Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

18 November 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Brooks MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Mr Peter Martin MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Present via teleconference facilities:
Mr Danny Baker MLA
Mr Jon Burrows MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA

In attendance: Miss Aoibhinn Treanor (Committee Clerk)
Ms Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Roisin Fleetham (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lawless (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Stephen Orme (Assembly Clerk) (Item 8 only)

Mr Jonathan Redpath (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk) (Item 8 only)

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Julie Middleton for her contribution to the work of the Committee and welcomed Peter Martin back to the Committee.

The Chairperson referred to the debate on the Committee motion on the Strategic Review of Current Special Educational Needs Provision and Transformation Agenda. The Chairperson thanked members, stakeholders and staff for their contribution to the review.

The Committee discussed concerns raised by school principals on the impact of recent Education Authority savings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority:

- Expressing concern that communication providing details of savings was sent to school principals late on Friday afternoon; and
- Seeking an explanation for changes to the delegated limit for procurement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing on the savings plan from the Education Authority Chief Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to education trade unions seeking examples of the impact of the savings plan.

Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Declaration of Interest

Mr Brookes made a declaration of interest that he took part in a visit to Israel referred to in correspondence.

Mrs Mason made a declaration of interest that she is Chairperson of the Committee on Standards.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 11 November 2026.

6. Religious Tolerance and Peace - Oral Briefing by RETOPEA

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Committee Clerk and RETOPEA.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.17pm

Professor Stefanie Sinclair, Official, Religious Tolerance and Peace (RETOPEA)

Dr Katelin Teller, Official, Religious Tolerance and Peace (RETOPEA)

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the work of RETOPEA

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the presentation on the resources with the Department of Education as good practice for the new curriculum and pedagogical approach.

Northern Ireland Assembly

7. SL1 - Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 Oral Briefing by DE Official

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Committee Clerk and the Department of Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.50pm

Ms Deirdre Ward, Director for SEN Strategic Policy, Department of Education

Ms Julie McBride, Head of Special Education Review Team, Department of Education

Ms Elaine Craig, Director of SEN Statutory and Education Psychology Services, Education Authority

Ms Tracey Logan, Head of SEND Statutory Services, Education Authority

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 3:16pm.

8. Education Inspections Bill –Oral Briefing by Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.16pm

Mr Stephen Orme, Assembly Clerk

Mr Jonathan Redpath, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Education Inspections Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee returned to public session at 3:39pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission amendments to be drafted in relation to clause two of the Education Inspections Bill by the Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

9.2. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on officials attendance at Committee regarding the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026.

9.3. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on officials attendance at Committee regarding the Education Inspections Bill.

9.4. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding spending on TransformED.

9.5. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding scheduling of the Consideration Stage of the General Teaching Council Bill.

9.6 The Committee discussed a Written Ministerial statement on the outcome of the Standards Commissioner's Report on Minister of Education's visit to Israel.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker indicating that a Public Petition in relation to St Columba's Primary School, Newbuildings has been laid in the Assembly.

9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from Matrix Academy Trust regarding their experience of developing a protocol and resource package that helps schools respond proportionately to possible threats.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education sharing the correspondence, and asking when guidance to schools will be refreshed.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the National Deaf Children's Society setting out its views on the impact of the Enhanced Support Model on support for deaf children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this correspondence when it considers the Enhanced Support Model.

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 3:56pm.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Forest School Association regarding concerns that the Department and Education Authority will not be proceeding with the proposed Outdoor Learning Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Education and Education Authority seeking their views.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Forest School Association to arrange an oral briefing on its Learning Without Walls campaign.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from NICCY highlighting concerns regarding the education system. The Commissioner also invites members to an event on the publication of his first Annual Statement on Children's Rights.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Commissioner seeking a briefing on research on attendance matters.

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding concerns about Literacy Policy.

9.15 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to a school regarding historical discrimination.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the correspondent signposting them to the Equality Commission for assistance.

9.16 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from a teacher to the Minister of Education raising a concern about school procurement arrangements and the restrictions placed on schools when purchasing educational resources and equipment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply indicating that it has sought a briefing from the Education Authority regarding procurement.

9.17 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual about School Parking Issues at St Conor's Primary School Omagh.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Education Authority seeking a response to the issues raised.

9.18 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding school-related disputes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply to the Correspondent setting out the relevant complaints procedures.

9.19 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual highlighting the experience of children living with complex disabilities receiving the support they require to attend school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the Department of Education and the Department of Health seeking how they can cooperate to resolve these issues.

9.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the National Deaf Children's Society setting out its views on the impact of the Enhanced Support Model on support for deaf children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this correspondence when it considers the Enhanced Support Model.

9.21 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence the National Association Of Head Teachers to the Education Authority regarding concerns about the implementation of savings and cost-control measures across schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the National Association Of Head Teachers to the Education Authority indicating the actions it is taking on this matter.

9.22 The Committee noted a response from Further Education NI on the Education Inspections Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the response in papers for the Education Inspections Bill.

Mr Baker left the meeting at 4:04pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 25 November 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:19pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
25 November 2026