



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 28 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 public session at 10:07am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 2017-18 Resource Budget

The Chairperson indicated that it is understood that the Department will submit its budget proposals for 2017-18 to the Department of Finance by 10 October 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking details of the 2017-18 budget proposal submission.

2.2 Children and Young Persons' Strategy

The Chairperson advised on the apparent timescale for the Children and Young Persons' Strategy consultation and indicated that the Department had agreed to provide a pre-consultation overview briefing on 5 October 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should liaise with Assembly Research and Assembly Education Services in order to facilitate children's feedback on the Strategy through the use of focus groups. The Committee also agreed that representation in the focus groups needed to be balanced with schools from across Northern Ireland.

2.3 Positive Futures

The Chairperson discussed a recent Positive Futures event at which parents provided testimony on limited co-operation between Health and Education organisations in respect of the provision of SEN services in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Positive Futures to the Committee's SEN Health/Education co-operation event on 9 November 2016. The Committee also agreed to invite the Parents Teachers Association (NI) and Special Schools to bring parents/parent governors to the event, in order to discuss the issues raised by Positive Futures.

2.4 Complaints in Schools

The Chairperson discussed reference in the Education Authority Board minutes of June 2016 to the development of new complaints information for schools reflecting the new role for the Ombudsman.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking sight of the relevant new information leaflet, when it is available.

Mr Chris Lyttle joined the meeting at 10:14am.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 21 September 2016.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted a Departmental press release referring to an extension for applications for resource funding from the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project.

Agreed: The Committee agree to write to the Department highlighting the lower than expected level of uptake for the Shared Education Signature Project and seeking clarification as to whether:

- the extended deadline reflected the provision of a new funding stream;
- the Shared Education Signature Project is, or is likely to be, significantly underspent;
- a significant number of applications to the Signature Project had been rejected owing to schools' failure to use Levels of Progression to assess educational impacts; and
- an underspend may lead to the loss of Atlantic Philanthropies (or other) funding for the Signature Project.

Ms Jennifer McCann joined the meeting at 10:16am.

5. Department of Education – oral brief – October Monitoring Round

The Committee noted the Department had advised that a briefing would not be provided and that the Committee had previously agreed that, in this eventuality, it would write to the Department seeking a full explanation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department suggesting that it bids for additional funding in October Monitoring in order to address the reported deficit in choice at A-level and GCSE in non-selective post-primaries, where budget constraints have limited compliance with the Entitlement Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information in respect of the timing of the allocation of £8m to the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority for information in respect of the “alternative approaches” which were considered at the Board meeting in June 2016 in order to achieve savings of £35m.

The order of agenda items was altered.

6. Correspondence

6.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

6.2 The Committee noted an invitation from the Children’s Law Centre inviting the Chairperson to a Youth Engagement Conference on 27 October 2016.

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

6.3 The Committee noted correspondence inviting the Chairperson to meet with the chief executive of GL Assessment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet the chief executive, diary permitting.

6.4 The Committee noted correspondence inviting the Chairperson to meet with the Fostering Network NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet the Fostering Network NI, diary permitting.

6.5 The Committee noted correspondence inviting the Chairperson to visit Malone College, Belfast.

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

6.6 The Committee noted a response from the Early Years Organisation regarding the Early Years Pathway Fund.

6.7 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority in respect of the first Education Authority Strategic Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the Education Authority, at the end of the consultation on the Plan.

6.8 The Committee noted an invitation to hold its meeting on Wednesday 7 December 2016 in order to facilitate attendance at the Young Enterprise Trade Fair in St George's Market, Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit the Trade Fair and if possible to hold its meeting in or near St George's Market, Belfast.

6.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office providing a briefing paper from Queen's University Belfast entitled 'After the EU Referendum: Establishing the Best Outcome for Northern Ireland'

6.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding a combined response from statutory committees to the draft 2016-21 Programme for Government Action Plan consultation.

6.11 The Committee noted an update paper from the Assembly on EU affairs.

6.12 The Committee noted an invitation from the Charity Retail Association to an event on Monday 17 October 2016.

6.13 The Committee noted an invitation from the Children's Law Centre and Save the Children to a children's rights briefing event on Wednesday 16 November 2016. The Committee noted that the date coincided with its planned Children and Young Persons' Strategy consultation event.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider rescheduling its event, at a future meeting.

6.14 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding unresolved allegations involving a teacher.

6.15 The Committee noted the September 2016 update for the Department's capital programme.

6.16 The Committee noted the draft Terms of Reference for the Special Schools pre-school review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department highlighting concerns in respect of the longer than expected timescales and the need to provide parents and schools with certainty regarding pre-school Special School provision, as soon as possible.

7. Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education - Introductory Briefing

Witnesses joined the meeting at 10:30am.

Bishop Donal McKeown, Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE); Sister Mary Conway, Member of NICCE; John Cooley, Member of NICCE; and Sister Eithne Woulfe, Member of NICCE briefed the Committee.

Mr Colin McGrath made a declaration of interest that he had previously been employed as a youth worker and that he was a member of the Board of Governors for St Mary's High School, Downpatrick.

Witnesses left the meeting at 11:45am.

8. Department of Education – Attendance Strategy consultation – oral briefing

Witnesses joined the meeting at 11:47am.

Caroline Gillan Director of Access, Inclusion and Well-Being, Department of Education; Jonathan Boyd Acting Head of Additional Educational Needs Team, Department of Education; and Nicola Topping, Assistant Senior Education Officer, Education Authority briefed the Committee.

Ms Jennifer McCann left the meeting at 12:09pm.

Witnesses left the meeting at 12:31pm.

Members commented with concern in respect of the link between poor attainment and poor attendance and the relatively large number of non-selective post-primary schools with 90% or worse attendance.

Members also queried the apparent failure of the Department to learn from and maintain support for successful interventions including the Extended Schools Programme etc.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department generally welcoming the Attendance Strategy but highlighting its concerns, as set out above, and also in respect of the apparent absence of additional support for the Educational Welfare Service, in order to address the findings of the Northern Ireland Audit Office 2014 report relating to the large proportion of pupils with very poor attendance who were not subject to any formal intervention.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on the impact of suspensions (which are classed as authorised absence) on the level of unauthorised absence in schools and seeking an update on the provision of independent counselling services for primary schools.

9. Forward Work Programme

Ms Jennifer McCann rejoined the meeting at 12:32pm.

The Committee considered a draft invitation list for its Special Educational Needs Education/Health co-operation event on Wednesday 9 November 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add PCCD to the list of invitees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the list of invitees for the event, as amended.

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer an informal planning session scheduled for 5 October 2016 to 19 October 2016.

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

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 5 October 2016, at 10.00am in Hall 3B, Waterfront Hall, Belfast.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:34pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
5 October 2016