



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 8 July 2020

Meeting Location: Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Apologies:

Mr William Humphrey MLA

In Attendance:

Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

In Attendance by Video Conference:

Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)



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Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)
Ms Louise Close (Assembly Engagement Manager) Item 6 only

The meeting commenced at 9:01AM in open session

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 1 July 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Emotional Health and Mental Well-being Framework – National Children's Bureau – oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and a copy of its scoping report on emotional health and well-being.

Witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:02am.

Ms Celine McStravick, Director, National Children's Bureau (Northern Ireland)

Ms Claire Dorris, Senior Research and Policy Analyst, National Children's Bureau (Northern Ireland)

Witnesses briefed the Committee on the NCB scoping report.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on its progress in bringing forward the Emotional Health and Mental Well-being Framework and asking the Department to explain the linkage with the Health and Social Care Board Framework.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department asking whether, as part of the Framework, it is considering:

- the development of a reportable well-being measure for schools; and
- the adoption of screening for emotional issues at Early Years in line with the findings of the related pilot study for the Early Intervention Transformation Programme.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity as to how the Framework is to:

- embed the Safeguarding Board's trauma informed culture programme in schools;
- support parents and voluntary and other groups to provide emotional well-being support to children; and
- ensure that the key role of physical activity in supporting well-being is set-out.

Agreed: Finally, the Committee agreed to write to the Department asking it to explain how it has co-operated with other Executive departments in responding to the Assembly motion of 11 October 2016 which recommended that school children be encouraged to live a healthier lifestyle and that an educational awareness and physical education programme be provided in schools in order to benefit the long-term health of our children.

Proceedings moved into closed session at 10:42am

6. Post-Primary Transfer – On-line Survey

The Committee discussed suggested amendments and additions to the draft on-line survey on post-primary transfer

Agreed: The Committee agreed a number of amendments to the wording of the on-line post-primary survey and that it was content with the precautions which were to be adopted in order to limit multiple deceptive completions.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to launch the survey as amended and promote it to parents and guardians initially and to teachers, children and young people in August/September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to write to the teaching unions, General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland and the Department of Education to ask if these organisations will circulate the survey in August/September to teachers.

Proceedings returned to open session at 11:27am.

2. Covid-19 – Minister for Education– oral briefing

The Committee noted an updated covid-19 situation report (dated 3 July 2020) from the Department of Education.

The Committee also noted:

- responses from the Department of Education on holiday hunger, the Restart Budget and childcare Restart issues;
- a copy of a renewal notice relating to the Coronavirus Act;
- responses from Our Lady's and St Patrick's Knock, Coleraine Grammar School and Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School on post primary transfer;
- correspondence from a parent about extending Covid-19 testing to children under 5 years' old;
- a copy of correspondence to the Minister from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in Northern Ireland on the impact of Covid-19 on district councils; and
- a report from Pivotal NI on the impact of Covid-19 on the economy.

The Minister and officials joined the meeting by video conference at 11:29am.

Mr Peter Weir, Minister for Education

Mr Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

The Minister and officials briefed the Committee on covid-19 matters.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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Mr Newton left the meeting at 12:18pm.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the revised covid-19 correspondence update was accurate and complete.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Omagh Learning Community (OLC) about improved access to remote devices and on-line learning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department asking it to respond directly to OLC and to copy its response to the Committee.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Unite on issues affecting childminders.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department asking it to respond directly to Unite and to copy its response to the Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence from Parentkind providing a report on parents' experience of home schooling.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Parentkind asking it to survey its members on their experience of school Restart and to share its findings in the autumn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the timeline for the commencement of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

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

- a timeline for the issuing of Covid-19 guidance to the youth sector;
- a timeline for the issuing of Covid-19 guidance to bus and taxi operators in respect of school transport;
- clarification regarding possible Barnett consequentials for education in Northern Ireland following recent HM Government spending announcements, including particularly for supporting schools and youth groups to provide physical education and activity for children and young people;
- details of the Special Schools' summer schemes including activities which are to be provided and the schools which are to be involved; and
- further clarification on the New School Day guidance and the issue of "seclusion" for children showing Covid-19 symptoms.

8. Correspondence



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8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee considered a response from the Department of Education on children in transition with statements of Special Educational Needs who require school places.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a further update on children in transition with statements of Special Educational Needs who require school places.

8.3 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on the reported reduction in youth facilities from 2004 to 2017.

8.4 The Committee noted the Strategic Investment Board Investing Activity Report, for June 2020.

8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on its progress against commitments and actions contained in the DE 2019/20 Business Plan.

8.6 The Committee noted the 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts for Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

8.7 The Committee noted the 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts for the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

8.8 The Committee noted the 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts for the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

8.9 The Committee noted an index of tabled correspondence.

8.10 The Committee noted responses from the Department of Education on the terms of reference and membership of the Special Educational Needs steering group and Education Authority governance.

8.11 The Committee considered a response from the chairperson of the Education Authority Board to the Committee's previous request for her to provide oral evidence on Special Educational Needs statementing at the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority Board chairperson inviting her to provide oral evidence at the Committee's meeting of 20 August 2020.



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8.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department on the payment of performance related pay in 2018-19 to directors of the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department on the subject of performance related pay and to also seek clarity in respect of payments to the then chief executive of the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority in respect of directors' performance related pay in 2019-20.

8.13 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Special Educational Needs provision in North Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the correspondents who had initiated the enquiry.

8.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in respect of an oral briefing to the Committee in August.

The Committee also noted previous correspondence from CCEA regarding examination payments to invigilators, markers and moderators.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether payments will be made to invigilators, markers and moderators.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA seeking clarity as to whether payments will be made to invigilators, markers and moderators.

8.15 The Committee noted the 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts for CCEA.

8.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding a review of Arm's Length Bodies.

9. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed a revised forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Healthy Kidz to provide an informal briefing in the autumn.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.



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11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 20 August 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 10:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:17pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
18 August 2020