



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2016  
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**Present:**

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)  
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Jonathan Craig MLA  
Chris Hazzard MLA  
Dolores Kelly MLA  
Trevor Lunn MLA  
Danny Kennedy MLA  
Nelson McCausland MLA  
Robin Newton MLA  
Pat Sheehan MLA

**In Attendance:**

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)  
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)  
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)  
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)

**Apologies:**

Maeve McLaughlin MLA

*The meeting commenced in public session at 10:13am.*

**1. Apologies**

Apologies are as indicated above.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

**2.1 Special School Area Planning**

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to a recent written answer (AQW 9574/11-16) which appears to indicate that a draft Special Schools Area Plan for North Antrim is to be produced by July 2016.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification as to whether a draft regional Special Schools plan for all of Northern Ireland is to be produced by July 2016.

**2.2 New Grammar stream in post-primary schools**

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to recent press reports indicating that a number of non-selective post-primary schools were to introduce grammar streams.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarification as to whether a Development Proposal will be required for the schools in question. The Committee further agreed to seek information on the criteria for changes in schools which require the use of a Development Proposal.

*Danny Kennedy joined the meeting at 10:18am.*

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 8 February 2016 and 10 February 2016.

### **4. Matters Arising**

#### **4.1 Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in respect of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

### **5. West Belfast Partnership Board - partnership working and addressing underachievement**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 10:21am.*

Geraldine McAteer, West Belfast Partnership Board, Chief Executive; Frank Maskey, Principal Corpus Christi College and Chairperson of the West Belfast Post-Primary Area Learning Community; Mairead Weir, Principal St Joseph's Primary School and Chairperson of the West Belfast Primary Area Learning Networking Community; and Angela Mervyn, West Belfast Partnership Board Education Programme Manager briefed the Committee on partnership working and addressing underachievement.

*Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 10:26am.*

*Jonathan Craig joined the meeting at 10:42am.*

*Nelson McCausland joined the meeting at 10:43am.*

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Sandra Overend joined the meeting at 11:27am.*

*Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 11:28am.*

*Robin Newton left the meeting at 11:32am.  
The witnesses left the meeting at 11:35am.  
Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 11:35am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on:

- the roll-out of the lessons learned from education projects facilitated by the West Belfast Partnership;
- the establishment of primary and nursery Area Learning Communities throughout Northern Ireland;
- the availability of Curriculum Advisory Support Services (CASS) for educational partnerships; and
- how funding for educational partnerships can be used to mainstream educational partnership arrangements.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking information on support for schools in respect of literacy and numeracy recovery.

## **6. National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland -"ICT and me" Report**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 11:38am.*

Celine McStravick, Director, National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland; and Dr Richard Nugent, Senior Research Officer, National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland briefed the Committee in respect of the "ICT and me" Report.

The Committee noted a tabled briefing paper from the National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland.

*Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 11:38am.  
Robin Newton rejoined the meeting at 11:38am.  
Jonathan Craig rejoined the meeting at 11:52am.*

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Trevor Lunn left the meeting at 11:55am.  
The witnesses left the meeting at 12:13pm.*

The Committee noted with concern the reported levels of addictive gaming behaviour among some school children and its potential adverse impact on their educational attainment.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- information on the action it is to take in respect of the report's recommendations;
- clarification as whether it is to commission further research into pupils' access to ICT, particularly in rural areas where broadband availability is limited; and

- confirmation on the reportedly high levels of addictive gaming behaviour among some school children including related feedback from the post-primary counselling service.

## 7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Save the Children in respect of the Read On.Get On Campaign.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification/commentary on the reported:

- shortage of speech therapists in Sure Start projects;
- urgent need for focused support from Early Years Specialists for staff in new pre-school settings; and
- need for a standardised assessment of children's language ability at entry to primary school.

7.3 The Committee noted an invitation from Libraries NI to the launch of Rub-a-Dub Hub – parental intervention in respect of children's literacy on Thursday 10 March 2016 at 11.30am in Finaghy Library, Belfast.

7.4 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Science Park to attend its annual event for 15-18 years olds – Generation Innovation Night of Ambition on Wednesday 2 March at 5:30pm, St. George's Market, Belfast.

7.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in relation to the withdrawal of GCSE examining bodies.

7.6 The Committee noted an invitation from Queen's University, Belfast to a conference on Childhood Acquired Brain Injury: Cost and Consequences on Friday 11th March 2016, 10am to 4pm in Queen's University Belfast.

7.7 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned teacher regarding a formal complaint against the Board of Governors and principal of a primary school. The Committee further noted a response from the Minister in respect of this matter.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the concerned teacher advising of the appropriate channels for teaching employment grievances.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding a primary school.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority enclosing a copy of the Equality Screening Outcome Report, 1 October 2015 – 31 December 2015.

**7.10** The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Education Service regarding a new election resource for schools entitled "Race to Stormont 2016".

**7.11** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Employment and Learning regarding concerns that employers were reportedly failing to recognise the equivalence between Essential Skills qualifications and Grade Cs in relevant GCSEs.

**7.12** The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education to the Dunleath lecture on Joint Church Schools on Wednesday 2 March 2016, at 7:30pm in the Canada Room, Queen's University, Belfast

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Clerk to attend the event.

**7.13** The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Health Agency enclosing a copy of the Phase II report on the review of Allied Health Professionals support for children with Special Educational Needs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its commentary on the reference in the report to the difficulty in isolating Allied Health Professional data relating to children with statements in mainstream schools.

**7.14** The Committee noted an invitation to attend an International Integrated Education Week 2016 event entitled 'Harmony' in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Belfast, on Thursday 3 March 2016 from 10.30am-12.30pm.

*Nelson McCausland left the meeting at 12:20pm.*

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the NICVA Education Departmental Monitoring Group to the stakeholder event on Wednesday 24 February 2016.

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

## **9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 2 March 2016, at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:28pm.*

**Peter Weir**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**2 March 2016**