Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

11 November 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
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

In attendance:
Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Committee Clerk)
Ms Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

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Present via teleconference facilities:

Mr Jon Burrows MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Julie Middleton MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted correspondence received regarding the recent GLL Swimming for Life event held in Parliament Buildings

Cara Hunter joined the meeting at 2.02pm

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding the return of officials to committee meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Speaker's Office to pause its request for a Section 44 notice to compel attendance by the Permanent Secretary and provision of specified papers.

The Committee noted correspondence from Fóram an nÓg regarding Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Authority regarding the current funding position.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking detail on the potential impact of cuts on pupils and families; which savings were considered but not taken forward; to what extent the Minister is required to sign off potential savings plans; and what the Education Authority is doing to address food waste.

The Committee noted the recent hoax email correspondence to schools regarding security issues and that an update is pending.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding ongoing liaison with curriculum stakeholders.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted correspondence from Dr James Nelson regarding his evidence given to Committee at the meeting on 04 November 2026.

The Committee noted a response from Department of Education with replies to research queries and giving notice of proposed DE amendment intentions iro the Education Inspections Bill.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 04 November 2026.

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6. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Oral briefing by Children's Law Centre

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.48pm

Rachel Hogan, SEND Specialist Legal Adviser, Children's Law Centre

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

Ellie Massey, Trainee Solicitor Children's Law Centre

The witnesses briefed the Committee on its joint partnership work with DE on development of the proposed Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Pat Sheehan MLA left the meeting at 3.07pm

Pat Sheehan MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.11pm

Pat Sheehan MLA left the meeting at 3.27pm

Cathy Mason MLA left the meeting at 3.30pm

Pat Sheehan MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.31pm

Pat Sheehan MLA left the meeting at 3.34pm

Cathy Mason MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.36pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to gather further information on data capture under the proposed regulations.

The Committee moved to closed session at 3.38pm

Michelle Guy MLA left the meeting at 3.39pm

Michelle Guy MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.43pm

Danny Baker MLA left the meeting at 3.56pm

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7. Case Study – oral briefing from Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.59pm

Robert Hunter, Solicitor, NICCY

Angela Haughey, Parent, Bright Futures NI

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Baker MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.01pm

Pat Sheehan MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.19pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice on the issues discussed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule idc a closed briefing session with officials from Education Authority and Department of Education.

The Committee returned to public session at 4.22pm

David Brooks MLA left the meeting at 4.23pm

8. Education Inspections Bill – GTC NI

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4.23pm

Ian Gallagher, the Interim Chief Executive Officer / Registrar

Mary Jackson, Head of Corporate Services and

Julie-Anne Stevenson, Head of Professional Standards.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Education Inspections Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

9. SL1 - Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Oral briefing by Department of Education

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

10.2 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding affordability of school uniforms

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to establish when findings will be published.

10.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding briefing from Fóram nan Óg on Irish-Medium Youth Work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply seeking further information.

10.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding Local Growth Fund.

10.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding grief and bereavement education.

10.6 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding school trip restrictions and financial disadvantage in voluntary grammar schools

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the reply to the individual who raised the issue.

10.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding Strule Shared Education campus.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask again for the total spend figure and project spend to date figure and to ask for more information on timescale for completion.

10.8 The Committee considered correspondence from Belfast Metropolitan College regarding the Education Inspections Bill.

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

10.9 The Committee considered correspondence from South West College regarding Education Inspections Bill.

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

10.10 The Committee considered correspondence from CAFRE regarding the Education Inspections Bill.

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

10.11 The Committee considered correspondence from De La Salle College regarding the Temporary Variation Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education for comment.

10.12 The Committee considered correspondence from the Governing Bodies Association regarding school trip restrictions and financial disadvantage in voluntary grammar schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the individual who raised the issue.

10.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Authority regarding Early Years access routes and the Local IMPACT Team support pathways.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Education Authority to keep the Committee updated on progress.

10.14 The Committee considered correspondence from St Patrick's College regarding Education Authority transport support for educational visits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority and the Department of Education to consider providing support for these journeys.

10.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding Joint Consultative Forum.

10.16 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities and Services) Bill

Agreed: The Committee agreed to make a nil return.

10.17 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the DE Curriculum 2028 consultation report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the individual.

10.18 The Committee considered correspondence from the British Heart Foundation regarding the Lifesavers programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put the questions raised by British Heart Foundation to the Department of Education and the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform British Heart Foundation of its actions.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered and agreed its forward work programme.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 18 November 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 17:21pm.

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Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
18 November 2026