



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

20 November 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

Ms Cara Hunter 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 Colin Crawford MLA



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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Record of informal meeting with the Education against Violence Empowerment Project

The Committee noted a record of informal meeting with the Education against Violence Empowerment Project and briefing papers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the witness thanking her for briefing it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the record and briefing paper in its inquiry into RSE.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interests.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted correspondence from Dr Sophie King-Hill providing further information on the work of the Safer Together project, Boys Impact project and highlighting the work of Professor Kieran McCartan from the University of the West of England.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the briefing paper in its inquiry into RSE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Professor Kieran McCartan asking for a written briefing as part of its inquiry into RSE.



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The Committee noted correspondence from Professor Maria Lohan providing further on information on the 'If I were Jack' Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the briefing paper in its inquiry into RSE.

The Committee noted that at its meeting on 13 November 2024, the Committee lost quorum before considering correspondence and that it was agreed with members by correspondence to take the following actions:

- Item 9.5: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance forwarding correspondence from Advice NI regarding extension of bereavement services;
- Item 9.6: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the 14-19 strategy and agreed to Write to the Department of Education seeking an update;
- Item 9.7: The Committee noted a Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Managing the Schools' Estate and agreed to invite the Audit office to provide an oral briefing on the report (in fact I am advised that the PAC wants to retain this report under primacy);
- Item 9.8: The Committee agreed to arrange a visit to Glenveagh School
- Item 9.9: The Committee noted correspondence from Buddy Bear Trust and agreed write to the Minister seeking his views on funding arrangements for the Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education school;
- Item 9.10: The Committee noted a response from the Minister regarding his attendance at the Committee; and
- Item 9.11: The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Assembly regarding the guidance issued by the Department of Education on 3 September 2024 on the use of mobile phones in schools and agreed to share this with the Department of Education.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 13 November 2024.



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6. Exceptional Circumstances - Oral briefing from CCEA, Director of Qualifications.

The Committee noted a Joint Council for Qualifications guide to the special consideration process and a Youth Assembly report on Bereavement Support and Grief Education.

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

Mr Michael McAuley, Interim Director of Qualifications, CCEA

Mr Ronan Carberry, Temporary Business Manager, CCEA

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the processes for supporting young people experiencing exceptional circumstances while sitting exams.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to CCEA seeking:

- clarity on the input from parents and young people in cocreating the process;
- information on how long term illness is defined; and
- A breakdown of special consideration awarded to the 3205 students since 2022 who have made an application for special consideration on grounds of bereavement, according to assistance given and application category.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to agenda item 9 at 2:52pm.

9. Correspondence

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual inquiry on RSE.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

9.4 The Committee noted a submission to its RSE inquiry from faith organisations.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause NI seeking a meeting with the Committee on post-19 provision for SEN pupils.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with Caleb's Cause NI on post-19 provision for SEN pupils.



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9.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education setting out the action it has taken in response to a recent data breach.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence highlighting a recent report from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), regarding failure of care and treatment; failings and breaches of a child with disabilities' human rights.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking its views on the issues raised by the report in relation to the use of restraint in educational settings.

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly Consultation to the draft Programme for Government.

9.9 The Committee noted a submission to its RSE inquiry from NASUWT.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the History Teachers' Association of Northern Ireland (HTANI).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to agenda item 7 at 2:57pm.

7. Special Educational Needs Regulations and Special Educational Needs transformation end to end review – Oral Briefing from Department of Education Officials

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department of Education.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.57pm:

Mrs Janis Scallon, Director of Inclusion, Department of Education

Ms Julie McBride, Head of Special Education Review Team, Department of Education
Ms Brenda Shearer, Head of Special Education and Inclusion Policy Team, Department of Education

Ms Lorraine Brown, Head of Special Education – Early Years & Pupil Support, Department of Education

Dr Suzanne Kingon, Director for Investment & Infrastructure and Strule, Department of Education



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The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on SEN regulations and the SEN transformation end-to-end review.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Crawford joined the meeting at 3:14pm.

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

- A breakdown of the number of SEN pupils provided with placements in September and how many actually entered school;
- Clarification regarding the revised roles and referral responsibilities of SENCOs and educational psychologists;
- A breakdown of the number of Allied Health Professionals available to provide support, according to their disciplines; and data on gaps in this workforce.

The Committee adjourned at 4:25pm.

The committee resumed at 4:30pm.

8. Independent Review Response - Oral Briefing from Department of Education Officials

The Committee noted a briefing paper on the Independent Review of Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:30pm.

Mr Andrew Scott, Director, Independent Review/Corporate Services and Governance, Department of Education

Ms Claire McClelland, Director, Raising Aspirations, Supporting Learning & Empowering Improvement, Department of Education

Ms Karen McCullough, Director, Qualifications, 14-19 Strategy & Youth work Policy, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the recommendations of the Independent Review of Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further briefing on the recommendations of the Independent review of Education.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to provide it with a written briefing on concerns about the effect of the end-to-end review on Irish Medium schools.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 27 November 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:14pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
27 November 2024**