Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

4 November 2026

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
Mr Jon Burrows MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

In attendance:
Ms Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)
Mr Stephen Orme (Assembly Clerk) (Item 8 only)

Mr Jonathan Redpath (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk) (Item 8 only)

Present via teleconference facilities:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Julie Middleton MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.08pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies received.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson referred members to a closed meeting prior to the Committee meeting to consider legal advice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education regarding the withdrawal of Department of Education Officials from Committee attendance.

Mr Brooks stated that he was not in agreement with the content of the letter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education seeking an organisational chart providing named officials for each area of departmental business.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to formally progress the serving of a section 44 notice seeking the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education's attendance at Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue formal invitations to the School Inspections Bill team and the team responsible for SEN regulations reminding them of the section 44 powers of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education inviting him to provide it with an oral briefing.

The Committee discussed the plenary debate on its motion in relation to the report on its inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to the Minister of Education seeking his position on recommendation 24 of the inquiry.

3. Declaration of Interest

Mrs Middleton made a declaration of interest that she previously worked as a Religious Education teacher.

Ms Hunter made a declaration of interest that her relative attended one of the schools briefing the Committee at the meeting.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted that at its meeting on 21 October it did not have a decision-making quorum. The Committee discussed follow-up actions for briefing taken at that meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and Education Authority seeking information on emergency communications and protocols for extreme weather and security emergencies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Education Authority sharing the report of its Socioeconomic Deprivation and Educational Underachievement stakeholder event and seeking their response to the issues raised.

The Committee noted that the Consideration Stage of the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill would take place in the Assembly next week.

Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 14 October 2026 and 21 October 2026.

6. Governance, Accountability, Transparency and the Northern Ireland Civil Service policy on the use of Social Media - Oral Briefing by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.23pm

Ms Jayne Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Ms Jill Minne, Deputy Secretary of People and Organisational Development, Department of Finance

The official briefed the Committee on scheduling the Governance, Accountability, Transparency and the Northern Ireland Civil Service policy on the use of Social Media

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee moved to closed session at 3:34pm

Officials briefed the Committee on the HR review.

Agreed: The Committee returned to public session at 3:52pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to clearly establish what HOCs advises can and cannot be shared on officials social media accounts without jeopardising impartiality, and how such limits apply to members of the Civil Service and Senior Civil Service respectively.

7. Religious Education – Oral briefing

The following witness joined the meeting at 3:53pm

Professor Noel Purdy, Chair, Review of the RE Core Syllabus

Ms Joyce Logue, Vice-Chair, Review of the RE Core Syllabus

Mr Feargal Friel, Principal, Hollybush Primary School, Derry/Londonderry

Mr Francine Walls, Head of Religious Studies, St Patrick's College, Maghera

Mr Warren Brown, Head of Religious Studies, Banbridge Academy, Department of Finance

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Review of the RE Core Syllabus

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on the regulation-making process in relation to the new curriculum.

Committee adjourned 4:38pm.

Committee resumed 4:43pm.

8. Education Inspections Bill – Oral briefing

The following witness joined the meeting at 4.43pm

Dr James Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast

The witness briefed the Committee on his submission regarding the Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee moved to closed session at 5:01pm

The Committee was briefed by Assembly Bill Office officials on the Education Inspections Bill

Agreed: The Committee returned to public session at 5:06pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on the timescale for drafting amendments to the Bill and sharing these with the Committee

Northern Ireland Assembly

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing dates that meetings of the Joint Health and Education Oversight Group have taken place since December 2025 and dates of future meetings.

9.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the independent Review of Baseline School Funding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking it to publish the report and provide the Committee with a copy of this.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding Northern Ireland Maths Teachers Association regarding the November examination series.

9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding historical safeguarding issues within a school setting.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to share the response with the individual who raised this matter with it.

9.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to concerns raised by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Northern Ireland in relation to the Behaviour in Schools Review Call for Evidence.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to share the response with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Northern Ireland.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the impact of the Education Inspections Bill on ETI's capacity, resources, training and workload.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to papers for the Education Inspections Bill.

9.8 The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department of Education on the funding rates for non-statutory pre-school providers participating in the Pre-School Education Programme.

9.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on collective worship in schools.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Energy Costs in Schools.

9.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Adverse Childhood Experiences Report.

9.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the teaching of modern languages.

9.13 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the proposed Technology and Design curriculum framework.

9.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS), alternative educational provision and compliance with Article 86 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the reply with the EBSNA Parent Support Group

9.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the ITE Bursary scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the reply with the correspondent who raised this matter with it.

9.16 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the status of the minor works list and funding for Richhill Football Club.

9.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on the Current Budget Position 2026-2027.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking detail on proposed savings and how these will be delivered.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity on its engagement with the Department on savings plans.

9.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing its Business Plan 2026-27 Quarter 2 (mid-year) Report,

9.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing the Department of Education Annual Report and Accounts For the year ended 31 March 2026.

9.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing an urgent Written Ministerial Statement addressing criticism of Curriculum 2028.

9.21 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing details of the Education and Training (Post Compulsory School Age) Bill.

9.22 The Committee noted a submission from GTC NI on the Education Inspections Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the submission to papers for the Education Inspections Bill.

9.23 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Education Inspections Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to papers for the Education Inspections Bill.

9.24 The Committee noted a submission from SERC on the Education Inspections Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the submission to papers for the Education Inspections Bill.

9.25 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding the Joint Consultative Forum.

9.26 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland War Memorial Museum regarding the TransformED curriculum redesign.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education seeking a response to the issues raised.

9.27 The Committee noted correspondence from Fingerprint Learning seeking to brief it in relation to TransformEd and Curriculum 2028.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with Fingerprint Learning.

9.28 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People providing their Rights Without Borders research report providing experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee children and young people in Northern Ireland.

9.29 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority providing solar panels on school roofs to lower overhead costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education on this matter.

9.30 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority providing an update on the position regarding Oakwood School and Assessment Centre.

9.31 The Committee noted a report from Visual Artists Ireland on the role of the arts in the future of Northern Ireland.

9.32 The Committee noted correspondence from ARK on Children's Perspectives on SEAG Test.

9.33 The Committee noted an invitation from Gael Linn to the Scoil Spreagtha Celebration.

9.34 The Committee noted a SIBNI Investing Activity Report for October 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek analysis of the report from Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe).

9.35 The Committee noted correspondence on Intergenerational Trauma and Mental Health.

9.36 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS), alternative educational provision and compliance with Article 86 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the reply with the EBSNA Parent Support Group

9.37 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on Enhanced Support Model and SEN Statements.

9.38 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People to an event on Research on Childrens Experiences of Missed Education.

9.39 The Committee noted correspondence providing data related to the UCAS - October Deadline.

9.40 The Committee noted a response from the Committee for Finance regarding Budget briefings

9.41 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, seeking views on Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill

Agreed: The Committee agreed a nil return.

9.42 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy seeking views on the Credit Unions (Amendment) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a nil return.

9.43 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing information on the Outturn and Forecast Outturn for September 2026.

9.44 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual to the Minister of Education regarding the delivery of school capital projects and the loss of specialist expertise.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking for a copy of its response to the correspondent.

9.45 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding referral processes and waiting times for children with SEND.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health asking it to communicate directly with the individual.

9.46 The Committee noted correspondence regarding a school disputes involving an individual.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the correspondent signposting them to NIPSO for assistance.

9.47 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual seeking a copy of Committee correspondence in relation to the ITE bursary scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the correspondent.

9.48 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual proposing the inclusion of menstrual health disorders and gynaecological conditions within the ongoing TransformEd curriculum review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education supporting the proposal.

9.49 The Committee noted correspondence relating to a freedom of information request.

9.50 The Committee noted a briefing paper from Dr Sharon McMurray on Phonics Guidance.

9.51 The Committee noted an invitation to a panel discussion at the launch of two new research reports commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund.

9.52 The Committee noted a freedom of information request relating to the Committee's scrutiny of academic selection.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered and agreed its forward work programme.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Northern Ireland Assembly

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 November 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.23pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
11 November 2026