



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

12 February 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  
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 Colin Crawford MLA  
Ms Cara Hunter MLA



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

### **1. Apologies**

No apologies were received.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 2.01pm.

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

The Committee discussed the format of committee meetings.

The Committee noted the itinerary for its visit to Middletown Centre for Autism and concurrent meeting of the Committee for Education and the Committee for Health.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting with Rebecca Davis on Air Quality in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking if it has an air quality in schools policy.

The Committee noted a record of a Committee visit to the Sólás Special Needs charity on Tuesday 11 February 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on applications for funding.



## **5. Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 5 February 2025.

## **6. Special Educational Needs - Oral Briefing from Empowered Parents**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Empowered Parents.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:22pm:

Ms Aisling Crossin, Empowered Parents

Mr Michael Carson, Empowered Parents

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Martin left the meeting at 3:09pm

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

- Asking about the departmental strategy for parental engagement and support for parents of children with special educational needs;
- Seeking clarity on the definition of the SEN first approach.

## **7. Attendance and Educational Welfare Service – Oral Briefing from officials from the Department of Education and the Education Authority**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:14pm:

Ms Claire McClelland, Director of Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning, Department of Education

Mr Michael Leonard, Head of Additional Educational Needs Team, Department of Education



## Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Dougie Cusin, Head of Additional Educational Needs Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

Mr Martin joined the meeting at 3:17pm

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Education Authority.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:59pm:

Ms Una Turbitt, Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services,  
Education Authority

Mr Adrian Nugent, Head of Service, Education Welfare Services, Education Authority

Mr Michael Florida-James, Transformation Lead, Children and Young Peoples  
Services, Education Authority

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Crawford left the meeting at 4:39pm.

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

- Seeking further information on the HERO programme resource and the number of schools using the resource;
- Asking when the review of the Attendance Strategy will conclude; and



## Northern Ireland Assembly

- Seeking evidence of the effectiveness of prosecutions of parents including the costs involved, engagement with families prior to prosecutions and the number of cases in the system.

### **8. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry - Consideration and Analysis of Themes Correspondence**

The Committee considered the evidence received as part of its inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education.

#### **9. Correspondence**

9.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

9.2 The Committee noted a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission E-Newsletter for January 2025.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Parenting Focus.

9.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing 2024-25 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn information.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on budget.

9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to issues raised by a group of Nursery School Principals.

**Agreed:** the Committee agreed to share the response with the group of Nursery School Principals seeking their views.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence regarding a replacement pitch at Lisneal College.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond indicating that it would take evidence from the Education Authority on this matter at its meeting on 26 February 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking an unredacted minute of meeting of the Minister of Education, the Minister for communities and the principal of Lisneal College.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Kids Together Belfast.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence regarding Voluntary School Fees.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on its policy on voluntary school fees.

9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from Parentkind regarding the All-party Group on Parental Participation.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from Executive Office on in relation to assistance with school enrolments for children living in asylum contingency accommodation or NIHE temporary non-standard accommodation.

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

9.11 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding Irish-medium Education (IME) sector's needs in regard to special educational needs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence the Department of Education providing an update on Pre-School Standardisation.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing an update on a Public Accounts Committee report on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 5:20pm.

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister on the School Uniforms Bill

9.15 The Committee noted a response from St Mays University College outlining how RSE is embedded within its Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the response to its RSE inquiry.

9.16 The Committee noted a response from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI on the appointment process for the Chairperson of the Education Authority.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister seeking an update on the appointment process for the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

9.17 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on its engagement with the Gillen Review Advisory Committee.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on what action was taken on action 181 in the report.

9.18 The Committee noted the thirty first Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.19 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on School Governance.

9.20 The Committee noted correspondence from Speakers for Schools seeking the Committee's support for an event for students to get to experience of Parliament buildings.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to support the Speakers for Schools event.

9.21 The Committee noted an invitation to a Lloyds Banking Group's apprenticeship and skills event.

Mr Martin left the meeting at 5:26pm

9.22 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health on the removal of on-site nurses from special schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking a briefing on the regional review of the healthcare needs of children with special educational needs.

9.23 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the role and funding of the Belfast Wide Early Years (BWEY) SEN and Programme.

### 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.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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

A concurrent meeting of the Committee for Education and the Committee for Health will take place on Wednesday 19 February 2025 at 2:00pm in Middletown Parish Church Hall.

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 February 2025 at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**26 February 2024**