



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

22 May 2024

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Brooks MLA

Mr Robbie Butler MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2:00 pm in public session.



## **1. Apologies**

Apologies have been received from Danny Baker and Cheryl Brownlee.

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

There was no Chairperson's business.

## **3. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **4. Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 15 May 2024.

## **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

Ms Nicholl joined the meeting at 2:02pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 2:02pm



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **6. Committee Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education**

The Committee discussed draft Terms of Reference for its Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education; draft questions for a survey; a draft list of organisations to be contacted seeking their views; a draft inquiry timetable; and a draft advertisement to signpost the inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed amended Terms of Reference.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer the launch of the inquiry until after summer recess.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to public session at 2:27pm.

### **7. Addressing bullying in schools - Oral briefing from a panel of organisations**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland regarding prejudice-based bullying and its policy recommendations 'Tackling Bullying and Challenging Stereotypes'; the 'Elephant in the Room' Young People's Report; a 'Step Up Speak Out' Anti Bullying Resource from Cara-Friend; the 'Growing up online' report; and the Republic of Ireland's 'Department of Education Cineáltas: action plan and implementation plan'.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:27 pm:

Professor Noel Purdy, Co-Chair, Anti Bullying Alliance NI Steering Group

Ms Aoife Nic Colaim, Programme Manager, Anti-Bullying Alliance

Ms Joanne McParland, Education and Training Manager, Cara-Friend

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on bullying in schools and the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 3:14pm.

The Committee meeting adjourned at 3:28pm.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee meeting resumed at 3:35pm

### **8. Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework and Addressing Bullying in Schools Act - Department of Education Oral Briefing**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:36pm:

Mr Peter Hutchinson, Director of Raising Aspirations, Supporting Learning and Empowering Improvement, Department of Education

Ms Julie Plackitt, Interim Head of Pupil Support Team, Department of Education

Mr Michael Leonard, Head of Additional Educational Needs Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework and the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Nicholl left the meeting at 4:22pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education expressing concerns at the lack of baseline data collected for post-legislative scrutiny of effectiveness of the legislation on bullying in schools and seeking action from the Department to:

- Collect and analyse data on bullying in schools;
- Examine how currently collected data might be anonymised, consent gained for a new processing purpose and this data used to provide a baseline for comparison;
- Consider inviting independent and inexpensive surveys of pupils' experience;
- Review the preceding stakeholder session in respect of effectiveness of the Act and the matters of gender and prejudice-based bullying.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### 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 in relation to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's recommendations about childcare and early years.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to raise these issues in a future briefing and share the response with Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the publication of the fifth 'A Fair Start' Report and Action Plan Progress Report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with officials on the report.

9.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding Barnardo's Time 4 Me primary counselling service.

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

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding Industrial Action by education support staff.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education supporting the urgent implementation of the pay and grading review.

9.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Communities in relation to the recommendations of Diverse Youth NI.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Communities in relation to the recommendations of Diverse Youth NI.

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice in relation to the portability of AccessNI checks.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share this response with the uniformed organisations that raised this issue with it.

9.9 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Health to the Department of Education in relation to a perceived disparity between schools in having a nurse on site to provide professional nursing care for pupils.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education about the benefits of an on-site nurse and to raise this matter with officials in the proposed concurrent meeting with the Committee for Health.

9.10 The Committee noted the thirteenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.11 The Committee noted the fourteenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) seeking a meeting with the Committee to discuss the education remit of the BBFC and their broader child protection role.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to BBFC asking it to first provide a written submission on its work.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a Post-19 SEN provision protest.

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the NI Fiscal Council regarding the NI Executive's 2024/25 Budget.

9.15 The Committee noted correspondence from Parenting Focus seeking to brief the Committee on the findings of the Big Parenting Survey 23/24 and other priorities identified by parents.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with Parenting Focus on the findings of the Big Parenting Survey 23/24.

9.16 The Committee noted an invitation from THRiVE to a conference exploring approaches to tackling the impact of poverty on children and young people on Tuesday 4 and Wednesday 5 June at Stranmillis University Belfast.

9.17 The Committee noted correspondence from SEAG in relation to the issues raised in relation to Irish language past papers for their transfer test.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the correspondent that raised this issue with it and with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) seeking their views on the response.

9.18 The Committee noted Correspondence from Angel Eyes NI.

9.19 The Committee noted Correspondence from Parents for Inclusive Education NI.

9.20 The Committee noted a written Ministerial statement on Industrial Action by EA support staff.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

9:21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority on Industrial Action by EA support staff.

9:22 The Committee noted further correspondence from an individual in relation to issues raised in relation to the SEAG transfer test and access to Irish language past papers.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to SEAG highlighting these issues.

### **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Forward Work Programme.

### **11. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

### **11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

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

The Committee will hold a concurrent meeting with the Committee for the Economy on Wednesday 29 May 2024 in the Assembly Chamber, Parliament Buildings at 10:30am.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**29 May 2024**