



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

Room 29 and Video Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video Conference:
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly 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 9:31am in open session

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Changing Covid-19 Advice to Schools

The Chairperson noted with concern press reports in respect of the provision of inconsistent guidance to schools on the treatment of children testing positive for Covid-19.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chief Medical Officer regarding the Public Health Agency's support for schools where positive Covid-19 tests have been recorded.

2.2 Post Primary Transfer

The Chairperson noted with concern that the Department had appeared to advise the Committee that it had not yet determined whether schools which had elected to temporarily set aside post-primary transfer (in June and July of this year) would be able to do so without a Development Proposal. The Chairperson reminded Members that Departmental officials had appeared to indicate that legislation may be required in order to allow these schools to set aside post-primary transfer temporarily.

Mr Humphrey joined the meeting at 9:35am.

Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 9:36am

2.3 School Starting Age Flexibility

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Minister had recently indicated that he had asked officials to revisit and update work on school starting age flexibility and that he was not in a position to set out how he intended to proceed in terms of legislation or timing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the National Education Union seeking its views on school starting age flexibility.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Research to update its research paper on school starting age flexibility.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 23 September 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Expert Panel on Underachievement and Socio-Economic Deprivation – Terms of Reference – oral briefing

The following witnesses joined by video conference at 9:36am:

Dr Noel Purdy, Director of Research and Scholarship, Stranmillis University College, chairperson of the Expert Panel on Underachievement

Ms Mary Montgomery, Principal Belfast Boys' Model School, member of the Expert Panel on Underachievement

Ms Kathleen O'Hare, Retired Principal, Hazelwood Integrated College and former Principal of St Cecilia's College, member of the Expert Panel on Underachievement

Ms Joyce Logue, Principal Longtower Primary School Derry/Londonderry, member of the Expert Panel on Underachievement

Mr Jackie Redpath, Chief Executive, Greater Shankill Partnership, member of the Expert Panel on Underachievement

Witnesses briefed the Committee on the Terms of Reference for the panel.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Mullan made a declaration of interest that she is a former pupil of St. Cecilia's College.

Mr Humphrey made a declaration of interest that he is a former pupil of the Belfast Boys' Model School.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Mr Newton left the meeting at 10:47am.

Members highlighted concerns in respect of the apparent absence of co-design in the development of the Terms of Reference for the Expert Panel.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Expert Panel and invite it to return to the Committee when the interim report is complete.

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

- clarification on the appointment process for the Expert Panel and the development of the Terms of Reference;
- an update on the Strategy for Tackling Educational Disadvantage;
- an update on the revised Extended Schools programme; and
- information on the effectiveness of the Full Service Schools programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Research to provide information on students with very low GCSE attainment in terms of their Free School Meal Entitlement status, demographic background, educational setting and Special Educational Needs (SEN) status.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Research to produce a paper on Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) and other jurisdictions.

6. Education Authority – Special Educational Needs Update – oral briefing

The Committee noted an Education Authority update paper on statutory assessments and a briefing paper on the SEN and Disability Strategic Development Programme.

Proceedings were suspended at 10:53am.

Proceedings resumed at 10:57am with Mr Lyttle, Ms Mullan, Mr Butler and Mr Newton present in Room 29, and Mr Bradley, Mr Humphrey, Ms Kelly, Mr McCrossan and Mr McNulty present by videoconference.

Officials joined the meeting by videoconference at 10:57am.

Ms Sara Long, Chief Executive, Education Authority

Ms Una Turbitt, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority

Ms Cynthia Currie, Interim Assistant Director, Special Education Statutory Operations and Pupil Support Services, Education Authority

Officials briefed the Committee on the EA's delivery of SEN provision.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to suggest that the Education Authority considers the importance of measuring cultural change and advised of the overarching importance of culture when compared to strategy (as argued by Drucker) and the critical significance that this will have in the progression of the programme of SEN improvement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority EA seeking;

- the current number of open statements and the percentage completed outside of the 26 week statutory limit; and
- information on the projected demand for SEN provision and statements for September 2021 and the likely level of open statements outside of the statutory period at that time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an update on the Early Years SEN Framework consultation and the provision of related oral evidence at its meeting on 4 November 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Special Schools Strategic Leadership Group seeking its views on EA's efforts to improve statementing and the delivery of SEN.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek formal oral briefings from the Department on the consultation on the new SEN and Disability regulations and related code of practice.

7. Correspondence

7.1. The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department providing assurance that key stakeholders had been involved in the development of revised processes for curriculum and assessment in 2020-21.

7.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department advising that it has already provided a copy of the grade awarding options report provided by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to the Minister in April 2020.

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA providing data comparing A-Level predictions with outcomes by school type.

7.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Procedures seeking commentary on the temporary provisions contained within Standing Orders 110-116.

7.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Procedures seeking commentary on a review of the current procedures for Legislative Consent Motions and the related Standing Order (42A).

7.7 The Committee considered a copy of correspondence sent to the Public Health Agency (PHA) by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation regarding

Covid-19 concerns, in particular the reported inconsistency of advice provided by PHA to schools in respect of the response to limited outbreaks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this correspondence with the Committee for Health, for its information.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister providing information and guidance to schools on the £12m Engage Programme for 2020-21.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Clerk to the Assembly / Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly seeking clarification as to the availability of the Assembly Chamber and the Members' Dining Room for closed or other committee meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise timings of informal meetings to 9:30-10:30am on Tuesdays.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive effective questioning training on 21 October 2020, subject to confirmation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a revised forward work programme.

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 7 October 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:37pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
7 October 2020