



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

1 May 2024

Meeting Location: Frazer Room, Clondeboy Estate

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 Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)

Ms Niamh Devlin (Research Officer)

The meeting commenced at 1:14 pm in Closed session.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 8.

8. Strategic Planning

The Committee received a briefing from the Education Researcher Niamh Devlin on RSE and worked to define the terms of its mini-inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the objectives of its mini-inquiry would be to compare the approaches to and outcomes of RSE in these islands and CSE internationally; to assess provision in NI; and to reach conclusions on the need for reform and make recommendations accordingly.

The Committee received a briefing from the Education Researcher Niamh Devlin on the Children's Services Co-operation Act and discussed interdepartmental working.

Mr Butler joined the meeting at 1:49pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to propose a concurrent meeting with the Health Committee regarding joined-up approaches to provision of and guidance about mental health and SEN support services in schools.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee discussed its ways of working; its short and medium-term priorities; and its objectives and values.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to segue from an induction focus to an emphasis on inquiry and transformation of services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to prioritise special educational needs; childcare and early years; and deprivation and educational under-achievement.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to maintain a theme around physical and outdoor learning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to flexibly adapt its ways of working to serve values and objectives of effectiveness, transparency, dignity and a child-centred approach.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to have reference to the Clerk's extensive note of these discussions in working through subsequent strategic planning.

The Committee moved to public session at 3:03 pm

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cara Hunter and Kate Nicholl.



Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Chairperson's Business

- 2.1 The Chairperson informed the Committee that members held an informal meeting with representatives of the Board of Governors of St Marys Primary School, Fivemiletown on 19 April 2024 and that a record of the meeting would be prepared for the next Committee meeting.
- 2.2 The Chairperson welcomed the Ministers urgent oral statement on services for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

3. Declaration of Interests

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered an update from a correspondent whose letter at the previous week's meeting in relation to SEN provision post 16 had been referred to the Economy Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also refer the letter to the Department of Education for its reply; to commission research on approaches in E&W to transition for SEN pupils aged 16 via educational and healthcare plans; and to raise the matter with officials at its concurrent meeting with the Economy Committee on 29 May.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 24 April 2024.

6. Correspondence

- 6.1 The Committee noted an index and summary note of correspondence.



Northern Ireland Assembly

6.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on its existing strategies, policies and plans to support students dealing with long Covid.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the Department's response with the correspondents who raised these issues with the Committee.

6.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing follow-up answers pursuant to the Committee's Ministerial briefing.

6.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education re Happy Healthy Minds.

6.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Clerk of the Committee for the Economy re 14-19 Framework.

6.6 The Committee noted the Tenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

6.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Sentinus.

6.8 The Committee noted correspondence from Bright Futures Project PEACHES.

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

6.9 The Committee noted correspondence from Belfast area Sure Start Managers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this with the Department and to reply notifying the correspondents of its childcare agenda on 5 June.

6.10 The Committee noted correspondence from Melted Parents NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply notifying the correspondents of its childcare agenda on 5 June.

6.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Retail NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to offer Retail NI an informal meeting slot in due course.

6.12 The Committee noted correspondence from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta for individual diaries.

6.13 The Committee noted correspondence from Causeway Neurodiversity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the correspondence to the Department of Education and the Education Authority for clarification of the disparities identified.

6.14 The Committee noted correspondence from St. Malachy's Youth Centre.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending an upcoming briefing from youth groups including this one.

6.15 The Committee noted correspondence from Downey House Parents.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the clarification made in its correspondence to the Department of Education.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

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

9. NI Forest School Association - Oral Briefing

The meeting moved into public session at 3.08pm.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from NI Forest School Association

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

Mr Brian Poots, CEO NI Forest School Association, NI Forest School

Mr Richard McMeekin, Clondeboy Nature Rangers Manager, NI Forest School

Mr Jim McDaid, Principal, Hazelwood Integrated Primary School

Ms Emma Quinn, Principal, Rathcoole Primary School

Mr Ian Huddleston, Trustee, Clondeboy Estate & Dufferin Foundation

Ms Danielle Morrow, NI Forest School



Northern Ireland Assembly

Ms Caoimhe Suitor, NI Forest School

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the role of the Northern Ireland Forest School Association.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee thanked the witnesses and agreed to review follow-up actions at its next meeting.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 8 May 2024 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:23 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education
8 May 2024