



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Minutes of Proceedings

WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Apologies: Mr Justin McNulty MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 10.00am in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Coronavirus – guidance for schools

The Chairperson referred to recent press reports in respect of precautionary measures in schools designed to limit the possible spread of coronavirus

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking assurance that schools have been (or are soon to be) provided with guidance on the

coronavirus including clear advice on how to provide a proportionate response including: fact sheets; surface and hand sanitising information; management of school trips to affected (or potentially affected) areas etc.. The Committee further agreed to seek clarity as to how the Department intends to keep schools, parents, pupils and the Committee informed of relevant developments.

2.2 Supply Resolution Debate

The Chairperson reminded Members that he had spoken on behalf of the Committee, indicating its support for the Department's resource and capital bids, in the Supply Resolution debate on Monday 24 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further briefings as and when the 2020-21 Education Budget was agreed.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 19 February 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Department of Education and Education Authority – Early Years and Childcare – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department on Early Years and Childcare issues.

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.09am

Mr Paul Brush, Director, Youth and Early Years, Department of Education

Ms Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years Intervention Programme,
Department of Education

Mrs Cathy Galway, Head of Childcare Unit, Department of Education

Ms Tina Dempster, Childcare Unit, Department of Education; and

Ms Pat Ward, Assistant Director, Pupil Support Services and Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority

Officials provided the Committee with an overview of Early Years and Childcare issues.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

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

- sight of the pre-school effective provision research which has informed the Department's views on the relative value of part-time and full-time Early Years provision;
- information on the "insight innovation lab" and the Department's consultation plans regarding the development of a revised Early Years and Childcare offer;
- sight of the interim evaluation of Bright Start;
- further information on the completion status of the elements of the Learning to Learn policy;
- information on the timing of legislation relating to eligibility for funded early years places; and
- the background to and Terms of Reference for the Childcare and Early Years cross-departmental project which is designed to improve "joined-up-ness".

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking the following written information which is to be addressed at an oral briefing on 11 March 2020:

- details of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Inclusion Services; and
- feedback on the consultation on SEN pre-school provision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority indicating its concern in respect of the reported changes to EA management and the re-allocation of senior responsibilities and recording its dismay that this had not been formally communicated to the Committee. The Committee further agreed to ask the chief executive of the EA to appear in person and respond in writing: setting out the changes and explaining the reasoning underpinning those changes and the implications for the provision of SEN support.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Early Years Organisation and Employers for Childcare to provide it with oral briefings on issues relating to Childcare and Early Years.

6. Department of Education and Education Authority – Nurture Provision - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department and the Education Authority.

The following officials joined the meeting at 12.02pm

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

Mrs Julie Humphries, Head of Additional Education Needs Team, Department of Education;

Ms Una Turbitt, Assistant Director, Pupil Inclusion, Wellbeing and Protection, Education Authority; and

Mr Sean Irving, Regional Manager for Nurturing Approaches in Schools, Education Authority.

Officials provided the Committee with an overview of Nurture provision.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Humphrey made a declaration of interest that he was a member of the board of governors of Edenbrooke Primary School.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 12.14pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities in order to determine whether it provides funding for nurture via Neighbourhood Renewal or other funding streams.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the impact of nurture on the demand for Special Educational Needs services.

7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding its intention to hold an inquiry into the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on 'Major Capital Projects', including the Strule Shared Education Campus.

7.3 The Committee noted an invitation from Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) to the launch of its review of Special Educational Needs Provision in Mainstream Schools in Northern Ireland on Tuesday 31 March 2020.

7.4 The Committee considered correspondence from concerned parents about the use of restrictive practices, restraint and seclusion in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on current policy in respect of restrictive practice, restraint and seclusion in schools and the Department's plans to revise policy in line with other jurisdictions. The Committee further agreed to seek an oral Departmental briefing on this subject.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking confirmation that the serious allegations included in the correspondence have been adequately addressed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the British Association of Social Workers seeking an oral briefing on restrictive practice, restraint and seclusion in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NICCY and the NI Ombudsman seeking information on their work (or planned work) on restrictive practice, restraint and seclusion in schools.

7.5 The Committee considered correspondence from an Education Authority employee about transferred redundancies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the issues raised and in respect of current policy and practice on transferred redundancies.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Irish Rugby Football Union to brief alongside the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association on the Sports Programme and Physical Education in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as amended.

10. Department of Education – Pandemic Influenza (Emergency) Bill - Oral Briefing

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the oral briefing on the Pandemic Influenza (Emergency) Bill.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 4 March 2020 at 9.45am in Room 30 Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.01pm.

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
4 March 2020**