

7.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Programme and the Levels of Progression.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department advising again of its view that given: the concerns previously expressed by the General Teaching Council NI in respect of the efficacy of Levels of Progression; the very low levels of participation; and the ongoing related industrial action, it was both surprising and unwise for the Department to link participation in Shared Education with the implementation of Levels of Progression.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Department to seek an update on the Minister's recent meeting with the teaching unions to discuss the ongoing industrial action relating to Levels of Progression.

7.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding the role of the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) as a key policy consultee and also providing information on an outstanding pay award.

7.8 The Committee noted a response from the Central Applications Office to Committee queries regarding the acceptance of Northern Ireland GCSE and A-level qualifications in Further and Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from Solace NI in relation to representation from local councils at Committee meetings.

7.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister enclosing the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Submission to the 5th Periodic Report on compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

7.11 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding the Together: Building a United Community Summer Camps Project.

7.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Education enclosing a copy of the draft Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a pre-legislative, public session oral briefing on the Addressing Bullying in School Bill.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in relation to an Education and Training Inspectorate inspection of a school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond, highlighting the findings in its recent inquiry and indicating that it had sought stakeholder views on recent changes to school inspection.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the briefing by Dr Ian Shuttleworth, the Committee's Special Adviser, on Free School Meal Entitlement and school funding would be rescheduled for 4 November 2015.

The Committee noted that there would be an informal meeting with GL Assessment on Wednesday 14 October 2015 at 2pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give consideration to the terms of reference for a mini-inquiry on the Programme for Government. The Committee noted that the mini-inquiry may include informal stakeholder evidence events which would take place prior to Christmas recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department in order to seek an update on the implementation of its Autism Strategy and to seek information on the timescales for SEN assessments for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

10. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 14 October 2015, at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:05pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
14 October 2015