



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**

### **Minutes of Proceedings**

Tuesday 23 March 2021

Video Conference

#### **Present by Video Conference:**

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA  
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA  
Mr Robbie Butler MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

#### **Apologies:**

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

#### **In Attendance:**

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Mr Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2:35pm in public session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies recorded as above.

#### **2. Minister for Education - Oral briefing on school restart and related issues**

The Committee noted:

- The Minister's Oral Statement to the Ad Hoc Committee on COVID-19 regarding Restart of Schools;
- A response from the Department of Education on a proposed summer programme;
- A response from the Department of Education on vaccination and testing;
- Correspondence from a school principal regarding concerns about sport in schools;
- Correspondence about face mask requirements; and

- A response from the Department of Education on about digital poverty.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 2:36pm:

Mr Peter Weir, Minister of Education, Department of Education

Mr Ricky Irwin, Director, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Department of Education

Mrs Karen McCullough, Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards Director, Department of Education

Mr James Hutchinson, Director of Education Restart, Department of Education

Mr Peter Hutchinson, Head of the Independent Review/Transformation, Department of Education.

The Minister and officials briefed the Committee on school restart and related issues.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Lyttle left the meeting at 2:57pm due to connection failure.*

*Mr Sheehan assumed the role of Chairperson at 2:57pm.*

*Mr Lyttle rejoined the meeting and resumed the role of Chairperson at 2:59pm.*

*Ms Brogan left the meeting at 3:46pm.*

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and officials for the briefing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking:

- what progress has been made so far on gauging the level of support for opening schools and educational establishments for a summer scheme during July and August and what progress has been made to establish partnerships among local sports clubs and community groups to help provide any summer schemes;
- If the Minister feels that appropriate funding will be available to roll out any summer programmes or summer schemes, and will adequate testing and vaccination be in place throughout any schemes that proceed; and
- For an update on legislation on Flexible School Starting age.

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

- Information on bids the Department has made for funding emotional health and wellbeing;
- An update on when further Engage funding would be allocated and issued to schools;
- An update on contingency planning for next year's transfer tests; and
- Information on the Minister's availability for future oral briefings.

### **3. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

### **4. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 March 2021 by video conference at 9:30am.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4:08pm*

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA  
Chairperson, Committee for Education  
14 April 2021**