



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2020

Video Conference and Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video Conference:

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

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9:05am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Extension of Free School Meal Payments

The Chairperson reminded Members of the recent Department of Education announcement that Free School Meals payments would be made during every school holiday until Easter 2022. The Committee warmly welcomed this development. Some Members recorded their congratulations to the Minister. A Member expressed concerns in respect of the absence of clarity relating to end of year examination contingencies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity as to why payments are to be made to the families of eligible children rather

than the provision of food parcels or free school meal alternatives in-line with recent practice and seeking assurance that the associated and necessary funding had been secured for 2021-22.

2.2 Homeless Period Belfast

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that Members had met informally with the Homeless Period Belfast and Councillor Glenn Finlay on Tuesday 24 November 2020 in order to discuss period poverty in schools. The Chairperson advised that a note of proceedings had been circulated.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the relevant pilot undertaken in North Belfast schools and the scoping work on free period product provision in all schools and indicating the Committee's support for the provision of free period products in all of Northern Ireland schools.

2.3 Ulster University: Segregation in Pre-Schools

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Ulster University had published a report into segregation in pre-schools suggesting that 70% of pre-schools are highly segregated and 47% are entirely segregated.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking for its response to the report and seeking clarity as to how it is to address the levels of reported segregation in pre-schools.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 18 November 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Independent Review of Integrated Education - Report Author – Oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper on the Independent Review of Integrated Education.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 9:11am:

Colm Cavanagh, Co-Author, Independent Review of Integrated Education

The witness provided a briefing on the report on the Review of Integrated Education.

Mr Butler joined the meeting at 9:22am.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Bradley joined the meeting at 9:37am.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for the briefing.

6. Update on the Implementation of the Independent Review of Integrated Education - Department of Education – Oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Education.

The following officials joined the meeting by video conference at 10:28am:

Alison Chambers, Director of Promoting Collaboration and Tackling Disadvantage, Department of Education;

Shirley Sweeney, Head of Irish Medium and Integrated Education Team, Department of Education; and

David Gibson, Irish Medium and Integrated Education Team, Department of Education.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department's implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Review of Integrated Education.

Mr Humphrey joined the meeting at 10:30am.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Mullan left the meeting at 11:31am.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) seeking clarity on its policy in respect of the use of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO) exemption for the recruitment and employment of teachers in Catholic Maintained post-primary schools.

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

- confirmation when the recommendations from the independent report are included in the terms of reference of the independent review of education;
- information on the level of over-subscription and over-provision in all schools on a school-by-school basis;
- confirmation as to whether the uptake of Integrated school places and the appetite for Integrated education is lower West of the Bann compared to the rest of Northern Ireland.
- an explanation as to why the Department of Education believed that the report authors were independent;
- clarity as to why the recommendation relating to differential reconciliation and tolerance outcomes by school sector is not to be taken forward;
- sight of the draft ethos document for jointly managed church schools;
- clarity on those recommendations which have in fact been actioned as opposed to those which are merely in progress; and
- clarity as to the status of super mixed schools e.g. Methodist College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing on key related definitions in respect of Integrated schools and super mixed schools etc..

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority indicating that limited planning has taken place in respect of professional development designed to support the development of Learning Support Centres in mainstream schools.

7.3 The Committee noted a response from the Minister on lockdown and access to support for vulnerable children.

7.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the review of suspension and expulsion undertaken in 2004.

7.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education indicating that preference and admissions information in respect of post-primary transfer is to be published.

7.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Economy advising that work on the Transition of Young People into Careers 14-19 project has recommenced.

7.7 The Committee noted a copy of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Annual Scheme Statements 2019-20.

7.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing information on October Monitoring and special school capital project plans. The Committee also noted that the response provided clarification regarding a reported Ministerial direction on Strule.

7.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education confirming that the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland currently lacks the correct legislative authority to undertake robust investigations into allegations of misconduct or to provide any sanction including de-registration of teachers and that the Department is working to bring forward the necessary amendments to primary legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating its concerns; seeking clarity as to how this situation arose and the consequences for teachers who require de-registration; and seeking an explanation as to why the Committee was not previously informed.

7.10 The Committee noted a response from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) on contingency arrangements for examinations and curriculum delivery.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking for details of the contingencies and options for end of year examinations that CCEA has provided in its advice to the Minister including consideration of moderated centre assessed grades.

7.11 The Committee noted a call for evidence in relation to the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill from the Committee for Communities.

7.12 The Committee noted correspondence from pupils expressing concerns about changes to GCSE English and English Literature examinations.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence from Rainey Endowed School expressing concerns regarding current proposals for GCSEs and A-level examinations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA seeking its comments on the issues raised by Rainey Endowed School regarding GCSEs and A-level examinations.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent seeking support for planned schools closures prior to Christmas.

7.15 The Committee noted correspondence from Action for Children providing information on its Blues Programme and seeking to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Action for Children to provide it with an oral briefing on its Blues Programme and its relevance to the Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework.

7.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Board of Governors of Fleming Fulton School regarding concerns about Area Planning.

7.17 The Committee noted correspondence forwarded by the Committee for Health about post-primary transfer.

7.18 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent about Post-Primary Transfer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on whether the Transfer Tutor App is supported or recommended by the Department, and whether schools can use Engage Programme money for this purpose.

7.19 The Committee considered a response from the Minister for Education on covid-19 examination guidance provided to schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking why guidance was issued with such short notice, seeking clarity as to whether the guidance applies to all public examinations and post-primary transfer tests, and seeing clarity regarding where responsibility will lie if so-called super centres are used to host the post-primary transfer tests.

8. Forward Work Programme

Mr Humphrey made a Declaration of Interest that he is President of the West Belfast District Scout Council.

Members noted the impact of the pandemic on volunteer uniformed organisations particularly in respect of employment issues at activity centres during the winter months.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Youth Work Alliance, Uniform Hub and the Youth Network Northern Ireland to brief it on related issues in the New Year.

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

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 2 December 2020 in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:59am.

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
2 December 2020**