



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH 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
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Robin Newton MLA

In Attendance:

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

Apologies:

Nelson McCausland MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:14am. In the absence of a decision-making quorum, proceedings continued in line with Standing Order 49(5).

The order of the agenda items was altered.

1. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

2. Promotion of STEM in Schools – Departmental briefing

Officials joined the meeting at 10:15am.

Dale Heaney, Head of Curriculum Development Team, Department of Education; Sam Dempster, Teacher Education Team, Department of Education; and Kim Scott, Assistant Senior Education Officer, South East Region, Education Authority briefed the Committee in respect of the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) in schools.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in respect of the availability of STEM GCSEs.

The Committee also noted an invitation from the Assembly Education Service to attend a Science Festival for Key Stage 2 pupils, on Tuesday 15 February 2016, to celebrate National Science and Engineering Week.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Danny Kennedy joined the meeting at 10:24am. The Committee achieved a decision-making quorum.

Dolores Kelly joined the meeting at 10:31am.

Sandra Overend joined the meeting at 10:34am.

Jonathan Craig joined the meeting at 11:05am.

The officials left the meeting at 11:11am.

3. SL1 Curriculum Complaints Tribunal – Departmental briefing

The official joined the meeting at 11:11am.

Dale Heaney, Head of Curriculum Development Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee on the proposed rule entitled: The Complaints Tribunal (Curriculum and Related Matters) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 11:14am.

Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 11:16am.

The official left the meeting at 11:17am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the appropriateness of the wording used in the schedule of the regulation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make and lay the statutory rule.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to forego an oral briefing on the rule when it is made and laid by the Department.

Agreed: Further to its consideration of STEM in schools, the Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- information on the number of schools that use coding applications, such as Scratch;

- information on the number of schools providing the new GCE A-Level in Software Systems;
- a breakdown, by GCSE subject, of the 3.2% rise in STEM subject uptake in 2015-16;
- clarification on the provision of GCSEs in computing, previously offered by English examining bodies;
- an explanation as to how it encourages schools to avail of the STEM support and training which it has produced;
- information on the action being taken by Higher Education Institutions to incentivise the uptake of STEM subjects by pupils;
- information on the action it is taking to ensure that the curriculum matches the needs of the ICT industry;
- an update on how it is considering ways to measure pupil attainment other than by GCSE or A-Level performance; and
- confirmation that all schools have been made aware of the new progression routes for apprenticeships launched by the Department for Employment and Learning.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Informal Briefing with BookTrust – 1 March 2015

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that some Members met informally with BookTrust NI on Tuesday 1 March 2015.

Danny Kennedy left the meeting at 11:24am

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its support for the Bookstart programme.

4.2 Injuries – school sports

The Committee noted recent press reports relating to injuries associated with school rugby.

Maeve McLaughlin rejoined the meeting at 11:25am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to determine whether, on foot of recent reports, it plans to issue revised guidance on concussion or undertake a study of the level of school sports injuries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking information on how it plans to increase the number of qualified rugby coaches in schools.

4.3 2015-20 Careers Strategy

The Committee noted a revised 2015-20 Careers Strategy published jointly by the Department of Education and Department for Employment and Learning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether the e-portfolio is to be used to track and record non-academic pupil attainment.

5. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 17 February 2016.

6. Matters Arising

6.1 PfG Stakeholder Event (24 February 2016)

The Committee noted a written submission from the National Association for Head Teachers (NAHT) in respect of the Committee's consideration of the Programme for Government.

The Committee also noted that a written summary of the findings from the Committee-sponsored stakeholder event will be available for consideration, as part of the Committee's legacy report, at the meeting on 9 March 2016.

7. Early Years Pathway – Departmental briefing

The officials joined the meeting at 11:28am.

Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years, Intervention Programmes Team, Department of Education; Alan MacDonald, Early Years Intervention Programmes Team, Department of Education; and Pauline Walmsley, Director of Knowledge Exchange, Early Years Organisation briefed the Committee in respect of the Early Years Pathway.

Danny Kennedy rejoined the meeting at 11:30am.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

A Member declared the following interest:

Trevor Lunn serves on a Board of Governors of a nursery school.

Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 11:58am.

Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 12:05pm.

Peter Weir left the meeting and Sandra Overend assumed the chairpersonship at 12:09pm.

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting and resumed the chairpersonship at 12:12pm.

The officials left the meeting at 12:26pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department expressing its concerns at the potential for duplication in administration and additional costs associated with different Early Years programmes and to seek the following:

- clarification as to how it plans to enhance governance and reduce administrative costs in those children's services for which it will have responsibility in the next mandate;
- sight of the essential/desirable criteria and the associated scoring matrix for the Pathway Fund;
- information on the number of children who benefited from the Early Years Fund;
- an estimate of the number of children likely to benefit under the Pathway Fund and approximate quanta of grant allocations;
- clarification as to how the Department proposes to deal with the mismatch between small areas of social disadvantage and super-output area designation; and
- clarification as to how it is to address gaps in the provision of Early Years places for pre-school children.

8. Further Matters Arising

8.1 Restricted Correspondence

The Committee noted restricted correspondence from a concerned teacher and concerned parents commenting on unrelated matters.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel enclosing briefing papers regarding EU Funding Programmes: PEACE IV and INTERREG V.

9.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the Pupil Attendance at Schools policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking information on:

- the number of Education Welfare officers in schools, broken down by Education Authority region;

- the target and average caseloads that a welfare officer currently undertakes; and
- the average time required for pupil attendance cases to be resolved by the Education Welfare Service.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education confirming the inclusion of voluntary and grant maintained integrated schools in advice and measures relating to asbestos in schools.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding the costs of precautionary teacher suspensions.

9.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the uptake of Applied A-levels and their transferability.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) enclosing its report entitled 'Fund-Mapping: The Investment of Public Resources In The Wellbeing of Children And Young People in NI'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of the Children's Services Co-operation Act and the responsible oversight department, following the transfer of functions.

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding funding for the EUROCLIO conference.

9.9 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority in respect of the replacement of school equipment.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding information on the levels of parental withdrawal from the pre-school allocation process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking information on the level of parental withdrawal from the pre-school allocation process.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Save the Children enclosing a copy of a report entitled "Reading Northern Ireland's future – How the Northern Ireland Executive can unlock every child's potential".

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding financial delegation to Special Schools.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker enclosing a public petition entitled 'Better Care for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Northern Ireland'.

9.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding the Review of Allied Health Professionals (AHP) support for children with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

9.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning enclosing relevant recommendations from its inquiry into post-SEN Provision in education, employment and training for those with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland.

9.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing notice of a consultation on the draft Special Educational Needs regulations.

9.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education to Committee queries regarding changes to the Levels of Progression.

9.18 The Committee noted an invitation from Queen's University to attend a meeting with a visiting delegation of school principals from East and West Jerusalem to discuss Shared Education in Divided Societies on Tuesday 5th April 2016 from 4.00 – 6.00pm.

9.19 The Committee noted an invitation from Young Enterprise Northern Ireland to attend the Young Enterprise Gala Graduation event on Wednesday 6th April in Titanic Belfast from 10.00am-1.30pm.

9.20 The Committee noted an invitation from St Angela's College, Sligo to attend an Education and the Law Conference entitled "A Duty to Care: Issues of Child Protection, Welfare and Inclusion for Educators and Legal Advisors".

9.21 The Committee noted a request for the Chairperson and Clerk to meet with NICVA to discuss the Committee's legacy report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and Clerk to meet with NICVA on this issue, diaries permitting.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the visit to Glenveagh Special School to Wednesday 16 March 2016 at around 11am.

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

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 9 March 2016, at 9.45am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
9 March 2016