



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

9 April 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
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 facilities:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted a report and speaking notes for the informal meeting with Linking Generations on 1 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education supporting the work of Linking Generations, emphasising the cross cutting nature of the work and asking the Minister to meet with the organisation.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Assembly Research and Information Service on Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Education System.

The Chairperson welcomed the resolution of the teachers' pay dispute.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education welcoming the agreement and asking for a clear breakdown of actions being progressed to address workload issues, including:

- timelines for delivery; and
- the scope and timeline for the work of the independent review of workload.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Mr Campbell made a declaration of interest that he is a member of the Board of Governors for Harryville Primary School.

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



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 2 April 2025.

6. Sure Start

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Sure Start.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:07pm:

Ms Joy Poots, Member, Inner City South Belfast Sure Start

Mr Mervyn Bell, Project Coordinator, Sure Start

Ms Siobhan Meehan, Manager, Sure Start

Ms Tracey Ripley-McElvogue, Project coordinator, Sure Start.

Ms Penny Ambrose, Sure Start Coordinator, Sure Start.

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 3:03pm



Northern Ireland
Assembly

7. Early Learning and Childcare Strategy proposals for 2025-26

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:15pm:

Mr Paul Brush, Director of Early Years, Childcare & Children & Young People's Strategy, Department of Education

Ms Tina Dempster, Head of Early Learning and Childcare Strategy Team, Department of Education

Ms Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years - Intervention Programmes Team, Department of Education

Ms Christine Leacock, Head of Pre-School Education Team and lead on standardisation, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

- Clarity on any measures around budget sustainability for Sure Start, and their key community and voluntary sector delivery partners in the early year space;
- Enhanced salary support post standstill, for recruitment and non-attrition of qualified Sure Start staff putting workforce and targeted interventions at core of strategy;
- Clarity on resourcing for the out-of-area fund;
- Information on the Education Authority review of allocating pre-school pupil numbers in the non-statutory sector;
- Information on the criteria used by the Education Authority to allocate places;
- Information on flexibility in the budget; and
- Whether a rural needs impact assessment was done as part of the policy development process, and what it determined.

The Committee adjourned at 4:11pm.

The Committee resumed at 4:18pm



Northern Ireland Assembly

8. Taskforce report on development of a proposed model for support for controlled schools

The Committee noted a Taskforce Report - Development of a Proposed Model for Support for Controlled Schools.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:18pm:

Mr Mark Baker, Chief Executive, Controlled Schools' Support Council

Mr. Andrew Scott, Director of Corporate Services and Governance, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 4:45pm.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

9.2 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health regarding the Healthcare needs of children with Special Educational Needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Minister of Education seeking his assessment of the adequacy of the Allied Health Professions provision and the sustainability of operating a parallel workforce planning process.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding a review of Stranmillis University College Teacher Demand Model Numbers.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to write to the Committee for the Economy asking that it share the Department of Education's response when this is received.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding removal of on-site nurses from Special Schools.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding its investment in outdoor equipment for schools.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education welcoming the flexibility in financial arrangements for the scheme and seeking an update on the rollout of the curriculum capital program in terms of specific investment in areas such as PE, music and drama, detailing the allocations this year; and asking when schools will start to see the benefit of this.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee of Finance providing an analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

9.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding its Engagement with the Gillen Review Advisory Committee.

9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department for Communities regarding the upkeep of listed buildings on the Middletown Autism Centre Site.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to share the response with the Middletown Autism Centre.

9.9 The Committee noted a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission E-Newsletter for February 2025.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding afterschool provision for children with Special Education Needs.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.

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

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from Cubbie seeking a meeting with the Committee on its Sensory Hub.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this at its next meeting along with an update from the Education Authority on its evaluation of the system.

9.13 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding concerns about the provision of health services in schools.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 5:03pm.

9.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding support for parents of children with Special Educational Needs.



Northern Ireland Assembly

9.15 The Committee noted a Policy Brief on Integrated Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information regarding the investment outlined.

9.16 The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson to visit the Buddy Bear Trust.

9.17 The Committee noted an invitation to the Deputy Chairperson to visit the Buddy Bear Trust.

9.18 The Committee noted the 36th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

9.19 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the School Enhancement Programme.

9.20 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding engagement with the Gillen Review Advisory Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include this in its RSE report.

9.21 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Interim Public Sector Transformation Board.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance seeking clarity on its approach to seek Treasury approval to fully reprofile any unused funding.

9.22 The Committee noted correspondence from St. Francis' Primary Lurgan on a school crossing patrol.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority sharing the correspondence and asking if it was considering a review of policy on this matter.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to review its Forward Work Programme following Easter recess.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

11. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 30 April 2025 at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:23pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
30 April 2025