



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

22 January 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Brooks MLA
Mr Colin Crawford MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Mr Peter Martin 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
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA



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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

No Chairperson's Business was discussed.

3. Declaration of Interests

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that he is a member of the board of Governors of Killinchy Primary School.

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.

Mr Crawford made a declaration of interest that he is a member of the board of Governors of Harryville Primary School.

Mrs Mason made a declaration of interest that she is a member of the board of Governors of St. Macartan's Primary School, Loughinisland.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee discussed correspondence from Cara Hunter MLA highlighting the Use of Artificial (AI) in educational settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this subject as part of its Forward Work Programme.



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The Committee noted correspondence from the Deputy Chair regarding the launch of his private member's bill consultation on the workforce in Irish Medium education.

The Committee noted correspondence from Michelle Guy MLA regarding its Forward Work Programme.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 15 January 2025.

6. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry

The Committee noted that Professor EJ Renold was unable to attend the meeting.

The Committee noted briefing papers on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Wales.

The Committee discussed correspondence from the Women's Rights Network provided in relation to the RSE Inquiry.

Mr Martin proposed:

That the Committee for Education write to the Women's Rights Network and ask them to come in expeditiously for an oral briefing to the Education Committee.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2; Noes 7; Abstain 0.

AYES

Mr David Brooks

Mr Peter Martin

NOES

Mr Danny Baker

Mr Colin Crawford

Mrs Michelle Guy

Ms Cara Hunter

Mrs Cathy Mason



Mr Nick Mathison

Mr Pat Sheehan

The motion fell.

The Committee noted correspondence from academics including Professor EJ Renold linking to their paper on young people's views on gender diversity in the journal 'Sex Education'; this will be included in the Committee's inquiry papers.

7. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry – Oral Briefing from Parenting Focus

The Committee noted a submission to the RSE inquiry from Parenting Focus.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:27pm:

Ms Emma Hitchen, Senior Participation and Research Officer, Parenting Focus

Ms Muriel Bailey, Head of Services and Operations, Parenting Focus

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 Parenting Focus seeking further information on its Summerhill Programme.

8. School Governance - Oral Briefing by the Department of Education.

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:07pm:

Mr Ray Caldwell, Director of Corporate Services and Education Governance,
Department of Education

Ms Kim Martin, Deputy Director of Governance, Department of Education



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Ms Nicola Adams, Head of Governor Policy and Appointment Teams, Department of Education

Ms Susan O'Boyle, Managing Inspector - Post Primary, Special Education, Department of Education.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on school Governance.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Brooks left the meeting at 3:50pm.

Mr Martin left the meeting at 4:08pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an oral briefing on Restraint and Seclusion.

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

- Asking why it doesn't collect data on school complaints and how it envisages its complaint handling develop;
- Asking it to lower its threshold of when its intervention is appropriate;
- Asking what guidance is available for school governors regarding schools asking for voluntary contributions from parents;
- Asking for further action to be taken to ensure that schools are complying with the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act; and
- Asking what guidance is available for school governors on workload management and where responsibility lies if there are concerns regarding excessive workload.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

9.2 The Committee noted an invitation from the Allied Health Professions Federation Northern Ireland to an event in Long Gallery on 24 February 2025.

9.3 The Committee noted a request from Integrated AlumNI seeking an informal meeting with the Committee to discuss the integrated education system in Northern Ireland.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Integrated AlumNI to provide it with an oral briefing.

9.4 The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules Provisional Report Dates for 2025.

9.5 The Committee discussed correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding a concurrent Committee meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the concurrent meeting to take place on 14 May 2025.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence regarding a decision by the Minister of Education on Bangor Schools Integrated Status.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the correspondent indicating the action it is taking on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education seeking a response to the issues raised.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding bereavement policy in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the Minister's response with Marie Curie seeking its views on the response.

9.8 The Committee noted the Twenty Ninth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee setting out its short to medium term priorities and reports on which it would be retaining primacy pending further consideration. Members noted that this included a report relevant to the Department of Education on Managing the Schools Estate.

Mr Crawford made a Declaration of Interest that he is a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Clerk to the Finance Committee in regard to budget timeframes.

9.11 The Committee noted a budget improvement roadmap.

9.12 The Committee noted a Draft Budget 2025-26 factsheet.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Belfast Wide Early Years Project seeking information further to the Minister of Education's recent



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announcement on SEN reform regarding the role of the project in relation to the regional programme for two to three year olds.

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

- Information on the role of the project in relation to the regional programme for two to three year olds; and
- Clarity regarding budget allocation to the project from April 2025 onwards.

The Committee discussed a visit to a Belfast Wide Early Years Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit a Belfast Wide Early Years Project on 11 February 2025.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Mr Martin rejoined the meeting at 4:20pm.

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 29 January 2024 at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
29 January 2024