



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Concurrent meeting of the Committee for Education and Committee for Health sitting informally

Informal Minutes of Proceedings

19 February 2025

Meeting Location: Middletown Parish Church Hall

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Danny Baker MLA
Mr David Brooks MLA
Mrs Linda Dillon MLA
Mr Danny Donnelly MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr Peter Martin MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Keith McBride (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)



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Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2:05pm in public session. (Informal)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Alan Robinson, Mr Pat Sheehan, Miss Órlaithí Flynn and Miss Nuala McAllister. Mr Alan Chambers, Mr Colin Crawford, Mrs Diane Dodds, Mr Colin McGrath.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked the Middletown Centre for Autism for hosting the Committee's visit and welcomed its role as a centre for excellence giving prominence, raising awareness and promoting good practice for autism in Ireland.

Committee members consented to the informal meeting being broadcast.

3. Oral Briefing by the Independent Autism Reviewer

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Independent Autism Reviewer.

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

Mrs Ema Cubitt, Independent Autism Reviewer

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Hunter joined the meeting at 2:18pm.

Mrs Dillon left the meeting at 2:34pm



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4. Oral briefing from the Chief Allied Health Professions Officer for Northern Ireland: how Department of Education and Department of Health jointly can impact positively on outcomes for mental health, autism and Special Educational Needs; including via the Children's Services Co-operation Act.

The Committee noted

- a briefing paper from the Department of Health;
- a briefing paper from the Department of Education;
- an Assembly Research briefing paper on the Children's Services Co-operation Act and pooling of resources;
- the first report on the operation of the Children's Services Co-operation Act;
- and correspondence from the Minister of Health on the removal of on-site nurses from special schools.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:17pm:

Professor Michelle Tennyson, Chief Allied Health Professions Officer, Department of Health

Ms Geraldine Teague Allied Health Professionals consultant, Public Health Agency

Maurice Leeson, Programme Manager of Children's Emotional Health and Well-being Services, Strategic Planning and Performance Group, Department of Health

Mr Nigel Chambers, Head of Learning Disability & Autism, Department of Health

Ms Janis Scallon, Director for Inclusion, Department of Education

Ms Brenda Shearer, Head of Special Education & Inclusion Policy Team,
Department of Education

Ms Lorraine Brown, Head of Special Education – Early Years & Pupil
Support, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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Mr Donnelly made a declaration of interest that his wife is a teacher in a special school.

Mr Martin made a declaration of interest that a member of his family is an educational psychologist.

Committee members noted that they would like to follow up on the following issues at formal committee meetings:

- Further information on the SEN Delivery plan;
- The need for a SEN baseline for March 2026;
- The need for a joint education and health workforce plan;
- Further information on the proposed 'encompass' database;
- How many a) Irish-speaking speech and language therapists and b) Allied Health Professionals in total are there; and
- Seeking an update on access NI checks in education.

5. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

6. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

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