



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

22 April 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker 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)

Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Ms Catriona Doherty (Legal Advisor) (Item 8 only)

Apologies:

Mr David Brooks MLA

Mr Jon Burrows MLA



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Brooks and Mr Burrows.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded members that the Assembly's Members' Survey is currently live and will close on Friday 24th April.

The Committee discussed correspondence from Children's Law Centre to the regarding concerns about the implementation of the revised SEND framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education and the Education Authority forwarding the correspondence, stating that it does not believe that the status quo in terms of SEN services is acceptable and asking how they plan to engage with stakeholders to address the concerns raised.

3. Declaration of Interest

Mr Martin made a declaration of interest that he was a special adviser to the Minister of Education when the children and young people emotional health and well-being framework was published.

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that his wife was employed by Angel Eyes who had co-signed the correspondence from Children's Law Centre to the regarding concerns about the implementation of the revised SEND framework

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered draft timelines for the Committee Stages of the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill and the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee considered optimal dates for extension of Committee Stage for each bill.

Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

Mr Sheehan proposed:

“That the Committee Stage of the Irish-Medium (Workforce Plan) Bill be extended to 30 August 2026”.

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Mr Pat Sheehan MLA, Mr Danny Baker MLA, Ms Cara Hunter MLA, Mrs Cathy Mason MLA.

Noes: Mr Peter Martin MLA.

Abstained: None

Did not vote: Mr Nick Mathison MLA, Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Absent: Mr David Brooks MLA, Mr Jon Burrows MLA

Agreed: the Committee agreed that the end date for the Committee Stage of the Irish-Medium (Workforce Plan) Bill be extended to 30 August 2026.

Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill

Mr Baker proposed:

“That the Committee Stage of the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill be extended to 18 September 2026”.

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Mr Nick Mathison MLA, Mr Pat Sheehan MLA, Mr Danny Baker MLA, Mrs Michelle Guy MLA, Ms Cara Hunter MLA, Mrs Cathy Mason MLA.

Noes: Mr Peter Martin MLA,

Abstained: None

Did not vote: None

Absent: Mr David Brooks MLA, Mr Jon Burrows MLA



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: the Committee agreed that the Committee Stage of the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill be extended to 18 September 2026.

The Committee noted that Assembly advisors were preparing to brief it on its proposed Bill to allow all pupils to wear trousers in school at its next meeting on 29 April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the results of its consultation on its proposed Bill to allow all pupils to wear trousers in school to the Minister of Education and ask that he provide right for all pupils to wear trousers in school.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 15 April 2026.

6. Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework - Oral Briefing by Department of Education Officials

The Committee noted a briefing paper.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:04pm.

Ms Claire McClelland, Director of Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning, Department of Education

Ms Glenda Davies, Pupil Support Team, Department of Education

Ms Nicola Topping, Assistant Senior Education Officer, Pupil Wellbeing Services, Department of Education.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health seeking clarity on the need for an intervention to address mental health and wellbeing in primary schools.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an update on staffing on the Reach, Being Well, Doing Well and Flare programmes, intended plans and resources for anti-bullying work.

7. Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda - Oral Briefing by Department of Education and Education Authority

The Committee noted a briefing paper.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:00pm.

Ms Deirdre Ward, Director for SEN Strategic Policy, Department of Education

Dr Tomas Adell, Chief Transformation Officer, Education Authority

The witnesses provided the Committee in relation to the Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Guy left the meeting at 5:05pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking a breakdown of costings for each transformation project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 5:11pm.

8. General Teaching Council Bill - Oral Briefing by the Examiner of Statutory Rules

The Committee noted legal advice.

The Committee noted a response from the

The following witness joined the meeting at 5:11pm.

Ms Catriona Doherty, Legal Advisor, NIA Legal Services



Northern Ireland Assembly

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on the General Teaching Council Bill's provision for subordinate legislation, and the stated position of the Department in clarifying correspondence.

Mrs Guy rejoined the meeting at 5:13pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee returned to public session at 5:25pm

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

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 5:29pm

9. SL1-The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee noted an SL1, draft statutory rule and an explanatory memorandum for the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views on the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

10. SR 2026/53 The Education (Pupil Reporting) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee discussed the Education (Pupil Reporting) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules would report on 24 April regarding the technical aspects of the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Statutory Rule to its next meeting.



Northern Ireland Assembly

11. Virtual Tour of Wish Charter Schools

The Committee noted that the tour has been postponed.

12. Correspondence

12.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

12.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Dr Karen Kerr providing a Report on Outdoor Learning in Northern Ireland's Schools in 2026.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to forward the report to the Department of Education seeking its views on the issues raised.

12.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a written Briefing on Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillation (AED) training in schools.

12.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education proving the Department's response to the Independent Review of Statutory Assessment and Publication of Policy Framework for Statutory Assessment.

12.5 The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement on the New Statutory Assessment Framework.

12.6 The Committee noted correspondence from Northern Ireland Environment Link with an update on its work regarding education for sustainable development (ESD), engagement with the curriculum taskforce, and offering to engage further with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing on education for sustainable development

12.7 The Committee noted an invitation from the Education Authority to the Joint Consultative Forum meeting on Thursday 23 April 2026.



Northern Ireland Assembly

12.8 The Committee noted Correspondence from the Committee for Health providing a copy of its correspondence to the Education Authority regarding SEN Summer Schemes.

12.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing an update on the restoration of C2K school services following a cyber-attack.

12:10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Forest School Association on outdoor learning.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the forward work programme.

14. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 29 April 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:32pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
29 April 2026