Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

11 December 2024

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:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed members that the committee's agenda for the meeting explores some human rights themes in keeping with International Human Rights Day.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted an Assembly Research paper on school governance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the paper with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the paper with the Bright Futures Project Peaches

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 4 December 2024.

6. Priorities for Ministerial briefing

Ms Hunter joined the meeting at 2:05pm.

The Committee discussed its priorities for its oral briefing with the Minister for Education scheduled for Wednesday 5 February 2024.

7. Newcomer Children - Oral Briefing from Authors of Research, Queens University Belfast

The Committee noted briefing papers from the researchers.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:06pm:

Dr Rebecca Loader, Senior Researcher, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Aisling O'Boyle, Director of the Centre for Language Education Research, Queen's University Belfast

Professor Joanne Hughes, Director of the Centre for Shared Education, Queen's University Belfast

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on obstacles faced by Newcomer Children.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on educational achievement rates broken down by ethnic background for Northern Ireland.

8. Newcomer Children - Oral Briefing by Education Authority Officials

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Education Authority.

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

Ms Una Turbitt, Assistant Director, Pupil Wellbeing and Protection, Education Authority

Ms Karen Turner, Deputy Head of the Intercultural Service, Education Authority

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on support provided to Newcomer Children.

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.

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

- Clarity around funding for newcomer children and funding flexibility in respect of newcomer children who arrive after the pupil census has been carried out;
- The number of requests made to schools for in-year admissions; and
- How the Department is addressing problems for post-primary pupils accessing places in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the report ‘Experiences of Education among minority ethnic groups in NI’ with the Department of Education seeking a response to its recommendations.

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

- If there are sufficient resources for Intercultural Education Service (IES); and
- If the Intercultural Education Service support early years settings; and
- What guidance is provided on home language use.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland raising concerns about the lack of engagement from the Home Office on this matter.

The Committee adjourned at 4:18pm.

The Committee resumed at 4:22pm.

9. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral Briefing from Alliance for Choice.

The Committee noted an RSE inquiry submission from Alliance for Choice.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:22pm:

Ms Danielle Roberts, Co-Convenor, Alliance for Choice & Organiser with Reclaim the Agenda

Dr Emma Campbell, Co-Convenor, Alliance for Choice & Reproductive Citizenship Researcher, Ulster University

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 4:36pm.

Mrs Guy left the meeting at 4:36pm.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted an index and summary of correspondence.

10.2 The Committee noted Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission E-Newsletter November 2024.

10.3 The Committee noted a response from Sport NI on the School Sports Programme.

10.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the difficulties faced by parents with multiple births.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the correspondent that raised this matter with it seeking their views on the response.

10.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the RAISE Programme.

10.6 The Committee noted Northern Ireland Civil Service Quarterly Sickness Absence for July 2024 – September 2024.

10.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on RSE

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include this as part of its Inquiry into RSE.

10.9 The Committee noted the twenty eighth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

10.10 The Committee noted Correspondence from the Committee for Communities on the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

10.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on a NIPSO report relating to restraint in an educational setting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the correspondent that raised this matter with it.

10.12 The Committee noted correspondence from Peace Summit Partners seeking a meeting with it regarding the draft Programme for Government.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask Peace Summit Partners to provide it with a written briefing on educational issues.

10.13 The Committee noted correspondence from Ulster University seeking a meeting with it to present research which profiles the Classroom Assistant workforce in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Ulster University to provide it with an oral briefing on its research.

10.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on funding arrangements for the Buddy Bear School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the correspondent that raised this matter with it.

10.15 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on funding for the Belfast Wide Early Years (BWEY) pilot.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the Belfast Wide Early Years (BWEY) pilot.

10.16 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing an update on the work of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Implementation Team.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing from the Department of Education and the Education Authority on the implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

10.17 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Public Expenditure 2024-25 October Monitoring.

10.18 The Committee noted a response from Department of Education on a pilot project at Rossmar School.

10.19 The Committee noted a response from Education Authority on the role of employer in safeguarding

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the correspondent that raised this matter with it.

10.20 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on October Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance asking when decisions are expected on proposals under consideration by the Interim Public Sector Transformation Board.

10.21 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on SEN Regulations, transformation and end-to-end review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarification on SEN placements.

10.22 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to Youth Assembly correspondence about guidance on the use of mobile phones in school settings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and share it with the Youth Assembly.

10.23 The Committee noted correspondence from Department of Education on a School Uniform Consultation Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 5:17pm.

10.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding staffing at the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education for further information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to public session at 5:25pm.

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.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 8 January 2024 via teleconference at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:29pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education
15 January 2024