



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

10 April 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Brooks MLA

Ms Cheryl Brownlee MLA

Mr Robbie Butler MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2:00 pm in public session.



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1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms Cara Hunter and Mr Danny Baker.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting held with Childminders NI on 19 March 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and Department of Health providing briefing papers provided by the group and seeking its position on the issues raised.

The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting held with JNC TUS joint secretaries in education on 9 April 2024.

The Committee noted that it would discuss a mini inquiry into the Delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools when considering its Forward Work Programme.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 20 March 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 7.



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7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index and summary note of correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding an urgent Written Ministerial Statement on the outcome of the Normalisation Pilot Process.

7.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this matter when considering its Forward Work Programme

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Committee's engagement with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

7.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing further information following its briefing on Policy and Children's Services.

7.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding funding cuts to Sentinus and similar organisations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Sentinus.

7.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the publication of the Healthy Happy Minds Pilot Post Project Evaluation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Education highlighting the success of the pilot and encouraging the rollout of the scheme in primary schools as a matter of urgency. The Committee noted that demand appeared to outstrip supply and recommended the need for a policy intervention in this area.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding St Malachys Youth Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to St Malachys Youth Centre.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy to the Chairperson of the Committee for Education inviting the



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Committee to take part in a concurrent meeting on cross departmental work on careers guidance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to accept the proposal and for Clerks and Chairs to liaise.

7.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education regarding Careers Education, Advice, Information and Guidance.

7.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy to the Speaker.

7.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly regarding use of the Plenary Chamber for a Joint Concurrent Meeting.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence from Young Enterprise NI seeking a meeting with it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Young Enterprise NI to an informal meeting with the Committee.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the History Teachers Association of Northern Ireland seeking a meeting with it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the History Teachers Association of Northern Ireland to an informal meeting with the Committee.

7.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Youth Assembly regarding a meeting with Committee members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee office will liaise with the Northern Ireland Assembly Youth Assembly to arrange a suitable date.

7.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Child Minders Association seeking a meeting to brief it on matters affecting the Childminding sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Northern Ireland Child Minders Association to brief it at a future meeting when it is receiving evidence on the early learning and childcare strategy.

7.17 The Committee noted correspondence from Diverse Youth NI regarding policy recommendations.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the recommendations to the Departments of Education, Economy, Health Communities and the Executive Office seeking their views.

7.18 The Committee noted correspondence from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

7.19 The Committee noted the Fifth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

7.20 The Committee noted the Sixth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

7.21 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for March 2024.

7:22 The Committee noted a revised index and summary note of correspondence.

7.23 The Committee noted correspondence from the History Teachers Association of Northern Ireland providing further information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to agenda item 5.

5. Department of Education Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy Update - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:11 pm:

Mrs Janis Scallon, Director of Inclusion, Department of Education

Ms Lorraine Brown, Head of Special Education – Early Years & Pupil Support, Department of Education

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

Ms Brenda Shearer, Head of Special Education and Inclusion Policy Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking:

- Data on the quantum of money has been used to address systemic issues as opposed to maintenance of a steady state iro SEN;
- The percentage of each school sector volunteering to place pupils with Special Educational Needs in response to the department's recent outreach exercise;
- Reasons why the approaches to support services from DE and DoH are being cultivated separately, elaborating on work done to reduce silos iro data sharing and confidentiality;
- Spims notwithstanding, the measures taken within special schools to increase capacity and address the complexity of needs presented;
- Clarity on the need being expressed as 1,000 additional SEN placements (as opposed to 1,000 children with SEN)
- The pedagogic or policy rationale for the presumption that all children go into mainstream education;
- An assessment of the extent of data sharing from and between health boards on children with SEN needs on their radar before they reach school;
- The operational date for rollout of integrated teams.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking information on its involvement with multidisciplinary and integrated teams to deliver services in schools.

The Committee adjourned at 3:35pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:46pm.

6. Education Authority – First Day Brief – Oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority and correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding the secondment of Mr Richard Pengelly to the post of Chief Executive Officer of the Education Authority

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:47 pm:



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Mr Dale Hanna, Director of Children & Young People's Services, Education Authority

Ms Cynthia Currie, Interim Director of Education, Education Authority

Mr Robbie McGreevy, Interim Director of Human Resources & Corporate Services, Education Authority

Ms Donna Allen, Interim Director of Operations & Estates, Education Authority

Mr Ivor Johnston, Temporary Director of Finance, Education Authority

The witnesses provided the Committee with an overview of the work of the Education Authority.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 4:09pm.

Ms Brownlee left the meeting at 4:29pm.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered an updated draft forward work programme and a draft timetable for an inquiry.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.



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12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 17 April 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:07 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education

17 April 2024