



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

2 October 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

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Mr Peter Martin MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)

Present via teleconference

Mr Robbie Butler MLA



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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms Cara Hunter.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting with Retail NI.

2.2 The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Mr Robbie Butler for his work on the Committee.

2.3 The Committee discussed comments made by members at its last meeting.

The Chairperson asked members to refrain from directing comments to or about members who are not present to respond.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters Arising

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

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

- Seeking confirmation that the Department of Education would be providing it with an oral briefing on budget at its meeting on 16 October 2024; and
- Seeking a detailed breakdown of funding decisions made by the department.



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The Committee discussed correspondence from the Department of Education providing an update on the implementation of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) measures for 2024/25. Members noted that the All-party Group on Early Education and Childcare had received an oral briefing on this matter and that the Committee would receive an oral briefing at a future meeting.

The Committee discussed correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office which is co-ordinating a response from the Assembly to the draft programme for Government.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of its response to this to its meeting on 9 October 2024

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 25 September 2024.

6. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education - Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People (NICCY)

The Committee noted a briefing paper from NICCY.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:26 pm:

Mr Chris Quinn, Children's Commissioner, NICCY

Dr Arlene Robertson, Policy and Research Officer, NICCY

Ms Madison Blair, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People Youth Panel

Ms Rachel Woods, Senior Policy and Research Officer, NICCY

Ms Joanne McGurk, Head of Legal & Investigations, NICCY.



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The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NICCY seeking further information on:

- Information it produces relating to faith based groups and good relations; and
- Information on how NICCY ensure that its youth panel is representative.

7. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education - Oral briefing from Catholic Schools Trustee Service

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Catholic Schools Trustee Service.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:22pm:

Mr Fintan Murphy, Chief Executive, Catholic Schools' Trustee Service

Ms Maria Maguire, Director, Pupil Services and Preventative Curriculum, St Ronan's College Lurgan

Ms Mairead Greene, Head of Year & RSE Co-ordinator, St Ronan's College Lurgan

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 4:13 pm.

The Committee resumed at 4:17 pm.

8. Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from NIPSO, an Overview Report on the use of Restrictive Practices in Northern Ireland schools and the NIPSO School Case Digest.



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The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:18pm:

Mr Sean Martin, Deputy Ombudsman / Director of Investigations, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Ms Julie Healy, Head of Improvement, Engagement, and Impact, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the work of NIPSO, School Governance and its Overview Report on the use of Restrictive Practices in Northern Ireland schools

Mr Butler left the meeting at 4:25pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

- Asking it to provide its map of what the school complaints process should look like;
- Asking what legislative power exists for the Department and Education Authority to address issues of governance brought to their attention, how often these powers are used and whether the Department believes it needs additional powers in this area; and
- Asking what data is being collected on complaints.

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

- seeking an update on Statutory Guidance on the use of Restraint and Seclusion in educational settings; and
- seeking planning information on training for teachers in tandem with the roll-out of new guidance re use of Restraint and Seclusion.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Minister of Education's meeting with the Loyalist Communities Council.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to the correspondent indicating that the Committee has written to the Minister seeking further information on this meeting.

9.2 The Committee noted an invitation to the launch of the Centre for Public Policy and Administration (CPPA) on Friday, 25 October 2024 from 9:00am to 1:00pm in the Canada Room and Council Chamber at Queen's University Belfast.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 9 October 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:16pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
9 October 2024**