



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

11 June 2025

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
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Mr Peter Martin 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
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA



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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Colin Crawford, Cara Hunter and Cathy Mason.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

3. Declaration of Interests

Ms Brownlee made a declaration of interest that she is a member of the Board of Governors for Sunnylands Primary School, Carrickfergus.

4. Matters Arising

4.1. The Committee considered a draft motion calling for action in relation to restrictive practices.

The Committee noted responses from NITC and the Special School Strategic Leadership Group on the proposed motion.

An amendment was proposed by Mr Martin:

The Committee divided: Ayes 2; Noes 4; Abstain 0.

Ayes

Noes

Ms Cheryl Brownlee

Mr Nick Mathison MLA



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Mr Peter Martin MLA

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

The amendment fell.

An amendment was proposed by Mr Mathison.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4; Noes 2; Abstain 0.

Ayes

Noes

Mr Nick Mathison MLA

Ms Cheryl Brownlee

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

Mr Peter Martin MLA

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That this Assembly acknowledges the painful, ongoing debate and campaign for minimisation if not eradication of restrictive practices in schools and other education settings; applauds parents for bringing this subject to the awareness of the Assembly and the public; commends the efforts of DE, DoH and partners in working to establish guidance for use in both health and education settings; calls on the Minister of Education to commit first, to guidance and training that is non-discriminatory, person centred and in the best interests of the child, namely from a human rights perspective; secondly to repeal of article 4 (1)(c) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and appropriate legislative change to respond compassionately to the difficult circumstances which can arise due to pupils’ challenging behaviours; thirdly to data gathering and monitoring; fourthly to review of the special school and wider school estate to address the environmental factors which exacerbate distressed and disregulated behaviours by pupils; and fifthly to commission an update to the 2013 ETI report on persistent and challenging behaviours in special schools; and urges the Minister in so doing to provide a safe school environment in which the human



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rights of everyone in the school community are respected and avoidable harm liability is not a concern.”

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 3 June 2025 and 4 June 2025.

6. School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill – Oral Briefing by Women's Support Network

The Committee noted a response from the Women's Regional Consortium response to Department of Education School Uniform Policy Consultation.

The following witness joined the meeting via teleconference at 2:17pm.

Ms Siobhan Harding, Policy Officer, Women's Support Network.

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

7. School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill – Oral Briefing by the Northern Ireland Resources Network

The Committee noted that representatives from Northern Ireland Resources Network are not available to attend the meeting but will provide a written submission.

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

The Committee noted that representatives from the EnvironmentalEadaí are not available to attend the meeting.



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9. School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill - Oral Briefing by Department of Education Officials

The following witnesses joined the meeting via teleconference at 2:52pm.

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

Mrs Shirley Sweeney, Head of School Uniform Policy Team, Department of Education

There was a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 3:26pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:36pm.

The Committee moved to closed session at 3:36pm.

10 School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill – Oral Briefing by Bill Office

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Bill office and a summary of other amendments drafted and provided by Committee members.

The following witness joined the meeting at 3:36pm.

Mr Stephen Orme, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office.

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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11 School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill - Informal Clause by Clause Deliberation

The Committee considered the clauses and proposed amendments to the Bill.

The Committee moved to public session at 5:19pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarification on the intent behind some of the clauses, further information on guidance and sharing potential themes for amendments to the Bill.

12 Correspondence

12.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

12.2 The Committee a response from the Executive Office regarding the Fair Start report and recommendations.

12.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Gambling with Lives seeking to brief the Committee on its Chapter One initiative.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Gambling with Lives to an informal meeting.

12.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Convener of the Scottish Education, Children and Young People Committee proposing that Committees across devolved bodies cooperate on areas of shared interest.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to engage with the Scottish Education, Children and Young People Committee on matters of common interest.

12.5 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health regarding refreshed Healthy Child and Healthy Future Framework.

12.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council NI on Sustainability of Funding for NI Water.

12.7 The Committee noted Correspondence from Unite the Union providing a briefing paper on Classroom Assistants working practices.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite EA to provide it with an oral briefing on measures to address the high rates of temporary engagement of Classroom Assistants in general and in particular to support the needs of SEN pupils.

12.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing an update on the 2025/26 application process for Free School Meals and School Uniform/Physical Education Clothing Allowances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Communities seeking an update on the introduction of auto enrolment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Bill Report for the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill.

12.9 The Committee noted the 41st Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

12.10 The Committee noted correspondence from Ulster University asking to meet with the Committee regarding a report on the implications, challenges, and opportunities presented by the integration of generative AI in schools in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on this matter.

12.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on outdoor equipment for schools.

12.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority on the School Uniforms Guidelines and Allowances Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Bill Report for the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill.

12.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the School Uniforms Guidelines and Allowances Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Bill Report for the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill.

12.14 The Committee noted an invitation from NAHT NI to an event in Parliament Buildings.



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13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

14. Any Other Business

Mr Martin raised concerns about language used by Mr Sheehan towards him.

Mr Sheehan apologised should he have offended Mr Martin.

The Chairperson reminded members that the Committee should conduct its business respectfully.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Tuesday 17 June 2025 at 9:15am in Room 29 Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
18 June 2025