

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

End of Session Report 1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014

REMIT, POWERS AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee for Education is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and, under Standing Order 48.

Statutory Committees have been established to advise and assist the appropriate Minister on the formation of policy in relation to matters within his/her responsibilities. Specifically, the Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- consider relevant secondary legislation and take the committee stage of primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister for Education.

The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of 5. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)

Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)^{1 2}

Maeve McLaughlin⁸

Jonathan Craig

Sandra Overend⁹

Stephen Moutray⁶

Chris Hazzard⁴

Trevor Lunn

Robin Newton⁷

Pat Sheehan⁵

Sean Rogers³

¹ With effect from 31 January 2012 Mr Mike Nesbitt replaced Mr David McNarry

² With effect from 17 April 2012 Mr Danny Kinahan replaced Mr Mike Nesbitt as Deputy Chairperson

³ With effect from 23 April 2012 Mr Sean Rogers replaced Mr Conall McDevitt

⁴ With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Chris Hazzard replaced Mr Phil Flanagan

⁵ With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Pat Sheehan replaced Mr Daithi McKay

⁶ With effect from 16 September 2013 Mr Stephen Moutray replaced Miss Brenda Hale

⁷ With effect from 16 September 2013 Mr Robin Newton replaced Miss Michelle McIlveen

⁸ With effect from 02 December 2013 Ms Maeve McLaughlin replaced Ms Michaela Boyle

⁹ With effect from 04 July 2014 Mrs Sandra Overend replaced Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson

KEY ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

During the third session of the mandate and in line with its strategic plan, the Committee concluded its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process. The Committee also considered at some length issues relating to proposed Departmental revisions to the Common Funding Scheme.

The Committee also undertook study of other matters including:

- the teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in schools;
- Area Planning;
- access to joined-up health services for school children with vision problems;
- access to support services for school children with Special Education Needs;
- the Departmental review of the future of GCSEs and A-levels;
- the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on employee absence;
- EU funding opportunities for schools; and
- issues relating to the criteria for and funding of teacher redundancies.

In addition, the Committee considered progress in respect of the Department's commitments under the Programme for Government and scrutinised relevant Departmental budgets.

The Committee launched an inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education and began initial evidence-taking.

The Committee scrutinised a number of statutory rules relating to: teachers' pensions; the constitution of the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland and provisions relating to a legislative gap in respect of the de-registration of teachers.

The Committee held 38 meetings in total. 20 were completely in public session. 18 were partially in private session – these were associated with the consideration of inquiry findings and the receipt of legal advice. 5 meetings were held outside of Parliament Buildings – 1 in the University of Ulster in Coleraine which involved a visit to Initial Teacher Education facilities; 1 at the West Belfast Partnership Board which informed the Committee's consideration of that organisation's work; 1 in Greenmount Agricultural College which included a visit to the RSPB outdoor education facility; 1 in the Queen's University of Belfast which included attendance at the launch of the BT Young Scientist Exhibition 2015; and 1 with the Fermanagh Trust in Enniskillen as part of the Committee's initial evidence-taking for its inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education.

INQUIRIES

The Committee undertook stakeholder events with District Inspectors and Associate Assessors in January and February 2014. Members visited Antrim Grammar School to inform their understanding of self-evaluation and also visited the West Belfast Partnership Board to learn of its work with the Education and Training Inspectorate.

In June 2014, Committee published the report on its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process. The report was debated in the Assembly and can be found [here](#). The Committee found that:

- professional, independent, broadly-based, balanced inspection of schools is and should continue to be an essential component of the school improvement process.
- the other essential component of the school improvement process was support for schools and that in order to ensure equitable provision, this should be better aligned with the inspection function as is the case in other jurisdictions
- schools' reasonable concerns in respect of inspection could be addressed by providing: improved communication; more transparent practices in respect of inspection moderation; and a more independent complaints procedure coupled with more reliable school feedback channels.
- a more collaborative approach between ETI and schools was preferable and that this would be facilitated by: greater use of 3rd party questionnaires; revised inspection reports (written in plain English for parents while providing more detail for schools); use of less pejorative descriptors; a consistent role for District Inspectors on inspection teams with more time for pastoral support; and a revised approach to the inspection of immersion settings in line with other jurisdictions.
- in order to inform the assessment of the value added by schools, a standardised attainment baseline was required. The Committee also felt that further work was needed by the Department to engage teachers and win their trust for the development of a measure of the value added by schools which properly recognises school context.
- a platform for representative parental consultation should be established by the Department. The Committee felt that this was essential to address sometimes limited parental understanding and involvement in the school improvement process.

The Committee also recommended that the realigned school inspection and improvement service should be rebranded as the Northern Ireland Education Improvement Service (NIEIS).

In order to permit the NIEIS the freedom to: highlight good practice; identify improvement actions; set its own agenda for school improvement through inspection; undertake longitudinal studies and comment on Departmental policies, the majority of Committee Members felt that NIEIS should be established in statute as independent of the Department of Education.

A formal Departmental memorandum of response is expected to be considered by the Committee in November 2014.

On 2 July 2014, the Committee agreed the terms of reference for its inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education.

The Committee is to:

- Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education across all educational phases – including consideration of the need for a formal statutory definition and an obligation in statute to facilitate and encourage Shared Education;
- Identify the key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education;
- Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of policy interventions and programmes;
- Consider what priorities and actions need to be taken to improve sharing and integration – including the effectiveness of the relevant parts of the CRED policy; the need to engage more effectively with parents/carers; and the role of Special Schools; and
- Report to the Assembly on its findings and recommendations by Spring 2015.



Education Committee Members with representatives from the Fermanagh Shared Education Programme following a Committee meeting on 18 June 2014.

The Committee has written to schools and stakeholders seeking written evidence. Oral evidence sessions are expected to be undertaken in October 2014 until January 2015. The Committee has placed an advertisement in the local press and is to undertake other related media activities in respect of the inquiry in early September 2014.

In response to the feedback from the previous inquiry, the Committee is also to explore:

- seeking submissions from academics at the start of the evidence-taking as these witnesses often shed a different light on the subject material;
- seeking pupil feedback perhaps from e.g. School Councils and investigating the possibility of hosting less formal evidence sessions with pupils.
- undertaking a number of school visits to hear from pupils and see sharing in action; and
- interacting with parenting organisations so as to obtain representative feedback from parents.

LEGISLATION

No primary legislation was introduced by the Department during the 3rd session of the mandate. The Committee scrutinised a number of statutory rules as indicated above.

The Committee scrutinised and reported to the Committee for Finance and Personnel on the relevant aspects of the Public Service Pensions Bill.

BUDGET / PfG SCRUTINY

The Committee noted the Department's generally good record in respect of resource and capital forecasting and budgeting. The Committee scrutinised monitoring rounds and capital announcements seeking, in the case of the latter, greater clarity in respect of selection protocols and new build timescales.

The majority of Committee Members noted with disappointment the absence of Departmental briefings or information in respect of progress relating to the Savings Delivery Plans.

In respect of the Programme for Government (PfG), the Committee noted with concern only marginal improvements in 2012-13 attainment in respect of 5 good GCSEs (including English and maths) for all school leavers compared with 2011-12. The Committee also noted with concern that the PfG attainment targets for school leavers entitled to Free School Meals had also only marginally increased and are well short of the 2014-15 target.

Although not a PfG commitment, the Committee also noted with concern only marginal increases in A-level attainment in 2013-14 as compared with 2012-13.

In respect of PfG Commitment 43, the Committee also scrutinised the continuing problems associated with the Levels of Progression and the failure to establish a baseline for literacy and numeracy attainment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

The Committee noted the increased provision of pre-school education and lobbied the Minister to provide increased flexibility in respect of school starting age.

The Committee considered the outline business case for the Lisanelly shared campus and welcomed the announcement of 3 further shared education campuses under the Together: Building a United Community initiative. As indicated above and as part of its consideration of PfG commitments in respect of Shared Education, the Committee agreed the terms of reference for an inquiry into Shared/Integrated Education

The Committee received a briefing from the Minister on the delays to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. It is understood that a revised Bill which simply amalgamates the existing 5 Education and Library Boards into 1 organisation is to be brought forward and that the work of the ESA Implementation Team is to be curtailed.

POLICY SCRUTINY

Common Funding Scheme

The Committee undertook a well attended stakeholder event in October 2013 where schools and other organisation gave their feedback in respect of the Department's proposed wide-ranging changes to the Common Funding Scheme (CFS). The original proposals would have led to many primary schools experiencing a reduction in their budgets in 2014-15.

The Committee agreed and published its response to the consultation in February 2014. The Committee accepted the need for reform of the CFS and welcomed: the injection of £15.8m extra for schools in 2014-15; the additional social deprivation funding coupled with better evaluation of associated interventions; the extension of Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) to more children in post-primaries; the introduction of separate primary and post-primary funding streams; the introduction of the Looked After Children factor and the Amalgamation factor; greater financial delegation to schools and constructive interventions in respect of substantial deficits/surpluses and the retention of funding arrangements in respect of Special Education.

The Committee called for the retention of the Educational Attainment; Premises; and Sports factors pending reconsideration of the impact of their withdrawal and for the adoption of a 5 band rather than a 3 band FSME funding model during a period of transition to an alternative CFS.

In the longer term, the Committee called for consideration of an alternative CFS in which the funding of educational intervention would be linked to educational attainment and FSME rather than wholly on FSME.

The Committee retained a Special Adviser – Dr Ian Shuttleworth. He will report in autumn 2014 in respect of the efficacy of funding mechanisms based on prior educational attainment, FSME and other pupil or area-based data.

The Department adopted many of the suggestions put forward by the Committee – e.g. retaining the Premises factor (worth £66m pa) and modifying plans to change the Educational Attainment factor. These changes to the revised CFS and the introduction of transitional funding greatly improved the financial picture for primary schools in 2014-15. The Committee continues to seek further clarity on individual allocations to schools.

STEM

In addition to briefings from the Association of Science Education; Geoserve (as part of the Politics Plus MLA/Scientist partnering programme); and the Department, the Committee hosted the STEM is Cool event. This information event was organised by the Northern Ireland Science Park and was attended by STEM stakeholders and Members of the Employment and Learning and Enterprise, Trade and Investment committees.

The Committee noted that the Education and Training Inspectorate is to undertake review of the teaching of science in primary schools and is to report in the autumn of 2014. The Committee agreed to undertake further work on this subject at that time and may elect to publish a short report on its findings and recommendations in respect of the teaching of STEM in schools.

Area Planning

The Committee considered the lessons learned from the Area Planning process in respect of Orangefield High School; undertaking briefings from the Department and previous and present chief executives of the Belfast Education and Library Board.

The Committee also undertook a visit to Edinburgh in order to meet with the chairperson and the members of the Scottish Commission for the Delivery of Rural Education. Members used this visit to further inform their understanding of Area Planning issues in other jurisdictions.



Education Committee Members with representatives from Lasswade High School during the Committee's visit to Edinburgh in October 2013.

The Committee continued to retain a Special Adviser – Professor Tony Gallagher – to assist with its scrutiny of the Viability Audits & Area Planning process.

The Committee's scrutiny of Area Planning was limited by the delay in the publication of the primary school Area Plans – the consultation in question closed in June 2013. The plans were published in June/July 2014.

It is anticipated that the Committee will undertake a final Area Planning stakeholder event in the autumn of 2014 and will publish a report on its findings and recommendations in spring 2015.

EU Engagement

The Committee scrutinised DE's International Education Programme and the Department's progress in drawing down EU funding. The Committee also hosted "The World in your Classroom" event with the British Council who are the funding organisation in the UK for Erasmus+. The event successfully highlighted funding opportunities for schools wishing to internationalise the curriculum. The Committee also responded to the SEUPB consultation on Peace IV welcoming the proposed Shared Education elements of the new funding programme.



Chairperson of the Education Committee, Mervyn Storey MLA learning a new language at the British Council ‘World in Your Classroom’ event on 27 May 2014.

Other

As indicated above, the Committee undertook initial evidence sessions with DE; the Public Health Agency; and the Health and Social Care Board relating to

- access to joined-up health services for school children with vision problems; and
- access to support services for school children with Special Education Needs.

The Committee expects to consider these matters again in the next session and may choose to publish short report(s) on its findings and recommendations.

The Committee also considered the findings of the Departmental review of the future of GCSEs and A-levels.

The Committee took evidence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office on its report on employee absence. The Committee sought further information from the Department and will respond to the Committee for Finance and Personnel on this issue in September 2014.

The Committee reviewed funding, selection and communication issues relating to teacher redundancies – undertaking additional meetings and recommending alterations to selection criteria reflecting the financial position of schools.

VISITS

During the session the Committee made a number of visits as previously indicated to:

- University of Ulster in Coleraine (September 2013) – visited Initial Teacher Education facilities;
- Edinburgh (October 2013) - met with the Scottish Commission for the Delivery of Rural Education; visited a shared school campus (Dalkeith) and a community access school campus (Lasswade); met with officials from Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority; met with the Scottish STEM Education Committee; met with the Scottish Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages; visited the Scottish Parliament and met with the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee;
- 2014 BT Young Scientist Exhibition in Dublin (January 2014);
- Antrim Grammar School (March 2014) which informed the Committee's consideration of school self-evaluation ;
- Greenmount Agricultural College (May 2014) – visited the RSPB outdoor education facility;
- Queen's University of Belfast (June 2014) attended the 2015 BT Young Scientist Exhibition launch (June 2014); and
- Fermanagh Trust in Enniskillen (June 2014) met with schools involved in Shared Education partnerships.



Education Committee Members at the BT Young Scientist Event in Dublin on 9 January 2014.

INFORMAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS

The Committee held 5 informal events:

- Common Funding Scheme stakeholders (October 2013);

- STEM is Cool (January 2014);
- District Inspectors (January 2014) – part of ETI inquiry;
- Associate Assessors (February 2014) – part of ETI inquiry; and
- The World in your classroom event (May 2014) – to highlight EU funding opportunities for schools.



Education Committee Members with stakeholders and school pupils who attended the ‘STEM is Cool’ event on 29 January 2014.

Committee Members also attended 5 informal meetings with:

- Ballee High School (November 2013) – Area Planning issues;
- OECD (January 2014) – launch of the OECD report on evaluation and assessment frameworks;
- GL Education Group (March 2014) – assessment and pupil progress tracking issues;
- West Belfast Partnership Board (March 2014) – as part of ETI inquiry;
- Drumragh Integrated College (May 2014)- Area Planning issues; and
- Confederation of British Industry (Northern Ireland) (June 2014) – First Steps NI report.

Committee Expenditure

Details of Committee expenditure for the session are contained at Appendix A.

Contact Details

Anyone wishing to contact the Committee for Education should do so at the following address:

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ANNEX A

Committee for Education

Expenditure for the period 1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	<p>Includes the cost of committee visits to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Ulster, Coleraine – 25 September 2013 • Edinburgh - 2 & 3 October 2013 • 2014 BT Young Scientist Exhibition in Dublin - 9 January 2014 • Antrim Grammar School – 4 March 2014 • Greenmount Agricultural College – 28 May 2014 • Queen’s University of Belfast – 4 June 2014 • Fermanagh Trust in Enniskillen – 18 June 2014 	£4103.62
Printing of committee reports	<p>Includes the cost of committee reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process 	£1918.92
Advertising	<p>Includes the cost of advertising relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education – July 2014 	£809.65
General expenses	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, committee events, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, and conference fees for members.	£5624.67
Total Expenditure		£12,456.86