



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

1 July 2025

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
Mr Peter Martin MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Glenda Doherty (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Mr Colin Crawford MLA



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The meeting commenced at 4:02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Colin Crawford.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

The Committee moved to Closed session at 4:04pm

3. School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill – Oral Briefing by Bill Clerk

The Committee discussed amendments to the clauses of the Bill.

The Committee moved to public session at 4:33pm

4. School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill - formal clause-by-clause deliberation.

The Committee considered the Clauses of and proposed amendments to the Bill.

Clause 1

The following amendments to clause 1 were proposed:

- Amendment 1:
Clause 1, Page 1, Line 10
Leave out 'from time to time' and insert 'at least once every three years'
- Amendment 2:
Clause 1, Page 1, Line 12, at end insert –



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‘(1A)(1) When developing or reviewing such guidelines, the Department must have due regard to the requirements of Articles 3, 14, 23, 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

(1B)(1) The Schedule sets out the text of Articles 3, 14, 23, 28 and 29 referred to in section (1A)(1).’

Mr Brooks and Mr Martin indicated that they were not in favour of amendment 2.

- Amendment 3:
Clause 1, Page 1, Line 18
Leave out ‘may’ and insert ‘must’

Mr Brooks and Mr Martin indicated that they were not in favour of amendment 3.

- Amendment 4:
Clause 1, Page 2, Line 1
After ‘who’ insert ‘, including pupils and their parents or guardians,’
- Amendment 5:
Clause 1, Page 2, Line 9
At end insert –
‘(6) The Department must lay any guidelines issued under this section before the Assembly.’

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 1 as amended.



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Clause 2

The following amendments to clause 2 were proposed:

- Amendment 6:
Clause 2, Page 2, Line 12
At end insert –
'(1A) Guidelines under this Chapter must include provision prohibiting any aspects of school uniform policies which restrict choice of items of clothing on the basis of sex or gender.'

Mr Brooks and Mr Martin indicated that they were not in favour of amendment 6.

- Amendment 7:
Clause 2, Page 2, Line 15
After 'pupils,' insert 'including with respect to menstruation'
- Amendment 8:
Clause 2, Page 2, Line 15
At end insert –
'(aa) practicality of clothing in relation to play-based curricula and outdoor learning, including within the Foundation Stage (as defined by the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007)'

Mr Brooks and Mr Martin indicated that they were not in favour of amendment 8.

- Amendment 9:
Clause 2, Page 2, Line 15
At end insert –
'(aa) promoting the safety of pupils with regard to road traffic'
- Amendment 10:
Clause 2, Page 2, Line 18



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At end insert –

‘(2A) Guidelines under this Chapter must include provision requiring school uniform policies to allow reasonable accommodations for cultural difference, religious practice, disability or special educational needs.’

- Amendment 11:

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 18

At end insert –

‘(2A) Guidelines under this Chapter must include provision requiring school uniform policies to ensure all items of clothing required are available for purchase from at least one retailer or provider which does not hold any formal or informal contract or agreement, with the school, relating to provision of such items of clothing.

(2B) Guidelines under this Chapter must include provision specifying that section 2A will not apply to any school uniform policy which includes a statement from the school manager explaining how such a contract or agreement delivers value for money with respect to items of clothing required by the school uniform policy.’

- Amendment 12:

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 18

At end insert –

“(2A) Guidelines under this Chapter must include provision requiring a manager of a school to publish, at least once per year, information regarding any formal or informal contracts or agreements, which the school holds with any retailer or provider, relating to provision of items of clothing required by the school uniform policy.

(2B) Provision under section 2A does not apply to any contracts or agreements which were in place before this Act received Royal Assent.’

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Amendment 13

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 18

At end insert –

‘(2A) Guidelines under this Chapter must require each school to facilitate or participate in a uniform reuse, loan, or bank scheme.’

- Amendment 14

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 18

At end insert –

‘(2A) Guidelines under this Chapter must include provision requiring school uniform policies to permit reasonable adjustments for pupils with a disability or special educational needs, where items of clothing required by those policies cause distress or sensory discomfort or present a barrier to participation.’

- Amendment 15

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 18

At end insert –

‘(2A) The Department must issue guidance, in consultation with relevant advocacy groups and organisations, on how schools may adapt uniform policies to accommodate pupils with a disability or special educational needs.’

The Question was put that the Committee was content with clause 2 as amended.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6 :Noes 2

Ayes: Nick Mathison MLA, Pat Sheehan MLA, Danny Baker MLA, Michelle Guy MLA, Cara Hunter MLA, Cathy Mason MLA

Noes: David Brooks MLA, Peter Martin MLA

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 2 as amended.



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Clause 3 - Express limit on specific styles by guidelines

The following amendments to clause 3 were proposed:

- Amendment 16:
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 29
Leave out 'may' and insert 'must'

Mr Brooks and Mr Martin indicated that they were not in favour of amendment 16.

- Amendment 17:
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 34
At end insert –
'(2) In particular, guidelines under this Chapter must include provision requiring school uniform policies to require no more than four items of clothing which bear school-specific features.
(3) Guidelines under this Chapter must further include provision prohibiting school uniform policies from requiring school-specific features on any shirt, blouse, trousers, skirts, tights, socks or shoes.
(4) For the purposes of this section, an item of clothing bears school-specific features if it is
(a) branded with a crest, logo, motto, emblem, marking or name which is distinctive to the school
(b) of a particular make, style, combination or fabric, or
(c) otherwise identifiable as a distinctive element of the school uniform.
(5) Guidelines under this Chapter must, where practicable, include provision requiring school uniform policies to permit the application of badges, emblems or markings to generic items of clothing as an alternative to items of clothing bearing school-specific features.'

Agreed: The Committee agreed not to proceed with Amendment 17 as drafted within the Committee Stage.



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Mr Sheehan, Mr Baker and Mrs Mason indicated that they remained in favour of amendment 17.

The Question was put that the Committee was content with clause 3 as amended

The Committee divided: Ayes 6 :Noes 2

Ayes: Nick Mathison MLA, Pat Sheehan MLA, Danny Baker MLA, Michelle Guy MLA, Cara Hunter MLA, Cathy Mason MLA

Noes: David Brooks MLA, Peter Martin MLA

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 3 as amended.

Clause 4

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 4 as drafted.

Clause 4A

An additional Clause 4A was proposed:

After clause 4 insert –

‘Reporting on school uniform costs and capping of expense

4A. (1) The Department must publish a written report, at least once every three years, detailing–

(a) Its assessment of the cost of school uniforms and their components, including mean costs, median costs and factors contributing to these, and

(b) The effect of any capping of expense included in guidelines as a result of section (4), or if no such capping of expense has been set, the reasons for this, and

(c) Its subsequent plans for

(i) Reviewing and, if appropriate, amending the guidelines, and

(ii) Imposing, ending or otherwise modifying any capping of expense.’



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(2) The first report under paragraph (1) must be published within the period of 3 years beginning with the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent.

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 4A as amended.

Clause 5

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 5 as drafted.

Clause 6

The following amendment to clause 6 was proposed:

- Amendment 19:

Clause 6, Page 3, Line 29

At end insert –

‘(3) A manager of a school must publish and operate procedures to enable complaints to be made concerning the school uniform policy, which must include provision permitting the school a maximum of three calendar months to issue a final response to any complaint.’

The Question was put that the Committee was content with clause 6 as amended

The Committee divided: Ayes 6 :Noes 2

Ayes: Nick Mathison MLA, Pat Sheehan MLA, Danny Baker MLA, Michelle Guy MLA, Cara Hunter MLA, Cathy Mason MLA

Noes: David Brooks MLA, Peter Martin MLA

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 6 as amended.

Clause 7

The following amendments to clause 7 were proposed:



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- Amendment 20:
Clause 7, Page 3, Line 31
Leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert –

‘7.—(1) The Department must give directions as follows to a manager of a school if the Department is satisfied that the manager is (or staff at the school are) in one or more material respects failing to adhere as required to guidelines under this Chapter.

(2) The Department may give directions to a manager of a school as follows if the Department is satisfied that the school’s pupils are liable to disciplinary measures or participatory disadvantages at the insistence of the manager (or of staff at the school) in consequence of breaching a school uniform policy applying at the school.’
- Amendment 21:
Clause 7, Page 4, Line 11
Leave out paragraph (b)
- Amendment 22:
Clause 7, Page 4, Line 30
At end insert –

‘(8) Where the Department gives directions to a school, it must publish these within three months of the directions first being given.’

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 7 as amended.

Clauses 8 - 14

Agreed: The Committee is content with clauses 8 – 14 put as drafted.



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Clause 15 – Commencement

The following amendment to clause 15 was proposed:

- Amendment 23
Clause 15, Page 7, Line 4
Leave out ‘Sections 3 and 4 come’ and insert ‘Section 4 comes’

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 15 as amended.

Clause 16

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 16 as drafted.

Schedule

The following amendment was proposed:

- Amendment 24:
This introduces a schedule after Clause 16 on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Schedule.

6. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.



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7. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 2 July 2025 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:53pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
2 July 2025