



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

20 March 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

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Neal Flanagan (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)



The meeting commenced at 1:59 pm in public session.

### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson referred members to a record of an informal meeting held with Gael Linn on Tuesday 12 March.

### **3. Matters Arising**

The Committee discussed follow-up actions arising from agenda items at its meeting of 13 March 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask budgetary questions suggested in the RalSe public finance briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to supply the briefing paper from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and request a reply to specific questions raised.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk would suggest several dates for a strategic planning session to which members would respond with their availability.

### **4. Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 13 March 2024.



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### 5. Ministerial Priorities – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department of Education and recent responses from the Minister to Committee correspondence.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:04 pm:

Mr Paul Givan, Minister of Education

Mrs Linsey Farrell, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Acting Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Ministerial priorities for the current mandate.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek further information on areas that were not comprehensively answered during the oral briefing.

### 6. Mental Health Champion – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Mental Health Champion.

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

Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Mental Health Champion

Dr Nicole Bond, Research Officer, Office of the Mental Health Champion

The witnesses provided the Committee with a presentation on the key issues and priorities of the Mental Health Champion.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to factor the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework into forward planning.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to emphasise the Mental Health Champion's desire that the cross-departmental working group on mental health be re-established.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 pm.

The meeting resumed at 4:36 pm with the following members present: Nick Mathison, Pat Sheehan, Mr Danny Baker, David Brooks, Cheryl Brownlee, Robbie Butler, Cara Hunter and Cathy Mason.

### **7. Introduction to Youth Engagement – Oral Briefing from Panel of Representatives**

The Committee noted briefing papers from Diverse Youth NI, the NICCY Youth Panel, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, Northern Ireland Youth Forum and the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:37 pm:

Ms Eimear Crozier, Youth Representative, NI Youth Forum

Ms Ellen Taylor, President, Secondary Students' Union for Northern Ireland

Ms Mia Murray, Member, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Ms Inioluwa Olaosebikan, Youth Representative, Diverse Youth NI

Ms Alex Deane, Youth Representative, NICCY Youth Panel

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on their key issues and priorities.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Cara Hunter left the meeting at 5:12 pm.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to bring the recommendations of Diverse Youth NI to the attention of the Department of Education and, given that they also relate to further education, to the Committee for the Economy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to send the Hansard reports of the meeting sessions to the Department and to relevant Statutory Committees.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing on The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

### **8. The Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (NI) 2024**

The Committee noted the Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (NI) 2024 and Second Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Education has considered the Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

### **9. Correspondence**

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

9.2 and 9.3 The Committee considered a response from the NIO and Department in relation to Fresh Start funding for shared and integrated education capital projects.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the responses to the Principals of Millennium Integrated Primary School and Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.

9.7 The Committee considered a response from the Department in relation to introducing a statutory gambling education policy for schools.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the response to the All-Party Group on Gambling Related Harm.

9.8 The Committee considered correspondence from individuals raising concerns about the dangers still posed by Covid-19 and its transmission in school environments.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to raise air quality monitoring in schools at briefings with the Education Authority scheduled after recess.

9.12 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual raising concerns about post-primary transfer placements and admissions criteria set out by the board of governors in South and East Belfast.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department asking what reassurance of accountability can be offered to parents in the privately managed transfer test system

9.16 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual sharing their experience on the challenges that young people with neurological complications due to long Covid face within the education system.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department seeking a response to the issues raised; and to reply the individual conveying Committee support, and to acknowledge their lived experience.

9.20 The Committee considered correspondence from the Integrated Education Fund seeking a meeting with the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to extend an invitation to the IEF to brief members at a future meeting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to dispose of correspondence not noted above per the summary notes in the meeting pack.

## 10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered an updated draft forward work programme.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to the Clerk on availability for a strategic planning session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to factor a briefing from the Integrated Education Fund into its schedule.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the forward work programme, as amended.

### **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 10 April 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education  
10 April 2024**