



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

13 March 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Ms Cheryl Brownlee MLA

Mr Robbie Butler MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Neal Flanagan (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)



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Apologies: Mr David Brooks MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

The meeting commenced at 2:02 pm in public session.

Robbie Butler joined the meeting at 2:03 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson briefed the Committee on his joining a House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee visit to Hazelwood Primary School on Monday, 11 March 2024, as part of its inquiry into integrated education. There was a brief discussion about the benefits of social care provision at the school.

The meeting was suspended at 2:04 pm and resumed at 2:10 pm.

The Chairperson briefed the Committee on a sponsored event with Unison regarding free school meals which took place on Monday, 11 March 2024. Unison indicated a desire to attend the Committee. The possibility of legislation or a Committee motion on the matter was discussed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider inviting Unison to present to members on the free school meals campaign as part of forward planning.



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3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 6 March 2024.

5. The Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee noted an SL1 from the Department regarding The Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee noted the Second Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, which raised no technical issues with the Statutory Rule.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:14 pm:

Mr Dale Heaney, Head of Tackling Educational Advantage Team, Department of Education

Mrs Ashleigh Mitford, Tackling Educational Advantage Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the proposed Statutory Rule.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department to make the following Statutory Rule: The Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

The Committee moved to closed session at 2:39 pm.

6. Public Finance Scrutiny Workshop – Research and Information Service

The Committee noted a briefing paper from RalSe.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:40 pm:

Mrs Eileen Regan, Senior Researcher, RalSe

Ms Rachel Keyes, Research Officer, RalSe

The RalSe officials provided the Committee with a presentation on public finance scrutiny.

The Committee adjourned at 3:42 pm.

The meeting resumed in public session at 3:50 pm.

7. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíocta – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíocta.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:51 pm:

Ms Maria Thomasson, CEO, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Ms Orla Nig Fhearraigh, Senior Education Officer, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta



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Dr Aisling O'Boyle, Director, Centre for Language Education Research, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Mel Engman, Senior Lecturer, Centre for Language Education Research, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Yecid Ortega, Centre for Language Education Research, Queen's University Belfast

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Irish-medium education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Kate Nicholl left the meeting at 4:55 pm.

8. Sustainability and Infrastructure – Department of Education Oral Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department of Education and a letter from the Minister of Education regarding the Strule Shared Education Campus.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:56 pm:

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Acting Deputy Secretary

Mr James Hutchinson, Director of Collaboration and Climate Change

Mr Eamonn Broderick, Acting Director of Sustainable Schools Policy and Planning

Ms Margaret Rose McNaughton, Director of Transport and Food in Schools

Mr Stephen Creagh, Acting Director of Investment and Infrastructure

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on sustainability and infrastructure in the education system.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to follow up on certain matters, including: how many teachers have received training on providing



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effectively for students with autism; how many Specialist Provision in Mainstream School units (SPiMs) currently exist in grammar schools; and an update on the current position regarding the use of the former Suffolk Primary School site for additional SEN provision St Gerard's Educational Resource Centre, Belfast.

Danny Baker left the meeting at 5:47 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an update on how it proposes to respond to the recommendations in the Queen's University '*Fair? Shared? Supported? : Examining expectation and realities for Irish-medium practitioners*' report on Irish-medium education.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index and summary note of correspondence.

9.11 The Committee considered an invitation to the Northern Ireland Nurture Group Network annual conference which is being held in the Dunadry Hotel Temple, Antrim on Friday 15 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that if any members wished to attend the conference they would inform the Committee Clerk.

9.12 The Committee considered an invitation to an event on building confidence and competence in numeracy at Ulster University Magee campus on Tuesday 19 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that if any members wished to attend the conference, they would inform the Committee Clerk.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider inviting representatives of the conference organisers to a future informal Committee meeting.

9.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly in which members of the Youth Assembly's Education Committee expressed the wish to sit in the public gallery for part of one of the Committee's meetings and meet with members of the Committee.



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Agreed: The Committee noted that representatives of the Youth Assembly would attend its meeting on 20 March, and further agreed that the Committee office liaise with the Youth Assembly to arrange a suitable date for its members to attend a future meeting and meet the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to dispose of correspondence not noted above per the summary notes in the meeting pack.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the provisional agendas for its meetings on 20 March and 10 April.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that members communicate with the Committee Clerk regarding availability for a strategic planning session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to focus a future meeting specifically on youth work, to include a briefing from the Education Authority and key stakeholders.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 March 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:57 pm.



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Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education

13 March 2024