



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**

### **Minutes of Proceedings**

WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 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 William Humphrey MBE MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA  
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:** Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 9:36am in public session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

None.

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

The Chairperson welcomed the new Deputy Chairperson Mr Pat Sheehan MLA to the Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister for Education had agreed to attend its next meeting on 10 February 2021.

The Committee discussed issues to be discussed with the Minister at its next meeting.

The Chairperson extended the Committee's condolences to the family and friends of Colin Davis OBE former principal of Tor Bank Special School on his passing.

*Mr Humphrey joined the meeting at 9:45am.*

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 27 January 2021.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. Pupil Well-being - Interim NI Mental Health Champion - Oral Briefing**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:47am:

Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Interim NI Mental Health Champion, Mental Health Champion

Mr Peter Cash, Senior Policy Officer, Mental Health Champion

The witnesses briefed the Committee on pupil well-being.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

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

- conveying the witnesses' view that school restart should focus on mental health before academic recovery;
- supporting proposals for a summer programme to be developed focusing on mental health, play, creativity, social mixing and physical wellbeing before identifying priorities for catch-up at school;
- proposing that this might usefully be taken forward via a funded partnership model including community and voluntary and sports governing bodies;
- asking if any scoping work had been done on such a proposal, and to what extent existing programmes might overlap with the proposal; and
- seeking an update on the structure and resources available for the recharge programme and how the Department has interacted with teachers and young people in the development of the programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Interim Mental Health Champion asking her to provide a briefing paper outlining proposals for a summer programme and the cross-departmental co-operation required to deliver this. The Committee also agreed to share this paper with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health and the Minister for Communities.

### **6. Covid-19 Vulnerable Children Plan – Department of Education/ Department of Health Briefing**

The Committee noted a briefing paper providing an update on the Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 11:33 am:

Mr Ricky Irwin, Director of Inclusion and Well Being, Department of Education

Ms Brenda Shearer, Head of Special Education Team, Department of Education

Ms Shauna Collinson, Interim Assistant Director of Pupil Inclusion, Wellbeing and Protection, Education Authority

Ms Eilís McDaniel, Director of Childcare and Family Policy, Department of Health

Mr Maurice Leeson, Children's Services Planning Professional, Health & Social Care Board.

The officials provided the Committee with an update on the Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Humphrey left the meeting 12:12pm*

*Mr Bradley left the meeting 12:53pm*

The Chairperson thanked witnesses for the briefing.

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

- To request a summary of the benchmarking of the plan against other jurisdictions and how its delivery differed and compared with them;
- To request a summary of the decisions which were made differently due to learning in the first lockdown;
- Supporting the work to prioritise school staff in the vaccination programme and seeking clarity on its implementation for special school staff as the programme develops;
- Seeking information on the current extent of the digital equipment criteria and any plans to widen the criteria to make more children eligible;
- Enquiring whether DE plans to implement an engage strategy for nursery schools; and
- With concern, seeking some contextual information on the increase in the number of looked after children due to the pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Education authority seeking an update on the work of the START and FLARE programmes.

## **7. Correspondence**

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education on issues raised by Belfast Youth Forum on Relationship and Sexuality Education.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response to Belfast Youth Forum seeking its views.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider a Committee motion on Relationship and Sexuality Education at a future meeting.

7.3 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education providing information on the numbers of church representatives and parent governors on Boards of Governors in respect of controlled and Catholic maintained schools.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response to the correspondent who raised this issue with it.

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education Informing it of his intention to make a statement to the Assembly on Alternative Awarding Arrangements for CCEA Qualifications in Summer 2021.

7.5 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding COVID 19 issues.

*Mr Butler left the meeting 1:03pm.*

7.6 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding concerns about the impact of exam cancellations on invigilators.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on this matter.

7.7 The Committee noted correspondence from individuals concerned about the Minister's decision to remove WJEC qualifications from the approved list available to NI learners.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the correspondents indicating that it has written to the Minister for Education on this matter.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office providing a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Executive Committee oversight of EU Exit Matters.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority indicating that consultations on area based planning for special and mainstream schools have been extended to 12 April 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to postpone planned briefings on these consultations. The Committee agreed to invite witnesses to address restraint and seclusion on 24 February.

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as amended.

## **9. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

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

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 10 February 2021 by video conference at 9:00 am.

*The meeting was adjourned at 1:13 pm.*

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**10 February 2020**