



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

8 May 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

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Trevor Allen (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)



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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

- 2.1 The Committee noted a record of the informal meeting with St Mary's Primary School, Fivemiletown on 30 April 2024.
- 2.2 The Chairperson informed the Committee that members held an informal meeting with Farmers for Action, Rural Schools Groups on 7 May 2024 and that a record of the meeting would be prepared for the next Committee meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a paper explaining the differences between formal and informal meetings/briefings that, to provide clarity and transparency, will be published on its webpage.

3. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson declared an interest in the scheduled briefings as his wife is employed as a teacher in a grant-maintained integrated primary school and he has a child in a grant-maintained integrated post-primary school.

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA also declared an interest as a member of the Board of Governors of an integrated primary school.



4. Matters Arising

Agreed: It was agreed that actions arising from the oral briefing from Forest Schools NI, a proposed follow-up written briefing from the Northern Ireland Forest School Association(NIFSA), and other items arising from the strategic planning session on 1 May be considered in more detail at the meeting on 15 May.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 1 May 2024.

6. Outcomes of Strategic Planning

Agreed: The Committee recorded its appreciation to the NIFSA for hosting its strategic planning meeting on 1 May and agreed to consider a paper on decisions made at the meeting, including the scope of the RSE Inquiry and other items relating to forward work planning, at the meeting on 15 May 2024.

7. Integrated Education Fund – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Integrated Education Fund.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:06 pm:

Mr Peter Osborne, Chairperson, Integrated Education Fund;



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Mr Sean Pettis, Parental Engagement Campaign (PEC) Manager, Integrated Education Fund; and

Mr Paul Collins, Head of Public Affairs and Advocacy, Integrated Education Fund.

The witnesses provided the Committee with an overview of the work of the Integrated Education Fund. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 3:07 pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3:10 pm.

8. Integrated Education Act and Action Plan – Departmental Oral Update

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:12 pm:

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Acting Deputy Secretary; and

Mr James Hutchinson, Director of Collaboration and Climate Change.

Ms Hunter rejoined the meeting at 3:15 pm.

The witnesses provided the Committee with an update on the Integrated Education Act and Action Plan. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Butler left the meeting at 3:24 pm.

Mr Butler rejoined the meeting at 3:29 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a further written update from officials on development proposal (DP) decision making timelines and the envisaged timeframe for outstanding decisions.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3:53 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 3:53 pm.



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9. Area Planning – DE Oral Briefing

The meeting resumed at 4:03 pm in public session.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department on Area Planning.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:03 pm:

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Acting Deputy Secretary;

Mr Eamonn Broderick, Director Sustainable School Policy and Planning;

Ms Lorraine Finlay, Head of Area Planning Team;

Mr Scott Harbinson, Head of Schools Admission Team; and

Mr Bill Stevenson, Head of Area Planning East Region.

The witnesses provided the Committee with an overview of Area Planning. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Nicholl left the meeting at 4:40 pm.

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 4:43 pm.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 4:47 pm.

Mr Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 4:48 pm.

Mr Brooks left the meeting at 4:49 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive further written information from the Department on

- updating of sustainable schools policy and area planning in light of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Education, the Climate Change Act 2022 and the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016;
- information sharing with the Department of Health for planning, development, and early identification of pupil needs for placement;



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- and on guidance on accessibility and inclusivity of Boards of Governors (BOGs), particularly in areas of economic disadvantage.

Ms Hunter rejoined the meeting at 4:58 pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 5:04 pm.

10. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted an index and summary note of correspondence and agreed the proposed approach to handling of the correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in relation to the regulation of the childcare sector, including adult/child ratios for childminders; and agreed to forward the response to original correspondent, Unite the Union.

Agreed: The Committee discussed the Minister's response to its letter of 17 April regarding the recommendations supplied from Diverse Youth NI that fall within his Department's remit. It agreed to forward the correspondence to Diverse Youth NI when responses are received from all other contacted Departments.

Agreed: The Committee noted the April 2024 Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education and agreed to request a research paper from the Assembly's Research and Information Service analysing the Department's investment activity.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Children's Law Centre (CLC) thanking the Committee for making Aurelia's visit to Parliament Buildings such a success and agreed to write the CLC thanking them for gathering everyone for the visit.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the British Association of Social Workers in Northern Ireland (BASW NI) outlining their views in relation to the draft "statutory guidance on the reduction and management of restrictive practices in educational settings in Northern Ireland". Members agreed to consider the briefing at the next meeting of the Committee.



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11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the current version of the FWP for publication on the Committee's webpages.

12. Any Other Business

No other items of business were raised.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 15 May 2024 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:11 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education
15 May 2024