



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

11 September 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr David Brooks MLA

Ms Cheryl Brownlee MLA

Mr Robbie Butler MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)



Northern Ireland Assembly

The meeting commenced at 2:01 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Committee membership

The Chairperson welcomed Mrs Michelle Guy to the Committee.

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Ms Kate Nicholl for her work on the Committee.

2.2 Invitation to the Chair from Community Relations in Schools

The Committee noted an invitation from Community Relations in Schools to its event "Investing in Good Relations and Collaborative Education" held Wednesday September 25th 9:30-11:30am at Belfast City Hall. The Chairperson noted that he was unable to attend and asked if other members were available.

Agreed: Members agreed to notify the Committee Clerk if they were available to attend the event.

2.3 Informal meeting with Department of Education - update on School Uniforms policy

The Chairperson informed the Committee that members had held an informal meeting with officials from the Department of Education on Tuesday 10 September 2024 to be briefed on uniform policy and that a record of the meeting would be prepared for the Committee's next meeting.

2.4 Correspondence from Practice and Participation of Rights

The Committee noted correspondence from Practice and Participation of Rights (PPR) regarding concerns that a recent practice change by the Education Authority



Northern Ireland Assembly

has resulted in its officers ceasing to offer assistance with school enrolments to children and young people living in asylum contingency accommodation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority and the Executive Office highlighting these concerns.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee discussed surveys for teachers, parents and young people that are being carried out as part of its mini inquiry in RSE in Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the youth survey at its next meeting.

Agreed: Members agreed a signposting advertisement to be placed in local papers regarding the inquiry.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 26 June 2024.

6. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry - Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)

The Committee noted a briefing paper from NIHRC

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:10pm:

Ms Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Ms Julia Buchanan, Senior Policy and Research Officer, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Mr Colin Caughey, Director of Policy, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission



Northern Ireland Assembly

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NIHRC seeking information on responses to its investigation from teacher training colleges.

7. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry - Oral Briefing from Department of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

The Committee noted a report 'The Preventative Curriculum in Schools and Education Other Than at School EOTAS Centres, and a briefing paper from Department of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:01pm:

Mrs Linsey Farrell, Deputy Secretary, Education Policy & Children's Services, Department of Education

Mr Sam Dempster, Head of Curriculum Policy, Department of Education

Ms Elaine McAllister, Managing Inspector, Education and Training Inspectorate

Dr Fionnuala McCann, Managing Inspector, Early Years and Safeguarding, Education and Training Inspectorate.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

- Arrangements for Home schooled children; and
- Support available for Boards of Governors.



Northern Ireland Assembly

8. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry - Oral Briefing from the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)

The Committee noted a briefing papers from the Education Authority and CCEA.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:49pm.

Mr John Unsworth, Assistant Director, School Development, Education Authority

Ms Esther Martin, Business Manager - Curriculum and Assessment, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Roisin Radcliffe, Programme Manager, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Deidre Coffey, Education Manager - RSE, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Mathison made declaration of interest that he is a member of the Board of Governors of a controlled primary school.

Agreed; The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority in relation to RSE provision in youth work.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index and summary note of correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

9.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education about Counselling and therapeutic services for primary schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Barnardo's.



Northern Ireland Assembly

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding Interim changes to eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and Uniform Grants.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing the CCMS Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing CCEA Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding June Monitoring Bids.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding a consultation on School Uniform policy.

9.9 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education providing further information following a briefing from the Minister.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding post Special Educational Need (SEN) Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Caleb's Cause NI.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing Middletown Centre for Autism reports and accounts.

9.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding Expansion of Sure Start.

9.13 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding Special School Summer Schemes.

9.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding recommendations made in an NIHRC report on the use of Restraint and Seclusion in educational settings.

9.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the RAISE Programme.

9.16 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Children and Young People (CYP) Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework and Addressing Bullying in Schools act

9.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing the first report on the Operation of the Children's Services Cooperation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.



Northern Ireland Assembly

9.18 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on arrangements for pupils participating in Work Experience.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Speakers for Schools.

9.19 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority to issues raised by Uniformed Youth Organisations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Uniformed Youth Organisations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority expressing its concerns about the time taken to respond to its correspondence.

9.20 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Communities regarding Funding for the Scoil Spreagtha O cáidí Cheiliúrtha Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Gael Linn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Communities expressing its regret that Ministers have not engaged with the scheme.

9.21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health providing the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.

9.22 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to issues raised by the Youth Start Consortium.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Youth Start Consortium.

9.23 The Committee noted a response from the Department for the Economy to issues raised by the Youth Start Consortium.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Youth Start Consortium.

9.24 The Committee noted a response from the Department of the Economy on the development of a new Careers Portal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Speakers for Schools.

9.25 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Finance providing information on the Monthly Outturn.

9.26 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Finance providing information on a Financial Provisions Bill.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a written briefing and seek advice from Bill Office on this matter.

9.27 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for the Economy regarding the 14-19 Education and Training Framework.

9.28 The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Communities regarding funding for the Scoil Spreagtha Ócáidí Cheiliúrtha scheme.

9.29 The Committee noted the twentieth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.30 The Committee noted correspondence from Our Lady and St Patrick's College about the launch of its 'female voices' resource.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a briefing on the resource to coincide with International Women's Day.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the school highlighting its inquiry into RSE.

9.31 The Committee noted correspondence from Causeway Neurodiversity regarding the Educational Psychology allocation model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on this matter.

9.32 The Committee noted a response from the Integrated Education Fund to issues around the integrated sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the individual that raised these issues with it.

9.33 The Committee noted a response from the Independent review panel's views on a single Education System and Constitutional Change.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the individual that raised these issues with it.

9.34 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for Department of Education June 2024.

9.35 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for Department of Education July 2024.

9.36 The Committee noted correspondence from Calebs Cause NI inviting members to a Rally.



Northern Ireland Assembly

9.37 The Committee discussed correspondence from the European Jewish Association inviting the Chairperson to participate in their delegation to Auschwitz in commemoration of Kristallnacht on 18 -19 November 2024. The Chairperson indicated that he was unavailable on those dates and suggested that another member could represent the Committee.

Agreed: Members agreed to check their availability and inform the Committee Clerk.

9.38 Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association on a response from the Department of Education to issues it had raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education again on this matter.

9.39 The Committee noted correspondence from Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education providing reports and accounts.

9.40 The Committee noted correspondence from Lisnagarvey High School in relation to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) capacity programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority on this matter.

9.41 The Committee noted a response from the Schools' Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG).

9.42 Correspondence from the Daily Mile asking to present to the Committee on its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite to group to provide it with an oral briefing.

9.43 The Committee noted correspondence from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta providing its 2023-24 Annual Report and Accounts

9.44 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding SEN funding.

9.45 The Committee noted correspondence from a Nursery School Principal seeking a meeting on principal release time on behalf of a group of principals.

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

9.46 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual re a response from the Education Authority on air quality in schools. Members noted that they would be meeting informally with the individual to discuss these issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the individual indicating that it would be happy to discuss these issues at the informal meeting that is being arranged.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

9.47 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual on the provision of Domestic Abuse Education in schools.

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

9.48 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on early learning and childcare.

9.49 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the criteria used to assess an Exceptional Circumstances Body (ECB) case.

9.50 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Area Planning.

9.51 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on issues raised in the Concurrent Committee of the Committee for the Economy and Committee for Education on Wednesday 29 May 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the Committee for the Economy.

9.52 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding funding for Gael Linn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Gael Linn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education expressing its regret that Ministers have not engaged with the scheme.

9.53 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding a data breach.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on the data breach and action it is taking to improve information security.

9.54 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding processes for SEN Children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the individual that raised these issues with it.

9.55 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Youth Service Provision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority regarding the delay responding to correspondence.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

9.56 The Committee noted correspondence from NICCY seeking a meeting with the Chair and Deputy Chair.

9.57 The Committee noted an invitation from NIHRC to the launch of a report on the Implementation of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework

9.58 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding concerns about a school wasting funds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority about how schools manage resources over periods when they are closed.

9.59 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing its Business Plan 2023/ 24 and end year report.

9.60 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing further information on budget.

9.61 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on its Pay and Grading Review.

9.62 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding an Urgent Oral Statement on Mobile Phone Guidance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on business case, Value for Money and consultation on this spending decision.

9.63 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding a Joint Consultative Forum meeting.

9.64 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding SEN Providers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the SEN providers who raised these issues with it.

9.65 The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office on provision for school age newcomer children.

9.66 The Committee noted a response from the Department of the Economy in relation to the report 'post Special Educational Need (SEN) Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Caleb's Cause NI.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

9.67 The Committee noted correspondence from NI Fiscal Council regarding publication of a supplementary note to its assessment on the NI Executive's 2024-25 Budget.

9.68 The Committee noted correspondence from Action for Children providing Insights on Family Support Needs.

9.69 The Committee noted an invitation from the Open University to a theatre and politics event.

9.70 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for Department of Education for August 2024.

9.71 The Committee noted correspondence from Dr William Kitchen seeking a meeting to discuss Curriculum reform.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a meeting with Dr Kitchen.

9.72 The Committee noted correspondence from Fingerprint learning seeking a meeting with it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the group to provide it with a written briefing.

9.73 The Committee noted an invitation from the Institute of Public Health to an event 'Reducing Alcohol Harms in Northern Ireland: The potential of Minimum Unit Pricing'.

9.74 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding difficulties accessing SEN education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority highlighting the concerns raised.

9.75 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding SEN Placements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education highlighting the concerns raised.

9.76 The Committee noted correspondence from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta regarding the Irish-medium version of the School Entrance exam, provided by the School Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share SEAG's response to the Committee with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta seeking its views.



Northern Ireland Assembly

9.77 The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal on its report 'The first seven months of the restored Northern Ireland Executive'.

9.78 The Committee noted a response from the School Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG) on the examination service it provides.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share SEAG's response with the individual who raised this issue with it.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

The Committee considered correspondence raised by Ms Hunter on current policy around exams and bereavement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite CCEA to brief it on the policy at a meeting on 18 November 2024.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 18 September 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:04 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education



Northern Ireland
Assembly

18 September 2024