



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

27 November 2024

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

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 Danny Baker MLA

Mr Colin Crawford MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA



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

### **1. Apologies**

### **2. Chairperson's Business**

#### **.2.1 Record of informal meeting with Auditory Verbal**

The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting with Auditory Verbal on 19 November 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education asking what the Department of Education is doing to broaden access to Auditory Verbal Therapy in schools and to point out value for money considerations of the model presented.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the note of the briefing with the Committee for Health.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Health asking how training in Auditory Verbal Therapy is to be made available for Speech and Language Therapists.

#### **2.2 Oral Ministerial Statement on Defibrillators in Schools**

The Committee welcomed the Minister of Education's Statement on Defibrillators in Schools.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

There were no Declarations of Interests.

### **4. Matters Arising**

No Matters arising were discussed.



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## **5. Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 20 November 2024.

## **6. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral briefing from Professor Chris Bonell**

The Committee noted an RSE inquiry submission from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:05pm via teleconference:

Professor Chris Bonell, Professor of Public Health Sociology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The witness 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 move to item 9 at 2:39pm

## **9. Children's Services Co-Operation Act – Written Briefing**

The Committee noted a written briefing on the Children's Services Co-Operation Act.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing from the Department on the Children's Services Co-Operation Act and seek an interdepartmental update on initiatives taken jointly with the Department of Health.



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### **10. School Uniforms - Written Update**

The Committee noted a written briefing on School Uniforms.

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

- If it was content with the level of engagement from schools and school governors on the consultation;
- If there are plans to raise the level of school uniform grants;
- For a briefing on the work of the taskforce set up to examine the level of the school uniform grants; and
- Requesting an indicative timeline for draft school uniform legislation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to item 7 at 2:50pm

### **7. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral Briefing from Professor Pam Alldred**

The Committee noted a report – ‘It’s about time’, a report – ‘Teenage Parenthood: What’s the Problem’ and articles by Professor Alldred.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:50pm via teleconference:

Professor Pam Alldred, Professor of Youth and Community Studies, Nottingham Trent University

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

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 3:37pm.



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The Committee resumed at 3:46pm.

### **8. Children's Grief Awareness – Oral briefing from Marie Curie**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Marie Curie; 'the Compassionate Schools Report'; The executive summary of the Compassionate Schools Report and a Youth Assembly Report on Bereavement Support and Grief Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:46pm:

Ms Christine Irvine, Senior Policy Manager for Northern Ireland, Marie-Curie

Ms Joan McEwan, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Marie-Curie

The witness 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 the Minister of Education:

- Seeking his views on the requirement for schools to have a bereavement policy;
- Asking what the Department will do to improve initial teacher training around affective material such as grief and bereavement;
- Asking if the Department intends to take forward recommendations for imbedding grief education into the curriculum;
- Asking that the Department issue a circular to schools reminding them to update bereavement policies and ensuring staff are aware of these; and
- Asking if he is intending to take forward a passport system for children allowing information supporting pupils to move between schools with them.

### **11. Correspondence**

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



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11.2 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding SEN education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to follow up on this correspondence with the Education Authority.

11.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on issues raised by the Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association.

11.4 The Committee noted a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into RSE from the Ulster Teachers Union (UTU).

11.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on SEN Placements at Ardnashee School.

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

11.6 The Committee noted an invitation to Annual Human Rights Statement 2024 Launch.

11.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on the launch of a consultation for review of eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and Uniform Grants.

11.8 The Committee noted a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into RSE from the Irish National Teachers Organisation.

11.9 The Committee noted a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into RSE from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI).

11.10 The Committee noted correspondence from Cubbie on a product they provide to help address sensory issues experienced by SEN pupils. The Committee noted that the Education Authority had carried out a pilot project on the product.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking a written briefing on the outcome of the pilot project.

11.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education on funding for the provision of automated external Defibrillators (AEDs) for all schools in Northern Ireland.

11.12 The Committee noted Correspondence from the Women's Parliament asking the Committee to share a link to a survey on the Committee's social media accounts.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share a link to the survey on its social media accounts.

11.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the Budget for 2025-26 and Future Years Information Gathering.

11.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the recent announcement by the Education Authority of its decision not to proceed with Fujitsu as the contractor for a new IT system for all schools in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority:

- Asking why the contract was cancelled;
- Seeking clarity on the strategic partnership element of the contract, asking if that is separate to the development of the school management system and asking if Fujitsu are still engaged in the development of that system and if not what assurances can be provided that a system will be developed.

11.15 The Committee noted an invitation to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Conference on Thursday 23 January 2025.

11.16 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from NCU to the Minister of Education.

11.17 The Committee noted the Twenty-seventh Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

### 11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme as amended.

### 12. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed correspondence inviting Sex Matters, the Woman's Rights Network and the LGB Alliance to contribute to the Committee inquiry into RSE and noted that these organisations have not yet responded.



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### **13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 4 December 2024 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:04pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education  
4 December 2024**