



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

15 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 Mark McQuade (Assistant 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 informal meeting with Farmers for Action on 7 May 2024.

2.2 The Committee noted a record of informal meeting with the Harry's Law campaign on 14 May 2024. The Chairperson expressed the Committee's thanks to Deirdre and Rodney Shakespeare for briefing members.

2.3 The Committee discussed its visit to the Northern Ireland Forest School Association on 1 May 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding issues raised by the Northern Ireland Forest School Association.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to engage with the Northern Ireland Forest School Association in hosting a conference on outdoor learning in the autumn.

### 3. Declaration of Interests

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

Mr Butler made a declaration of interest that he is a member of a school Board of Governors.

Ms Nicholl made a declaration of interest that she is a member of a school Board of Governors.



Mr Brooks made a declaration of interest that his wife is a member of a school Board of Governors.

#### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **5. Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 8 May 2024.

#### **6. Outcome of Strategic Planning meeting**

The Committee discussed the outcome of its strategic planning meeting on 1 May 2024.

**Agreed:** the Committee confirmed the following medium-term priorities:

- Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- Childcare and Early Years; and
- Poverty or Educational Underachievement and Socioeconomic Status;

The Committee further endorsed the theme of outdoor education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to carry out an inquiry into the SEN process in 2025.



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

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

Ms Cheryl Brownlee joined the meeting at 2:16pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Terms of Reference for its Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed an amended list of consultees.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed a provisional timetable for the inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content that a signposting advertisement be placed in the Belfast Telegraph, the Newsletter, the Irish News and on social media directing people to the Committee Inquiry website.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that questions for the Citizen Space questionnaire would be circulated to members for agreement, and if necessary for further discussion at its next meeting.

## **8. Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Oral Briefing**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:21 pm:

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

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

Ms Emily Mills, Policy and Research Officer, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission



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The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the work of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and on the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission seeking its views on the legal relationships of accountability between schools, Boards of Governors and parents.

### **9. Restraint and Seclusion – Department of Education Oral briefing**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:29pm:

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

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

Ms Judith Logan, Additional Educational Needs Team, Department of Education

Ms Andrea Kelly, Behaviour Support Services, Education Authority.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Cathy Mason left the meeting at 4:13pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education:

- Referring it to the evidence taken from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission;
- Seeking information on work to align terminology and guidance with the Department of Health particularly in respect of overlap in Early Years SEN provision;



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- Wishing to ascertain whether the Minister's intention is to repeal Article 4(1)c of The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998; and
- Seeking assurance that a system of monitoring and reporting such as that outlined by the Harry's Law Campaign be put in place to allow parents' concerns to be addressed.

### 10. Correspondence

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

10.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing further information on fiscal and budgetary issues raised by the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with RAISE Financial Scrutiny Unit and the Committee for Finance.

10.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Advancing Shared Education 4th Report.

10.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding Childhood illness and resulting school trauma.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the correspondent that this raised this matter with the Committee.

10.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in relation to a Development Proposal for Downey House Preparatory School.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the Downey House Parents group who raised this matter with the Committee.

10.6 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority in relation to long covid in the school environment.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the original correspondent.

10.7 The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office in relation to the recommendations provided by Diverse Youth NI.

10.8 The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office about its engagement with school-age newcomer children and their families.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Executive Office regarding its responsibility to co-ordinate cross-departmental strands to support newcomer children's access to education.

10.9 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health regarding recommendations made by the Registered Childminders Branch of Unite.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the Registered Childminders Branch of Unite.

10.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the draft Executive Budget 2024-25.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk would prepare a response to the Committee for Finance.

10.11 The Committee noted the Twelfth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10.12 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Mid-Ulster District Council to the Minister for Education regarding Childcare for Children with SEN.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Mid-Ulster District Council on this matter.

10.13 The Committee noted an invitation from Ulster University to a Lego Project Workshop

10.14 The Committee noted Correspondence from the Board of Governors of Beechlawn School raising concerns about information that is being provided by the Education Authority about the school, and the nature of its SEN provision.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking a response to the concerns raised.

10.15 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual with questions around integrated education following the Committee's briefing from the Integrated Education Fund.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Integrated Education Fund seeking a response to the issues raised.

10.16 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual providing further details on their previous submission around indoor air quality in schools.

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



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education regarding policy issues raised in the correspondence.

10.17 The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom regarding plans to protect children from online harms.

10.18 The Committee noted correspondence from MENCAP and others raising concerns about immediate and long-term challenges faced by providers like them.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking a response to the issues raised.

10.19 The Committee noted an invitation from Parents for Inclusive Education NI to a Report Launch.

10.20 The Committee noted correspondence from UCAS about two new initiatives they are undertaking for the 2025 cycle, designed to reach potential applicants who may have previously ruled out higher education as an option for them.

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

10.21 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the SEAG post-primary transfer tests.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the correspondent that this raised this matter with the Committee.

10.22 The Committee noted a response from SEAG regarding the post-primary transfer tests.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the response at its next meeting.

## 11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

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





## **12 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 22 May 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:46 pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

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