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Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

8 September 2021

**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  
Mrs Diane Dodds MLA  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Mr Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

**Apologies:** Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA



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The meeting commenced at 9:07am in public session

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies as above.

### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson informed members that the Chief Medical Officer and representatives of the Public Health Agency were unable to attend the Committee meeting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange a joint meeting with the Committee for Health to take evidence from the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health, the Chief Medical Officer and the Public Health Agency on covid-19 guidance for schools returning after the summer holidays.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 7 July 2021 and 1 September 2021.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.



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## 5. Restart - Department of Education Oral Briefing

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:09am:

Mr James Hutchinson Director of Restart, Department of Education

Mr Jonathan Boyd, Head of Restart Team, Department of Education

Ms Kim Scott, Assistant Director for Education, Education Authority

Mr Paul Crooks, Education Authority

The witnesses briefed the Committee on public health arrangements for the return of pupils to schools after the summer holiday.

The briefing was covered by Hansard.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reissue its invitation to the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency to brief it on guidance.

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

- Expressing concerns about inadequate communication regarding guidance with parents, children and schools;
- Requesting sight of data referred to by officials on transmission of covid-19 in schools; the levels of infection among pupils having to self-isolate due to contact with confirmed cases which give rise to the guidance to test on days 2 and 8; and the level of infection in very young children in preschool environments;
- Seeking an update on the number of children absent from school and the length of these absences compared with this time last year;
- Seeking information on alternatives to the current testing system being considered by the Department;



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- Proposing the use of loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP) tests for pupils in nurse schools and pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools;
- Proposing that the Department commission an independent and professional assessment of ventilation in school buildings; and
- Asking who was responsible for enforcement of guidance, particularly with respect to risk assessment and working from home for pregnant teachers and other school staff, and suggesting that ETI might undertake monitoring of compliance with guidance.

### **6. General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)- Department of Education Oral Briefing**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 11:21am:

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

Mr Alan Boyd, Head of Teacher Education Team, Department of Education

The witnesses briefed the Committee on teacher registration by GTCNI.

The briefing was covered by Hansard.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

### **7. Correspondence**

7.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on GTCNI staffing Issues.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to NIPSA.

7.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education providing a statement setting the Priorities for the Next Regional Area Plan for the Education Sector.

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education setting out the next steps and timescale for progressing the Executive's Childcare Strategy.

7.5 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Education to Principals on Covid-19 Guidance to Educational Settings.

7.6 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Education to Principals on Contact Tracing.

7.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing its views on the establishment of an Independent Fiscal Council for Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Finance.

7.8 The Committee noted the Committee for Finance Report on an Independent Fiscal Council for Northern Ireland.

7.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing Information about the amount of time schools allocate to Physical Education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Communities and to arrange a briefing with Department of Education officials on Physical Education in schools.

7.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing a copy of a response regarding Private Music Tuition.

7.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to issues raised in a research paper on School Uniform Policy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department to reiterate concerns about rights and cost implications of uniform policy and to request the timeframe envisaged for legislation on Free School Meals and uniform grants.



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7.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing further information on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services following the briefing on the Wellbeing framework on 9 June 2021.

7.13 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on difficulties experienced placing children in appropriate post-primary schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department seeking an update on what action is being taken to place remaining children and what contingency plans it has made for this year.

7.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on GTCNI access to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

7.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to UNISON's Free School Meals for All Campaign.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to UNISON.

7.16 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education indicating that the Department has no plans to gather information on students' access to an appropriate electronic device.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department indicating its concerns that to deliver equal educational opportunities for all children the Department needs to ensure that all pupils have access to appropriate digital devices.

7.17 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Sexual Harassment in Schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department seeking clarification on the response.

7.18 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing a brief on the Protection of EU Citizens and their Family Members' Rights and Access to Services in educational settings.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the correspondent who raised this issue with it.



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7.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing information on the Temporary Modification of Education Duties (No.34) Notice (NI) 2021.

7.20 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on Confidentiality and Information Sharing regarding the capacity of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Health.

7.21 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority indicating the support available to pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Irish Medium schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

7.22 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on the use of weed killer on the school estate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Pink Ladies Cancer Support Group that raised this matter with it.

7.23 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing information on the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum on 16 November 2021.

7.24 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA providing an update on the process this year for the issue of A level and GCSE results and the support available for students and parents.

7.25 The Committee noted a response from the Public Health Agency regarding Speech, Language and Occupational Therapy services and the operation of the Joint Health Education Oversight Group.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the correspondent who raised this issue with it.

7.26 The Committee noted a copy of a letter from All-Party Group Chairpersons on tackling gambling related harm via education, treatment, regulation and enforcement.



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Mr Butler made a declaration of interest that he was Chairperson of the All Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking its response to the letter's request for awareness programmes tackling gambling related harm to be incorporated into the official primary and post-primary curricula during the next CCEA review of the curriculum.

7.27 The Committee noted a Call for Evidence from the Committee for Justice on the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill.

7.28 The Committee noted a call for evidence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development on the Climate Change (No.2) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking its Climate Change actions.

7.29 The Committee noted a call for evidence from the Committee for Health on the Autism (Amendment) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an informal meeting with Mrs Pam Cameron MLA the proposer of the bill.

7.30 The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Christopher Stalford MLA seeking a meeting for the group Solas with the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the Group to an informal meeting.

7.31 The Committee noted correspondence regarding the wearing of facemasks in schools.

7.32 The Committee noted correspondence regarding School Uniforms.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward a research paper on school uniform policy and Department of Education response on this matter to the correspondent.

7.33 The Committee noted an invitation from Carers NI to the All-Party Group on Carers Meeting on 15 September 2021.

7.34 The Committee noted correspondence from Invisible traffick seeking a meeting with the Committee on its Junior Education Programme on Human Trafficking.





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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the group to an informal meeting.

7.35 The Committee noted correspondence from the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland providing information on its Keynote Seminar on Tackling Educational Underachievement.

7.36 The Committee noted an invitation from Gambling with Lives to the launch of its Education Pilot Programme.

7.37 The Committee noted correspondence on concerns about GCSE Science awarding.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) on this matter.

7.38 The Committee noted correspondence on concerns about GCSE Science awarding.

7.39 The Committee noted correspondence on concerns about GCSE Science awarding.

7.40 The Committee noted correspondence on concerns about GCSE Science awarding.

7.41 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing a copy of opening remarks from its briefing on Area Planning on 7 July 2021.

7.42 The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) providing a copy of opening remarks from its briefing on Area Planning on 7 July 2021.

7.43 The Committee noted correspondence from Home-Start UK in Northern Ireland providing a summary report of key findings from engagement with Families.

7.44 The Committee noted correspondence regarding problems with obtaining Higher National Diploma results.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for the Economy who have responsibility for higher level education.

7.45 The Committee noted the GTCNI Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20.



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7.46 The Committee noted the Middletown Centre for Autism Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21.

7.47 The Committee noted the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland Investing Activity Report for July 2021.

7.48 The Committee noted the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland Investing Activity Report for August 2021.

7.49 The Committee noted correspondence regarding GCSE Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Double Award Science examinations in 2022.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond indicating that the Committee has agreed to arrange a briefing with CCEA on this matter.

7.50 The Committee noted correspondence regarding the level of support for school principals carrying out Covid-19 contact tracing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond indicating that these issues had been raised with departmental officials at today's meeting and signposting them to where they can view the briefing.

7.51 The Committee noted correspondence about contact tracing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond indicating that these issues had been raised with departmental officials at today's meeting and signposting them to where they can view the briefing.

## 8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an additional slot to plan its forward work programme.



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**9. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

**10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 15 September 2021 by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:19pm

**Chris Lyttle MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education  
15 September 2021**