



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

5 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  
Mr Colin Crawford 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)

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



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### 1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

### 2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson referred members to recent media coverage of capital investment in a sports pitch at Lisneal College.

The Chairperson put on record that the Committee's interest in this matter was not about attacking the reputation of the school.

He noted that this issue raised questions around wider processes around the allocation of capital investment.

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

- Seeking clarity on the precise timeline and milestones of the capital investment on this project, from the identification of need and feasibility study to prioritisation and scheduling; the role and seniority of the authorising officials in the process; whether the award was unusual or novel and any deviation from good practice in this case;
- Asking it to publish the risk assessment of the health and safety case made for the upgrade of the sports pitch at Lisneal College;
- Seeking clarity on current thresholds for minor and major works; and a process map on how projects are identified, applied for and prioritized; including an outline of how DE's financial delegation is managed within the Education Authority, detailing all checks, balances, controls and transparency arrangements in place to maintain financial thresholds and propriety.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with the Education Authority on this matter.

The Committee discussed a Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta event on the needs of the Irish Medium sector.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to an oral briefing from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Department of Education officials on the Irish Medium sector.

The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting on 21 January 2025 with Ms Rebecca Davis on air quality in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to this matter at its next meeting.

### 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 a briefing paper from Assembly Research on Educational underachievement in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** to consider in briefing paper when planning its Forward Work Programme going forward.

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Professor Knox for his work for the Committee.

### 5. Minutes of Proceedings

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 29 January 2025.

### 6. Ministerial Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Minister and a response from the Department of Education providing the SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:09pm:



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Mr Paul Givan, Minister of Education, Department of Education

Mr Ronnie Armour, Acting Permanent Secretary, Department of Education

Mrs Linsey Farrell, Deputy Secretary, Education Policy & Children's Services,  
Department of Education

Ms Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

The Minister and officials provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Martin made a declaration of interest that his sister-in-law is an educational psychologist.

Mr Crawford made a declaration that he was a member of the Board of Governors of Governor, Harryville Primary School which has Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPIMS) units.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking:

- If the Minister had discussed the Educational Maintenance Grant with the Minister for the Economy as the amount paid to students hasn't increased in 22 years;
- What interaction has there been with the Department of Health about support for SEN children who won't be able to take up further education;
- How the Department liaises with the Department of Health on Local impact teams;
- For an outcomes framework and a timeline against which to measure progress on the SEN Reform Agenda Delivery Plan.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with the Education Authority on the work of its Transitions Service.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Communities asking about its input into or consideration of the sports pitch upgrade at Lisneal College and any contribution made by the Department to the £710 thousand cost of the upgrade.



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Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 4:36pm

### **7. Restraint and Seclusion Case - Oral Briefing from Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

The Committee noted that the briefing had been postponed and would be rescheduled.

### **8. Correspondence**

8.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

8.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of Northern Ireland Civil Service sickness absence.

8.3 The Committee noted an invitation from Outscape to a conference.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the Department of Education's 2025-26 Budget.

**Agreed;** The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the Department of Education on the 2025-26 Budget.

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the recommendations in the QUB / Nuffield report on 'Experiences in Education among minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland'.

8.6 The Committee noted the Thirtieth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

8.7 The Committee noted a report from Pivotal 'Review of the first year of the restored Northern Ireland Executive'.

8.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding co-operation with the Voluntary and Community Sector on Public Sector Policy development.

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

8.9 The Committee noted a response from the Minister on the final Special Educational Needs Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan.



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8.10 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Education regarding the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill Committee Report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking to be copied into its reply to the Committee for Communities.

8.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing notice of Minister of Education to make an oral Ministerial statement.

8.12 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Zero Emissions vehicles and fleet management.

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

8.13 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education indicating that it does intend to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the draft budget for 2025-26.

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

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to discuss these issues with officials from the Department of Education and the Department of Health at a concurrent meeting of the Committee for Education and the Committee for Health.

8.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the EdIS Strategic Partner and School Management System Project.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an update on the EdIS project.

8.16 The Committee noted a programme for an Allied Health Professionals Federation Northern Ireland event.

8.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a summary of responses from a consultation on proposed changes to qualifications performance measures.

8.18 The Committee noted a briefing Paper from Queens University on the Curriculum Review of Northern Ireland.



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8.19 The Committee noted an invitation from Children in Northern Ireland to an event.

8.20 The Committee noted an Angel Eyes NI Winter 2025 Newsletter.

8.21 The Committee noted a report from the Royal Society of Chemistry on Future Workforce and Educational Pathways.

8.22 The Committee noted correspondence from Women's Rights Network Northern Ireland in relation to its RSE Inquiry.

8.23 The Committee noted correspondence from the Christian Institute regarding misinformation on RSE.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in its RSE report.

8.24 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee in regard to Primacy.

Mr Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 4:47pm.

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 4:47pm.

8.25 The Committee noted for diaries an invitation to the 4 Corners festival.

Mr Martin left the meeting at 4:48pm

### **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.



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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 February 2025 at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:51pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

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