



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

13 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Danny Baker MLA
- Mr David Brooks MLA
- Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
- Ms Cara Hunter MLA

In attendance:

- Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Jonathan Lamont (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
- Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Attended via teleconference facilities:

- Mrs Julie Middleton MLA



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Apologies: Mr Jon Burrows MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies was received from Mr Burrows and Mrs Mason.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee discussed notification that the Northern Ireland Teachers Council (NITC) was now in a formal dispute process with the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking an urgent update on the management of the dispute and the timeline for resolution.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NITC regarding its concern that matters have led to the formal dispute.

3. Declaration of Interest

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that his wife was employed by Angel Eyes NI which is a signatory to an open letter from Children's Law Centre and other bodies to the Minister of Education on the SEN framework.

Ms Hunter made a declaration of interest that she is a member of the technical advisory council for Synthesia AI.



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4. Matters Arising

The Committee discussed changes to the minimum standards for childminders announced by the Minister of Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Health asking:

- Was there an impact assessment carried out on how child minders and the childcare sector more generally would be impacted by these changes;
- Does the Department of Health have modelling on how many child minders will be impacted and how many children will be impacted; and if not, on what basis this decision was made;
- What research was drawn on to make the decision; and
- What engagement he had with the Minister of Education on the changes and how it impacts on the early learning and childcare strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) requesting a written briefing.

Mr Baker put on record his disappointment with oral evidence from Department of Education officials on the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 6 May 2026.

6. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations - Oral Briefing by Children’s Law Centre

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Children’s Law Centre.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.14pm.

Mr John O’Doherty, Chief Executive, Children’s Law Centre

Mrs Kathryn Stevenson, Solicitor, Head of Legal Services, Children’s Law Centre

Ms Rachel Hogan, BL, SEND Specialist Legal Adviser, Children’s Law Centre.



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The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Middleton left the meeting at 2:59pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education sharing the results of its call for evidence and seeking:

- a comparison of the wording of existing and new regulations; and
- information on the work of the health /education oversight group.

7. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Bursary Scheme - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted correspondence from the witnesses and the Minister of Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.29pm.

Mr Ben O'Hagan, BEd Post Primary Student, St. Mary's University College.

Ms Maud Barr, BEd Post Primary Student, St. Mary's University College.

Ms Jacinta King, BEd Post Primary Student, St. Mary's University College.

Mr Ryan Davey, BEd Post Primary Student, St. Mary's University College.

Mr Caoilte Hamill President, Students Union, St. Mary's University College.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the Initial Teacher Education Bursary Scheme.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Baker left the meeting at 3:50pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education:

- asking for the Department to meet with the witnesses regarding their concerns and the proposed tapering model; and



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- asking for data on the rate of students dropping out from relevant teacher training courses.

8. Childcare Strategy - Oral Briefing by Department of Education officials

The Committee noted a Department of Education briefing paper.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.54pm

Ms Tina Dempster, Acting Director of Early Years, Childcare & Children and Young People's Strategy, Department of Education

Ms Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years - Intervention Programmes Team, Department of Education

Mrs Christine Leacock, Head of the Pre-School Education Programme Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the Childcare Strategy

Mr Baker rejoined the meeting at 3:56pm

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 4:40pm

The Committee resumed at 4:45pm

Agreed: The Committee moved to closed session at 4:46

9. General Teaching Council Bill - Formal Clause-by-Clause Consideration

The Committee noted the submissions to its call for evidence on the Bill, correspondence from NASUWT and a response from the Department of Education on proposed amendments.

The following official joined the meeting at 2.05pm.



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Mr Jonathan Redpath, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk, Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office.

The official briefed the Committee in regard to the General Teaching Council Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to public session at 4:57pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education sharing the letter from NASUWT for a response to issues raised.

The Committee considered the Clauses of the Bill.

Clause 1

Mr Sheehan recorded his intention to bring forward an amendment to the clause at Consideration Stage.

The Chairperson was content with Clause 1 without prejudice to developments at Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 1.

Clauses 2 – 16

Agreed: The Committee is content with Clauses 2 – 16 as drafted.

Long Title of the Bill

Agreed: The Committee is content with the Long Title of the Bill.

10. SL1 - The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Mr Baker left the meeting at 5:05pm

The Committee considered an SL1 for the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content that the Department proceed with the Statutory Rule.



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11. Correspondence

11.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

11.2 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on the use of restrictive practices in educational settings.

11.3 The Committee noted correspondence from WRDA and Menstruation Matters regarding access to bathrooms in schools.

Mr Baker rejoined the meeting at 5:08pm.

11.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health on the provision of nursing cover for Special School Summer Schemes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health regarding concerns raised by school principals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to the papers for its Strategic Review of Current SEN provision and Transformation Agenda.

11.5 The Committee noted an invitation to the Launch of the Children in Northern Ireland report 'Left Out - Disabled Children's Rights and Experiences in NI'.

11.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy on a Joint Concurrent Meeting on 17 June 2026.

11.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy on Childcare Issues.

11.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy seeking views on the Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a nil return.

11.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy seeking views on the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a nil return.



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11.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Health on Summer Schemes at Special Schools.

11.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice seeking the Committee's views on an SL1 for the SEN and Disability Tribunal (Amendment) Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this at its next meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking a copy of its response to the Committee for Justice on the regulations.

11.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance on ringfencing of funding for the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for consideration in relation to the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

11.13 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding funding for TinyLife.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with TinyLife seeking its views on it.

11.14 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding pupil registration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority regarding the concerns raised in the correspondence.

11.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education providing a copy of the draft Education Inspections Bill and Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

11.16 The Committee noted Correspondence from Assembly and Executive Review Committee on its Review of Assembly Committee Engagement on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.

11.17 The Committee noted Correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the Management of the Vote on Account.



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11.18 The Committee noted an invitation from Outscape NI to a People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland (POMNI) Webinar.

11.19 The Committee noted a response to the Committee's call for evidence on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 from SENAC.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for consideration on the regulations.

11.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy on A-Level Reform.

11.21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy providing a nil response to the Committee's call for evidence on both private members' bills currently before it.

11.22 The Committee noted a response to the Committee's call for evidence on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 from RNIB.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for consideration on the regulations.

11.23 The Committee noted correspondence from Shimna Integrated College regarding concerns regarding the oversight and outcome of the Independent Report into Governance at the school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education seeking their views on the issues raised.

11.24 The Committee noted a response to the Committee's call for evidence on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for consideration on the regulations.

11.25 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA on Learning Lifesaving Skills.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the British Heart Foundation.

11.26 The Committee noted an invitation from Live Music now to an event on expanding access to music for autistic learners.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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

14. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 May 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.18pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
20 April 2026