



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

5 March 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr David Brooks MLA

Mr Colin Crawford MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Mr Peter Martin MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Ms Victoria Bourquin (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)

Present via Teleconference:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA



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

1. Apologies

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Informal briefing with Microsoft

The Committee noted a record of an informal briefing with Microsoft providing an overview on the use of AI in Education on Tuesday 25 February 2025 along with briefing papers.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted a copy of the Minister of Education's meeting with Lisneal College and that a copy of the meeting note/minutes will be placed in the Assembly Library. This minute was discussed at last week's meeting but was not yet in Committee papers at that time.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 26 February 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 2:03pm.



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6. Primary Legislation School Uniform Bill - Briefing by the Bill Office

The Committee noted a copy of the School Uniform Bill, an Assembly Bill Office presentation and background papers on legislative scrutiny.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:04pm:

Mr Stephen Orme, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Michelle Guy MLA joined the meeting at 2:08pm.

The witness left the meeting at 2:39pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the School Uniform Bill to the Examiner of Statutory Rules and request a provisional Legal Services Memorandum on the bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to public session at 2:40pm.

7. School Uniform Bill – Briefing by the Department of Education

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Clerk and the Department of Education and a report of the Department of Education's consultation on the Bill.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:41pm:

Ms Margaret Rose McNaughton, Director of Transport and Food in Schools,
Department of Education

Mrs Shirley Sweeney, Head of School Uniform Policy Team, Department of
Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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Cathy Mason MLA left the meeting at 3.35pm.

Cathy Mason MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.42pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3:44pm.

The briefing session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider at a future meeting draft notices of a call for evidence, a draft call for evidence and a provisional timeline for the Committee Stage.

The meeting adjourned at 3:44pm.

The meeting resumed at 3:50pm.

8. Capital Budget – Briefing by the Department of Education

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Clerk and the Department of Education.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:51pm:

Ms Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary, Sustainability and Infrastructure Group, Department of Education

Mr Seamus Gallagher, Acting Grade 5, Investment and Infrastructure, Department of Education

Mr Stephen Creagh, Deputy Director, Investment and Infrastructure, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4:52pm.

The briefing session was recorded by Hansard.



9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance sharing correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding further details and figures in relation to employer National Insurance costs and funding.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Business Office in relation to Teachers' Pension Annual Scheme Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health regarding Auditory Verbal Therapy (AVT) and what the Department of Health is doing to make training in AVT available for Speech and Language Therapists.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the correspondence to the AVUK charity.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Cubbie regarding a product they provide to address sensory issues experienced by SEN pupils.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward an update to Cubbie.

9.6 The Committee noted a written update from the Department of Education on its budget for 2024-25 and a draft budget for 2025-26.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom regarding a proposal relating to tackling online safety of women and girls.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from Linking Generations NI, requesting to brief the Education Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with Linking Generations NI.



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9.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Business Office regarding the quarterly sickness absence report in the Northern Ireland Civil Service for October – December 2024.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing clarity on the red status of three projects related to the Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC) and four projects related to integrated schools in ISNI Report Delivery Tracking System Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education for November 2024.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding the Northern Ireland Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs seeking views on the Agriculture Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that as there is no Committee position on this matter, members may engage with the Bill directly.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Nursing to the Department of Education Restraint and Seclusion Task and Finish Group detailing concerns that final statutory guidance may not be compliant with international human rights legislation and practice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to seek views on the matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an update from Children's Law Centre on Restraint and Seclusion in education settings.

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding Minutes from Lisneal College Meeting.



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9.15 The Committee noted correspondence regarding Education Authority guidance for Transgender Students.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to elaborate on the guidance.

9.16 The Committee noted correspondence regarding SEN afterschool childcare for children with complex needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Education requesting further information and seeking clarification on what work has been done with £1.9 million allocation for SEN childcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Childminding Association (NICMA) asking for an update on work progressing in this area under the childcare strategy.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite CCMS, CCFC and the voluntary grammars to brief the Committee on 12 March 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

Michelle Guy MLA requested that Members of the Committee show support to an event being held in Parliament Buildings for Caleb's Law.

Michelle Guy MLA also raised an issue regarding correspondence received by her from a teacher seeking an update on teachers' salary.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Education to request an update on teachers' salary and workload conditions; without prejudice to ongoing negotiations but mindful of the approaching end of the financial year.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:07pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
12 March 2025**