



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

12 June 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 Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 2:01pm.

The Committee discussed its forward work programme.

The Committee returned to public session at 2:05pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that its last meeting before summer recess would be on 26 June 2024 and that its first meeting following recess would be on 4 September 2024.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters Arising

No matters arising were discussed.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 5 June 2024.



Northern Ireland Assembly

6. Independent Review of Education Panel - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted the 'Investing in the Future' report and Hansard of the briefing from the panel on 29 May 2024.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:09pm:

Sir Gerry Loughran, Vice-Chairperson, Independent Review of Education

Dr Keir Bloomer, Chairperson, Independent Review of Education

Ms Isabel Nisbet, Panel Member, Independent Review of Education

Mr Robin McLoughlin, Panel Member, Independent Review of Education

Ms Marie Lindsay, Panel Member, Independent Review of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the topics of: early years and childcare; and socioeconomic deprivation and educational underachievement.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 3:38pm

The Committee resumed at 3:45pm

Mr Butler left the meeting at 3:45pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to endorse, and recommend universal provision of, Surestart; and to enquire as to the extent of prioritisation of resource for 2 year olds.

7. Minister for Education – Department of Education Oral Briefing

The Committee noted an 'A Fair Start' progress report, a report from Pivotal 'Reconciliation and deprivation: twin challenges for Northern Ireland' and the Department of Education 2023-24 business plan.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:47pm:

Mr Paul Givan, Minister of Education, Department of Education



Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Ronnie Armour, Deputy Secretary, Resources Governance and Early Years,
Department of Education

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

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Acting Deputy Secretary, Department of Education.

The Minister briefed the Committee on his priorities.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that his wife worked at Millennium
Integrated Primary School.

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 4:44pm.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 4:48pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education in respect
of:

- Professionalising of the exceptional circumstances process for school places;
- Further information on best practice on absenteeism post covid;
- An outline of the work of the Education and Health Oversight Committee and how it works to improve collaboration at a working level;
- The timeline for the June Monitoring process;
- Seeking further information on actions to mitigate bullying given its causal link with suicidal ideation; and
- Seeking further information on the support available for pre-school pupils suffering with anxiety.

8. Correspondence

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



Northern Ireland Assembly

8.2 The Committee noted Correspondence from the Department of Education about Development Proposal Timelines.

8.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Communities regarding its Volunteering Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the uniformed organisations who originally raised the issue.

8.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health regarding Counselling and Therapeutic Services for Primary Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this response with the Department of Education seeking its plans for Counselling and Therapeutic Services for Primary Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Barnardos, who originally raised the issue.

8.5 The Committee noted the Sixteenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding Beechlawn School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence with the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to prioritise the delivery of Special Educational Needs (SEN) services in its workplan.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause NI reminding Members of a planned protest around the lack of post-19 SEN provision.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause NI highlighting a report produced by the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning in the 2011/16 Mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy seeking information on follow-up action taken on the report's findings.

8.9 The Committee noted an index and summary note of tabled correspondence.

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



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the Department noting with regret that this change does not extend uptake significantly given the cost of living and inflation.

8.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education about Indoor Air Quality in Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the individual who originally raised the issue.

8.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to the Committee for the Economy about Support for Childminding.

8.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding careers provision.

8.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy thanking members for contributions to the concurrent Meeting.

8.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee regarding the Memorandum of Reply (MOR) on the report 'Closing the Gap – social deprivation and links to educational attainment'.

8.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Acting Head of the Northern Ireland Assembly Communications Office.

8.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Head of the Northern Ireland Assembly IS Office.

8.18 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Free School Meals, School Uniform and Transport.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this substantial item of correspondence at its next meeting.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

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



10. 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 19 June 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:12 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
19 June 2024**