



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 17 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 Justin McNulty MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Apologies: Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

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 9:32 am in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

Ms Brogan joined the meeting at 9:33 am.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson alerted Members to the Minister's announcement of legislation on flexible school starting ages.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Department to provide it with an oral briefing on plans for flexible school starting ages.

The Chairperson expressed concern about the timescale for vaccinations for Special School staff.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking urgent clarification of which staff would be included, the timescale for vaccinations and asking what the rationale is for only vaccinating some staff.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 10 February 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Blues Programme and emotional health and well-being framework - Action for Children – Oral briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Action for Children.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:35 am:

Ms Lorna Ballard, National Director, Action for Children

Ms Sheena McMullan, Campaigns, Advocacy and Policy Advisor Northern Ireland, Action for Children

Ms Emma O'Neill, Service Co-ordinator - Blues Programme, Action for Children

Ms Rhonda Murphy, Service Co-ordinator - Blues Programme, Action for Children

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Action for Children's Blues Programme and on the emotional health and well-being framework.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey made declarations of interest as a governor of Edenbrooke Primary School and Belfast Model School for Girls, and as a member of the Scout Association.

The Chairperson thanked witnesses for the briefing.

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

- Encouraging the use of a proportion of covid-19 funding for universal programmes for resilience and mental health, prioritising those organisations that are already delivering these services successfully and providing security of funding for such programmes;
- Suggesting that a proportion of confidence and supply money be a) ring-fenced for community and voluntary organisations to deliver universal mental health programmes; and b) co-ordinated through an integrated strategy to better collaborate with community and voluntary organisations and include school voices in their development;
- Proposing that the Department make ambitious bids for covid-19 funding now in preparation for these support needs as school restart approaches;
- Indicating a need for a cross-departmental system to support health and wellbeing recovery to enable curriculum recovery;
- Commending the success of Action for Children with the Blues programme and suggesting that the Department meet with Action for Children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education asking how the Children and Young People's Strategy compared to the Executive's Recovery Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a briefing with the Children's Commissioner.

6. Curriculum Sports Programme - Department of Education briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Department of Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 11:08 am:

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

Mr Sam Dempster, Head of Curriculum and Assessment Team, Department of Education

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Head of School Improvement, Department of Education

Ms Madeline Mason, Physical Education Specialist Inspector, Education and Training Inspectorate.

The officials provided the Committee with an update on the Curriculum Sports Programme.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey made a declaration of interest as Vice-President of Woodvale Cricket Club.

The Chairperson thanked witnesses for the briefing.

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

- expressing the Committee's concern that the ETI review of Physical Education is long overdue and deploring the report that only 5% of primary and 8% of post-primary pupils pre-lockdown were getting the recommended two hours of curricular PE each week and that this continues a trend of some years;
- asking why the current Sports Programme that is helping deliver the core PE curriculum is a reduced version of the former Curriculum Sports Programme and is only rolled out to 50% of schools;
- Given the very delayed budget process, seeking that urgent confirmation of funding for the Sports Programme 2021/22 be made, not least to reassure coaches that their jobs will be funded;
- expressing concern that girls are not routinely involved in co-creation of their PE programme;
- seeking an assessment of the capacity of other sporting bodies, such as Ulster rugby and cricket, to also deliver fundamental movement training in the sports programme; and whether these sports might be better represented in PE;
- and asking for an update on opportunities for Continuous Professional development for teachers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council recognising the success of its Active Girls Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Health noting that children in Northern Ireland are less likely to reach the required levels of physical activity than those in other UK jurisdictions and asking what the implications of this are for children's health.

7. Wellbeing– Healthy Kidz briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Healthy Kidz.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 12:31 am:

Mr Kevin Creery, Healthy Kidz

Mr Paul Carvill, Healthy Kidz

Mr Chris Cousens, Healthy Kidz

Mr Brendan McConaghy, Organisational Development and Change Manager,
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the work of Healthy Kidz.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 12:51 pm.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 1:00 pm

Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 1:01 pm

The Chairperson thanked witnesses for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Healthy Kidz to congratulate them on their work and arrange an informal briefing to provide Members with a run-through of the Healthy kidz curriculum and app.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted an updated copy of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People's 'Still Waiting' Monitoring Report 2021.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence regarding concerns about funding for Grant maintained integrated schools by the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority regarding these concerns.

8.4 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education regarding steps being taken to plan for the post-primary curriculum and address learning lost in 2021/2022.

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

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the Minister on concerns about advice provided in a Public Health Agency infographic.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from Employers for Childcare providing a briefing on the work of the All-Party Group on Early Years and Childcare.

8.7 The Committee noted a response from the Minister on the decision to disallow WJEC Qualifications.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the Minister's statement that equivalent qualifications for all WJEC qualifications are available from other examination Boards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the original correspondents and seeking their views on it.

8.8 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Parental Engagement software for schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority asking why it had taken until now for a procurement exercise to be arranged for such software.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to BlendED NI and Goliath.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department:

- seeking its response to the recently published Ulster University Unesco Education Centre report on Administrative Structures in the NI Education System.
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- Seeking its response to concerns that some children were having to complete remote learning using mobile phones due to lack of suitable equipment.

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 24 February 2021 by video conference at 9:30 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:19 pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
24 February 2020