



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2016
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Barry McElduff MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Lyttle MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Rosemary Barton MLA
David Hilditch MLA
Carla Lockhart MLA
Phillip Logan MLA
Jennifer McCann MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Lord Morrow MLA
Sandra Overend MLA
Catherine Seeley MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Bronagh Irwin (Clerical Supervisor)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

None

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:05am.

1. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed its forward work programme

Mr Chris Lyttle joined the meeting at 10:07am.

1.1 Youth Parliament

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Members of the Youth Parliament to provide a formal oral briefing.

1.2 Anti-Bullying Week

The Committee discussed how it could contribute to anti-bullying week which takes place between 14 and 18 November 2016.

Ms Carla Lockhart joined the meeting at 10:11am.

Ms Jennifer McCann joined the meeting at 10:15am.

Mrs Sandra Overend joined the meeting at 10:17am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a formal oral briefing from the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk will circulate to Members a copy of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016 and a link to the New Bridge Integrated School anti-bullying video.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to options for Committee involvement in anti-bullying week including the use of social media and the sponsorship of an event.

1.3 2016-21 Programme for Government (PfG)

The Committee discussed a PfG stakeholder engagement event planned for Wednesday 19 October 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue an invitation letter to the specified list of invitees for the stakeholder event.

1.4 Other Issues

The Committee discussed possible joint working opportunities with the Committee for Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the timescale for the publication of the Childcare Strategy and requesting a related oral briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the use of vocational courses in other jurisdictions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the draft forward work programme as amended.

The Committee moved to public session at 10.35am

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Tor Bank School

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tor Bank School thanking the principal and staff for hosting the Committee meeting on 7 September 2016.

3.2 Global Learning Partnership

The Chairperson briefed members on a recent informal meeting with the Global Learning Partnership.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on requiring the Education and Training Inspectorate to inspect schools' commitments to teaching and learning in respect of sustainability and global citizenship

3.3 Publications

The Committee noted the following publications laid in the Assembly or sent to the Committee office: the 2015-16 Common Funding Scheme for schools; the annual reports from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

The Committee also noted the publication of the Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether targets to end segregation in education are to be set and how they are to be evaluated. The Committee also agreed to seek clarification as to how the Department will take forward: the development of new curricular materials on active citizenship; the increased interaction with the Living Law programme; the new youth intervention programmes and the early intervention activity.

3.4 Assembly Research blog

The Committee noted the launch of a new Assembly Research Blog entitled: Research Matters.

3.5 Home to School Transport

The Committee noted a freedom of information request for Committee correspondence relating to home to school transport.

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

- clarification regarding the provision of free home to school transport where the nearest school selects academically and where a parent does not wish their child to sit the transfer test;
- clarification regarding the maximum permitted waiting time for pupils' school to home transport at the end of the school day; and
- an oral briefing on home to school transport policy.

3.6 Public Gallery

The Chairperson welcomed to the public gallery Ms Carol Nolan TD.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 7 September 2016.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 The Committee noted the Clerk's cover note on Matters Arising.

5.2 The Committee noted correspondence regarding pre-school provision in Special Schools. Members noted that the Minister would be providing oral evidence on this matter at the Committee meeting on 12 October 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the 2016 placement of children seeking Special School and mainstream preschool provision – in particular, details of the numbers of parents who withdrew from the process prior to its conclusion.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether and how all Special School principals are to be given the opportunity to participate in the review consultation groups and emphasising that the Committee expected the provision of the Terms of Reference of the review and other key pieces of information prior to the Ministerial briefing.

5.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Fifth Periodic Report on the United Kingdom. Some members noted concerns in respect of the UNCRC commentary on academic selection.

5.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department providing funding plans and details of the successful and unsuccessful applicants by geographical region for the Early Years Pathway Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and to the Early Years Organisation indicating concerns regarding the high level of unsuccessful applications and setting out some Members' views on the limited number of successful rural applicants.

5.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department including the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an analysis of literacy and numeracy programmes carried out in Northern Ireland in recent years - setting out the costs and effectiveness of these programmes.

5.6 The Committee noted the Assembly's most recent EU Affairs Report.

5.7 The Committee noted an EU Referendum Update produced by the Assembly's Research and Information Service.

Some Members highlighted concerns relating to the impact of Brexit on the European Qualification Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- seeking information on the number of 3rd level students from Northern Ireland studying in the Republic of Ireland and the number of students from the Republic of Ireland studying in Northern Ireland; and
- indicating concerns in respect of the phasing of grants paid to students from Northern Ireland studying in the Republic of Ireland and the impact of changing exchange rates.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the impact of Brexit on EU-funded educational programmes including Peace IV and Erasmus+.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister suggesting that he raise the issue of the potential impact of Brexit on student mobility at the North South Ministerial Council.

5.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding changes to post-primary transfer policy guidance.

The Committee considered a motion to request an oral Ministerial briefing on the recent changes to post-primary transfer guidance, particularly in respect of academic selection.

The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes	Abstained	Not Voting
Barry McElduff	David Hilditch		
Chris Lyttle	Carla Lockhart		
Rosemary Barton	Philip Logan		
Jennifer McCann	Lord Morrow		
Colin McGrath			
Sandra Overend			
Catherine Seeley			

The motion was passed.

6. Department of Education – oral briefing – 2011-16 PfG outturn; 2015-16 Business Plan outturn; 2016-17 Business Plan

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 11:25am.

David Hughes, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards; Gary Fair, Director of Planning and Performance Management; Cathy Galway, acting Director of Youth, Early Years and Childcare; and Caroline Gillan, Director of Access, Inclusion and Well-being briefed the Committee.

Mr Colin McGrath made a declaration of interest that he had previously been employed as a youth worker.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 12:19pm.

Ms Jennifer McCann left the meeting at 12:42pm.

Mr Philip Logan left the meeting at 12.43pm

Departmental officials left the meeting at 12:50pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- requesting further information, including the terms of reference, meeting frequency and achievements to-date of the joint Department of Education and Department of Health Special Educational Needs co-operation working group;
- highlighting concerns in respect of excessive bureaucracy relating to youth provision and seeking clarity as to the Department's plans to address this issue;
- seeking clarification as to how it will ensure that Sure Start services are properly targeted and delivered to small areas of deprivation outside the 25% most deprived wards;
- seeking information as to how the Department will engage with parents so as to ensure improved participation in early intervention programmes;
- requesting information on the Department's plans to address issues relating to elective home education; and
- seeking clarification on the number of pupils that have participated in shared education programmes and how this is to be measured reliably going forward.

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned Individual regarding teacher recruitment.

7.3 The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson from the Chinese Consulate-General to an event to mark the 67th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to attend the event, diary permitting.

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority (EA) announcing the development phase of the first EA Strategic Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an explanation for the delay in developing its first Strategic Plan and the timescale for the completion and publication of the plan.

7.5 The Committee noted an invitation from the Attorney General to a colloquium entitled: Getting Legislation Right.

7.6 The Committee noted an invitation from the NSPCC to the launch of the Keeping Safe Programme, on Wednesday 21st September 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would attend, diaries permitting.

7.7 The Committee noted an invitation from the Global Learning Programme for the Chairperson to attend an event on 14 September 2016.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 21 September 2016, at 10.00am in room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
21 September 2016