



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

14 February 2024

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

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)



Apologies: Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

The meeting commenced at 2:01 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Committee Composition

The Committee noted a paper setting out the composition of the Committee.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson introduced himself and formally welcomed the Deputy Chairperson and members to the first meeting of the Committee in the 2022-27 mandate.

The Chairperson and all members present highlighted areas of particular interest and their priorities and aspirations for the work of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chair and Deputy Chair should have an introductory informal meeting with the Minister.

The meeting moved to closed session at 2:14 pm.



4. Committee Procedures and Practices

The Committee noted various guidance documents related to the powers and operations of the Committee.

The Clerk to the Committee briefed members on procedures and practices.

Mr David Brooks joined the meeting at 2:36 pm

5. Education Overview

The Clerk to the Committee provided members with an overview of education in Northern Ireland.

The meeting moved to public session at 2.55 pm.

6. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson declared that his wife is a teacher in a grant-maintained integrated primary school, and that he is a member of the board of governors of a local controlled primary school.

Mr Butler declared that he is a member of the board of governors of a primary school in Lisburn; and is an officer in the Boys' Brigade. He added that, as a former firefighter, he is impacted by the McCloud judgement on public-sector pensions.

Ms Nicholl declared that she is a member of the board of governors of an integrated primary school.

Mr Brooks declared that his wife is a member of the board of governors of Grosvenor Grammar School.



Northern Ireland Assembly

7. Treatment of Subordinate Legislation

The Examiner of Statutory Rules joined the meeting at 2:58 pm.

The Committee noted guidance on the consideration of delegated legislation.

The following question was put and agreed by the Committee:

Agreed: That the Committee for Education, under Standing Order 43, resolves to delegate to the Examiner of Statutory Rules the technical scrutiny of statutory rules referred to the Committee under the above mentioned Standing Order. The Committee further resolves that in carrying out this function the Examiner shall be authorised to report her technical findings on each statutory rule to the Assembly, and to the relevant Department, as well as to the Committee itself and to publish her report.

The Committee moved to closed session at 3:00 pm.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules briefed the Committee on her opinion as to the statutory rules at agenda items 8 and 9.

She agreed to appear at the next meeting to more fully brief the Committee on her role.

The Chairperson thanked the Examiner of Statutory rules for her attendance.

The Committee adjourned at 3:23 pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:31 pm in open session with the following members present: Mr Mathison, Mr Sheehan, Mr Baker, Mr Brooks, Ms Brownlee, Mr Butler, Ms Hunter and Ms Nicholl.

8. SR 2023/131 - The Teachers' Pension Scheme (Remediable Service) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:31 pm:



Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Brian Quinn, Head of Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team, Department of Education.

Mr Bill Bradley, Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team, Department of Education.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the background and effect of the regulations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer a decision on the statutory rule until its next meeting.

9. SR 2023/122 - The Curriculum (Circumstances in which a Pupil may be Excused from Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Education) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:49 pm:

Mr Ray Caldwell, Director of Curriculum, Assessment, Teacher Education and Professional Learning, Department of Education.

Ms Andrena Murray, Head of Curriculum Team, Department of Education.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the background and effect of the regulations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer a decision on the statutory rule until its next meeting.



Northern Ireland Assembly

10. Committee for Education Legacy Report 2017-2022 and Access to Committee Legacy Papers

The Committee noted the Legacy Report of the 2017-2022 predecessor Committee for Education.

The following question was put and agreed by the Committee:

Agreed: That the Committee for Education agrees to access and publish, as appropriate, all unpublished papers obtained by the predecessor Committee.

11. Correspondence

11.1 The Committee noted an index and summary note of 33 items of incoming correspondence.

11.2 The Committee considered a summary of departmental decisions made in the absence of a Minister in May, August & September 2023.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to confirm that the list of decisions is comprehensive up to 3 February 2024.

11.3 The Committee noted an invitation to a meeting of the Education Authorities Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) on Tuesday 16th April in Belfast.

11.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding free school meals, physical education and uniform allowance.

11.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding free school meals and uniform allowance information.

11.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding the Annual Plan of Arrangement for Children with SEN.

11.7 to 11.24 The Committee noted 18 monthly Investing Activity Reports for Department of Education reports from the Strategic Investment Board Ltd.



Northern Ireland Assembly

11.25 The Committee noted an invitation from STEAM NI for consideration as part of its forward work programme.

11.26 The Committee considered correspondence from the North Down Primary Principals' Group seeking a meeting with the Committee to discuss increasing incidents of abuse of school staff by parents and carers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the group seeking a briefing on the current situation regarding incidents of abuse of school staff by parents and carers.

11.27 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Second Reading of the 'Dyslexia Screening and Teacher Training Bill' in the House of Commons.

11.28 The Committee noted correspondence from The St Stephen's Green Trust regarding the cost of school uniforms.

11.29 The Committee considered an invitation from the Royal Society of Chemistry to a primary science workshops event at Ulster University's Coleraine campus. Ms Hunter indicated that she intended to attend the event.

11.30 The Committee considered correspondence from Employers for Childcare seeking a meeting with the Committee on the key findings from the Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023 and Tackling Disadvantage through Childcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Employers for Childcare to a formal meeting.

11.31 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual requesting that the Committee ask the Minister of Education if he will implement/deliver a properly resourced and funded childcare strategy for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the correspondent to the Minister's response to Assembly debate on a childcare strategy for Northern Ireland.

11.32 The Committee considered correspondence from the Mental Health Champion seeking the opportunity to attend and brief the Committee on their work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Mental Health Champion to a formal meeting.



Northern Ireland Assembly

11.33 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual seeking a meeting with the Chairperson as he is interested in international and local politics, democracy and current affairs, as well as the collection of memorabilia.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the individual to thank them for their interest in the work of the Committee and advise them of arrangements for public access to Committee meetings; and to provide a signed first meeting agenda.

11.34 The Committee considered correspondence from the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists seeking a meeting with the Committee to discuss its early years work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Royal College to an informal meeting to discuss its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to dispose of the correspondence not noted above per the summary note.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme/Induction Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 4:51 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed on a number of priorities for the forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold regular informal meetings at 9.15 on Tuesday mornings to inform its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider an options paper on making a visit to a school from every sector.

The Committee noted that a first-day brief had not yet been provided to the Committee by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Minister to brief the Committee on his priorities as soon as possible and to make a rolling commitment to attend the Committee regularly.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

13. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 21 February 2024 in Room 29 Parliament Buildings at 2:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:59 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education
21 February 2024