



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

12 January 2022

Meeting Location: Teleconference

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Marcus Matthews (Clerical Supervisor)

Apologies:

Mrs Diane Dodds MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA



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The meeting commenced at 9:33am in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association

The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting with the Northern Ireland Forest School Association.

2.2 Correspondence from the Minister for Finance

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Finance declining a request from the Committee to provide it with an oral briefing on the Education budget. The Minister of Finance states that the Education Minister has full discretion as to how Department of Education's funding will be prioritised and allocated and it would not be appropriate for him to brief the Committee on this.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent update with the Minister of Education on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education suggesting that the Department should bid for funding for air filtration systems and seeking information on funding for:

- Special Educational Needs;
- The Childcare temporary closure fund and Sustainability Fund; and
- The impact of increased fuel costs for schools.



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3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 15 December 2021, 16 December 2021 and 17 December 2021.

Mr Sheehan joined the meeting at 9:36am.

4. Matters Arising

Agreed: The Committee agreed on foot of concerns raised about an individual case to seek an oral briefing with the Education Authority on Special Educational Needs provision.

5. Correspondence

5.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

5.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education on 'A Fair Start' report.

5.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding a consultation on draft regulations entitled "The Teachers' Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022".

5.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education providing information on the Temporary Modification of Education Duties (No.37) Notice (NI) 2021.

5.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding Area Planning and Cedar Lodge Special School indicating that a report on the Education Authority consultation over two draft Special Educational Needs Area Planning Frameworks is expected imminently.

5.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the Review of the Education Authority indicating that the review will include



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engagement with the Education Committee, and will consider the effectiveness and governance of the Education Authority.

5.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on staffing in special schools and action to address shortages.

5.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding how data is being collated by the Department and Education Authority on the Digital Devices Loan Scheme.

5.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education about its intention to amend regulations under Article 127 to replace the reference to “nationals of a member state” following the UK’s decision to exit the European Union.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on the number of pupils affected by the change.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission research on the effect of Brexit on pupils from newcomer families.

5.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the work of Verbal Arts Centre. The Department indicated that it met with Verbal in November 2021, and had arranged further discussions to include representatives from the Education Authority and Public Health Agency.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking updates on the outcome of future meeting.

5.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding access to information for people with sensory impairments.

5.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding amendments to the Parental Leave (Leave and Pay) Bill.

5.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the ongoing consultation on the draft Budget for 2022-25.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an early briefing from the Department of Education on the draft Budget for 2022-25.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to stakeholders seeking their views on the draft Budget for 2022-25.

5.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding correspondence that it sent to the Minister of Education regarding Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and the Review of Minimum Content Order.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking an urgent response on this matter.

5.15 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding dyslexia services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Dyslexia NI seeking its views on the response.

5.16 The Committee noted a response from St Mary's University College Belfast on the dyslexia training it provided.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Dyslexia NI seeking its views on the response.

5.17 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Gael Linn to the Minister regarding a decline in the uptake of Irish Language in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking an urgent response to the issues raised in the correspondence.

5.18 The Committee noted correspondence from School Start Flexibility NI providing its response to the Department of Education's consultation on Deferring School Starting Age.

5.19 The Committee noted correspondence from Tiny Life providing its response to the Department of Education's consultation on the Deferral of School Starting Age.

5.20 The Committee noted a response from Employers for Childcare providing its views on the Department of Education's Childcare Support arrangements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent update from the Minister for Education on this matter.



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5.21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People regarding the upcoming publication of its next monitoring report in early February 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Committee for Health to hold a joint briefing with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and her panel on the monitoring report on 9th February 2021.

5.22 The Committee noted an invitation to the Irish National Teachers Organisation Northern Conference on 4th of March 2022.

5.23 The Committee noted correspondence from a Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Primary School teacher requesting support during the Omicron wave of Covid-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking a response to the issues raised in the correspondence.

5.24 The Committee noted correspondence regarding restraint and seclusion in educational settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarification on whether it declined to join a Department of Health review of its policy on restraint and seclusion in January 2020.

5.25 The Committee noted the Department of Education Investing Activity Report for December 2021.

5.26 The Committee noted an update from the Department of Education on the January Monitoring Round 2021-22.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on the monitoring round and relay a summary of this position to the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Diane Dodds MLA offering its support in the light of the abuse she suffered on social media over the Christmas period.

6. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme as amended.

7. Period Products (Free Provision) Bill - Oral Briefing from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA).

The Committee noted a CCEA response to the call for evidence on the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 10:19am:

Ms Roisin Radcliffe, Programme Manager, Curriculum (Post primary, DE Projects, Modern Languages and Irish Medium Education)

Ms Deidre Coffey, Project Manager, Period Dignity and formerly Relationships and Sexuality Education Project Manager.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Lyttle left the meeting at 10:21am.

Mr Sheehan took the Chair at 10:21am.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

8. Physical Education in Schools - Oral Briefing from the Department of Education

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 11:10am:

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards

Mr Sam Dempster, Head of Curriculum Policy Team

Ms Heather Jackson, Education and Training Inspectorate



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The witnesses briefed the Committee on physical education in school.

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:

- seeking curriculum planning guidance referred to by officials;
- asking how many schools have outdoor, green facilities for physical education, including access to standard sports playing pitches;
- Seeking data on the current level of physical activity in schools and how this is benchmarked internationally;
- asking what the Department is doing to ensure that physical education is being mainstreamed for pupils of all abilities;
- asking what action is being taken by the Department to facilitate access for schools to community resources, sports clubs and shared spaces and vice versa, and urging proactive measures to assist rather than impede such solutions; and
- asking the Department of Education to engage with the Northern Ireland Forest School Association on programmes to encourage outdoor activity.

9. Period Products (Free Provision) Bill - Oral Briefing from Department for Communities.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Communities.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 12:03pm:

Ms Nichola Creagh, Manager, Community Empowerment Branch, Department for Communities

Ms Tracy Johnston, Deputy Director, Strategic Policy and Equality, Department for Communities

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

10. Any Other Business

The Committee noted that the Minister of Education had offered to brief it at its meeting on Wednesday 19 January 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take oral evidence from the Minister of Education at its meeting on 19 January 2022.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 13 January 2022 by video conference at 9:00am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:39pm.

Chris Lyttle MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
19 January 2022**