



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2016
ST DOMINIC'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, BELFAST

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)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)
Simon Kelly (Assembly Legal Services), item 1 only

Apologies:

None

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:01am.

1. Assembly Legal Services – legal advice on compelling witnesses and documents

The Committee noted legal advice on compelling witnesses and documents.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Assembly Research on budget processes in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on scrutiny of the budget and the October Monitoring Round.

The Committee considered legal advice provided by Simon Kelly from Assembly Legal Services.

Mr Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 10:05am.

Ms Carla Lockhart joined the meeting at 10:07am.

Mrs Sandra Overend joined the meeting at 10:15am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- requesting 2017-18 resource and 2017-21 capital budget information and a related oral briefing session as soon as possible (in closed session, if necessary) from Departmental officials;
- again seeking clarification as to why this information is not to be provided to the Committee, prior to the budget being laid in the Assembly; and
- Indicating that in the event of the information and briefing not being provided, the Committee may elect to seek to compel the Department to provide relevant documents and witnesses in line with the powers set out in Section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2. Committee Planning Session/ Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the commissioning of research papers and additional oral evidence sessions. The Committee also considered the subject of a formal Committee inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission research papers on:

- the content of the primary school curriculum and its links to the needs of the economy;
- the cost of education and the cost of empty school places;
- physical education in schools;
- underachievement and educational attainment;
- educational progress in composite classes;
- costs and options in respect of parental choice in education;
- special educational nursery provision; and
- educational practice in Finland and Germany.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek Departmental evidence sessions on:

- the tracking of pupil progress in schools;

- the Priorities for Youth policy and the role of volunteers in youth provision; and
- Alternative Education Providers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would undertake an inquiry into educational underachievement and that the inquiry would include consideration of: underachievement for marginalised children; recommendations to remove barriers to achievement; and the impact of current post primary transfer arrangements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the terms of reference for the inquiry at a subsequent meeting.

The meeting moved to public session at 11.14am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to receive a further Departmental briefing on the Special Educational Needs regulations on 7 December 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with its Forward Work Programme as amended.

3. Apologies

No apologies were received.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 West Belfast Partnership Board

The Chairperson referred to an informal meeting, on Monday 17 October 2016, with representatives of the West Belfast Partnership Board and a delegation including academics from Dublin City University and Sofia University as well as school inspectors and teachers from Bulgaria.

The Committee noted correspondence from the West Belfast Partnership Board seeking a further briefing with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal briefing with representatives of the West Belfast Partnership Board, after Year 12 validated GCSE results are published.

4.2 The Fostering Network

The Chairperson referred to an informal meeting, on Tuesday 18 October 2016, with representatives of the Fostering Network. Members noted that the Committee has recently written to the Department in respect of the Looked After Children policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department expressing its support for the Fostering Achievement programme and suggesting

that the Department supports the Fostering Network's Outcomes Seminar.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Fostering Network regarding its interaction with other fostering organisations including Foster Care Associates (FCA).

4.3 Area Planning Consultation

The Chairperson referred Members to the Education Authority's consultation document on Area Planning - 'Providing Pathways 2017-2020'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further details on individual Area Plans. The Committee also agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister seeking clarification on the planned consultation for Area Planning Action Plans and in respect of the Minister's intentions (if any) to reduce or eliminate the Small Schools Support Factor.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 12 October 2016.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. Department of Education – oral evidence - Programme for Government Action Plans

The Committee noted that the briefing on the Programme for Government Action Plans had been deferred.

8. Governing Bodies Association (GBA) – introductory oral evidence session

The witnesses joined the meeting at 11:21am.

Nuala O'Neill, Director, GBA; Dermot Mullan, GBA Executive; Carol McCann, principal of St. Dominic's, GBA Executive; and Professor Robert Hutchinson, GBA Executive provided oral evidence to the Committee.

Ms Catherine Seeley made a declaration of interest that two family members were teachers.

Ms Carla Lockhart made a declaration of interest that she was a school governor.

Mrs Sandra Overend left the meeting at 12:29pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:33pm.

Mr David Hilditch left the meeting at 12.33pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department again seeking a breakdown by school of the surpluses and deficits for Voluntary Grammar schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister highlighting concerns in respect of the adverse impact of both a one-year budget on schools and the timing of the provision of budget information to schools given their obligation to produce a 3-year budget plan.

9. Comhairle na Gaelscolaoichta (CnaG) – introductory oral evidence session

The witness joined the meeting at 12:35pm.

Mr Liam Ó Flannagáin, Chief Executive Officer, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta provided oral evidence to the Committee.

Mrs Sandra Overend rejoined the meeting at 12:42pm.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 1:05pm.

Ms Carla Lockhart left the meeting at 1:10pm.

Ms Catherine Seeley left the meeting at 1:13pm.

Ms Jennifer McCann left the meeting at 1:13pm

The witness left the meeting at 1:13pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CnaG requesting a briefing paper on Special Educational needs demand and services in Irish Medium Schools.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted a list of correspondence received.

10.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding literacy numeracy programmes

Ms Catherine Seeley rejoined the meeting at 1:15pm.

Ms Jennifer McCann rejoined the meeting at 1:16pm.

10.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the reduction of bureaucracy in respect of youth provision.

10.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding ICT Procurement Policy and an iPad leasing arrangement in a school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Department's response to St Oliver Plunkett School.

10.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the NSPCC Keeping Safe Programme.

10.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding parental financial contributions to schools.

10.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Volunteer Now seeking a meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Volunteer Now to an informal meeting.

10.8 The Committee noted correspondence from West Belfast Partnership Board.

10.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee on Procedures regarding e-petitions.

10.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office providing information on the Outcomes-based Accountability approach.

10.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office providing the Delivering Social Change Stakeholder update for September 2016.

10.12 The Committee noted an invitation to the Prince's Trust's Celebrate Success awards ceremony on 1 November 2016 in Titanic, Belfast.

10.13 The Committee noted an invitation to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Annual Statement Launch 2016 on 8 December 2016, in the Long Gallery.

11. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed previous correspondence to the Executive Office regarding the Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation (ILiAD) report.

12. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 26 October 2016, at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:17pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
26 October 2016