



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

15 January 2025

**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 Cara Hunter 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**

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

**Apologies:**

Mr Colin Crawford MLA  
Mr Peter Martin MLA



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

### **1. Apologies**

An apology was received from Peter Martin MLA.

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

#### **2.1 Minister's statement on Special Educational Needs (SEN) reform.**

The Committee discussed a statement by the Minister of Education on SEN reform.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking further detail on the delivery plan for SEN reform.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Head of the Civil Service seeking clarity on the work of the Interim Public Service Transformation Board, asking when it is expected that money will be released to the Executive to allow significant PFG level collaborative programmes to be funded.

#### **2.2 Integrated Education.**

The Committee discussed a recent decision by the Minister regarding integrated education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange oral briefings on integrated education from the Department of Education and IE stakeholder bodies.

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

Mr Brooks made a declaration of interest that his wife is a member of the Board of Governors of Grosvenor Grammar School and Mitchell House School.



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

The Committee noted correspondence regarding the appointment process for the Chairperson of the Education Authority.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking a breakdown of the appointment process and asking what advice was provided to the Minister as to whether there was any conflict of interest in this appointment.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office asking when it is expected that a new Commissioner for Public Appointments will be appointed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments seeking its assessment of the issues around the conflict of interest of a sitting elected representative from the Minister's party taking up such a role.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 11 December 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 8 January 2025.

#### **6. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry - Oral Briefing from Professor Dirk Schubotz**

The Committee noted briefing papers and research from Professor Schubotz.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:18pm:

Professor Dirk Schubotz, Queen's University Belfast.

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

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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**Agreed** The Committee agreed to move to Item 9 at 3:52pm

### **9. Correspondence**

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

9.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing information on Special Educational Needs Services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on the number of children currently waiting for placement and asking:

- what work is being done to make sure that all children have placements in September 2025;
- Why the Department does not have access to information on current numbers of Allied Health Professionals available to provide support to SEN pupils

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking information on current numbers of Allied Health Professionals available to provide support to SEN pupils; their respective disciplines; and by region; and information on gaps in this workforce.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to Item 7 at 2:58pm.

### **7. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry – Oral Briefing from Women's Resource and Development Agency**

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Women's Resource and Development Agency.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:58pm:

Ms Elaine Crory, Women's Sector Lobbyist, Women's Resource and Development Agency

Ms Meghan Hoyt, Women's Sector Lobbyist Policy Assistant, Women's Resource and Development Agency



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Ms Jonna Monaghan, Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform

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 the Department of Education seeking a breakdown of LJ Gillen's recommendations iro education, what progress has been made on these and an assessment of current need.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Universities and Further Education colleges to ascertain the measures they put in place to provide RSE and complement secondary teaching.

The Committee meeting adjourned at 3:40pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:47pm

### **8. Education Authority Leadership and Operational Updates - Oral Briefing.**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority.

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

Mr Richard Pengelly, Chief Executive, Education Authority

Mr Dale Hanna, Director of Children & Young People's Services, Education Authority

Ms Elaine Craig, Interim Assistant Director, Children and Young Peoples Services, Education Authority

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the work of the Education Authority.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

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



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- Asking for the number of Special Educational Needs Coordinator's (SENCO's) in schools;
- Asking how the SEN early years inclusion service will change as part of the transformation process;
- Asking how EA is currently measuring outcomes for SEN children;
- Asking what role the Education Authority played or will play in developing the outcomes framework the minister referenced in his statement on SEN reform;
- Seeking further information on the constraints placed upon the Education Authority which inhibit it in making improvements as referred to in its briefing paper; and
- Seeking information on current numbers of Allied Health Professionals available to provide support SEN pupils; their respective disciplines; broken down regionally and information on gaps in this workforce;
- Asking what baseline data is held on children with SEN in schools;
- Asking for information on EA support services available for the school community in the event of an incident such as a death of a child in school.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on spot checks and data collection on bullying in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking information on the removal of on-site nurses in Special Schools, whether this decision is subject to change, risk assessment of the decision and alternative support arrangements.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 5:15pm.

The Committee returned to item 9 at 5:15pm.

### 9. Correspondence

9.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Youth Assembly correspondence regarding Departmental Guidance on the use of mobile phones.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the Youth Assembly.

9.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education informing the Committee of a joint departmental review with the Department for the



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Economy of Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) regulation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on CCEA regulation.

9.5 The Committee correspondence from the Institute of Physics.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with the Institute of Physics on STEM teaching.

9.6 The Committee correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding an Education Authority contract with Fujitsu.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People regarding school governance.

9.8 The Committee noted an invitation from Marie Curie for the Chairperson to take part in a panel regarding bereavement information and support for children.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content for the Chairperson to attend the event.

Ms Hunter rejoined the meeting at 5:21pm

9.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on the 14-19 Framework.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) on the processes for supporting young people experiencing exceptional circumstances while sitting exams.

9.11 The Committee noted a link to a consultation on a proposed Holiday Hunger Bill.

9.12 The Committee noted a response from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) regarding its engagement with the Department of Education's End-to-End Review of Special Educational Needs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education sharing the correspondence from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and asking for the Minister's assessment of the Irish Medium sector's needs in regard to SEN and how the Department intended to address these.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on 2024/25 Spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) and January Monitoring.



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9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding changes to the Department for Communities Bereavement Service.

9.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance forwarding correspondence from the Department of Justice providing information on the potential equality impacts of the draft Budget 2025-2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking if it intended to carry out an equality impact assessment for the draft Budget 2025-2026.

9.16 The Committee noted correspondence from Cara Hunter MLA proposing that the Committee extend an invitation to Microsoft to deliver a presentation on the role of Artificial Intelligence in enhancing children's learning experiences.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the organisation to brief it informally on the role of Artificial Intelligence in enhancing children's learning experiences.

9.17 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on school uniform policy and grants.

9.18 The Committee noted a draft consultation from the Department of Education on The Teachers' Pensions Scheme (Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

9.19 The Committee noted an invitation from Gael Linn for a Committee member to attend an event on the 'Scoil Spreagtha' scheme on 23 January 2025.

9.20 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding Special Educational Needs Placements.

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

9.21 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on its use of zero emissions vehicles and fleet management.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Infrastructure.

9.22 The Committee noted correspondence from Angel Eyes NI seeking to brief the Committee on its report 'Education Access in Ireland for Students with a Visual Impairment'

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that his wife worked for Angel Eyes NI.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Angel Eyes NI to brief the Committee at an informal meeting.





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9.23 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

9.24 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority about a new IT system for schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the Committee for Finance.

9.25 The Committee noted a Youth Assembly News Letter for December 2024.

9.26 The Committee noted a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission E-Newsletter for December 2024.

9.27 The Committee noted correspondence from Outscape.

9.28 The Committee noted a Department of Education response regarding access to Auditory Verbal Therapy in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with Auditory Verbal.

9.29 The Committee noted an Investing Activity Report Assembly Committee Report for December 2024.

9.30 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding the Education Authority's procurement system and processes.

9.31 The Committee noted the Independent Autism Reviewer's Report 'Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Schools'.

9.32 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education informing the Committee of the Minister's intention to make an oral Ministerial statement on 13 January 2025.

9.33 The Committee noted correspondence from the Bruiser Theatre Company on its work with school children on RSE with charities Ascend and Nexus.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the papers for its RSE inquiry.

9.34 The Committee noted an invitation from Advice NI to its AGM on Thursday 30 January 2025.

9.35 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a written Briefing on January Monitoring 2024-25.

9.36 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority in relation to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) capacity programme 503



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to Lisnagarvey High School who raised this matter with it.

9.37 The Committee a response from the Department of Education providing information on Early Years and Childcare.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on the next step in the Department's plans for Pre-School Standardisation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with the Department of Education on Pre-School Standardisation.

### **11. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

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

### **12. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 January 2024 at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

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