



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

15 April 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30 Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr David Brooks MLA

Mr Jon Burrows 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 Julie Byers (Legal Advisor) (Item 9 only)

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



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1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority on special school summer schemes and correspondence from an individual on this matter. Members noted that the Assembly had been recalled during Easter recess to discuss the matter, that the decision to cancel the schemes has been reversed and provision has been reinstated.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking an update on its planning for these schemes and how they will be managed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health asking how they will work together to support these schemes going forward.

The Committee discussed recent reports of cyber-attacks on the Education Authority.

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

- Information on the nature of the attack;
- What steps EA is taking to ensure that anybody whose data may have been compromised is being properly advised and supported;
- What engagement it has had with the Information Commissioner;
- What assurances EA can provide around measures being put in place to protect the system from attack in the future; and
- Information on investment to upgrade its systems.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Gary Middleton to wish him very well and thank him for his work on the Committee.



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3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted correspondence from Assembly Research providing links to thematic papers to support scrutiny of the draft budget.

The Committee discussed the number of Special Educational Needs placements outstanding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on Special Educational Needs placements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education advising that given the urgency of the matter, an update to the Assembly iro Special Needs placements is overdue.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 25 March 2026.

6. Religion and World views – Education for All – Oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:12pm.

Dr James Nelson, Senior lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Rebecca Loader, Assistant Research Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.



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The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on the Religion and World Views - Education for All report.

Mr Martin joined the meeting at 2:18pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Brooks made a declaration of interest that he was a member of the Elim Church.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking if, in due course, it will be carrying out a wider public consultation on the content of a redrafted RE syllabus.

7. Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill – Oral briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Mr Baker and a briefing note from Assembly Research on potential consultees.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:05pm.

Mr Danny Baker, MLA - West Belfast, Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Patrick Gaffney, Policy Advisor, Sinn Féin

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities asking how Holiday Meals Payments could affect other benefits received by families.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance and the Executive Office asking if funding for Bill could be ringfenced.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a draft survey on the Bill.

The Committee discussed a list of consultees for the Bill and agreed to add Care, the Evangelical Alliance and the Centre for Social Justice to the merged list.

Agreed: A list of consultees on the Bill was agreed as amended.



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The Committee adjourned at 4:03pm.

The Committee resumed at 4:10pm

8. Irish Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill – Oral briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Mr Sheehan and a briefing note from Assembly Research on potential consultees.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:10pm.

Mr Pat Sheehan, MLA - West Belfast, Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Patrick Gaffney, Policy Advisor, Sinn Féin

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Baker left the meeting at 4:49pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed a draft survey on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a list of consultee's on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 4:52pm.

9. General Teaching Council Bill – oral briefing from Assembly Legal Services

The Committee noted:

- A Convention Rights Memorandum addressing issues arising from the European Convention on Human Rights and Windsor Framework in relation to the Bill;
- Correspondence from the Department of Education setting out the proposed scope and detailed content of the Subordinate Regulations in relation to the Bill; and



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- Legal advice in relation to the Bill.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:52pm.

Ms Julie Byers, Legal Advisor, NIA Legal Services

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on the contents of a Convention Rights Memo.

Mr Baker rejoined the meeting at 5:04pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee returned to public session at 5:16pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking further information on statutory rules.

Agreed; The Committee agreed to consider potential amendments to the bill at its next meeting.

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

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 5:17pm

10. Disposal and Retention Schedule

The Committee considered the Department of Education Disposal and Retention Schedule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it had no objection to the Department of Education Disposal and Retention Schedule.

11. 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 20 April re the technical aspects of the rule.



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

12. Correspondence

12.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

12.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker providing a public petition on the 'Protection of Christianity and Christian Ethos in our Schools'.

12.3 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual in relation to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to evidence for its consideration of the SL1.

12.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on funding for Tiny Life.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education supporting continued funding for the TinyStart programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with Tiny Life.

12.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on strategically important small schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the board of governors of St Mary's Primary School, Fivemiletown who raised this matter with it.

12.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing an analysis of the February Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education for information on an easement on childcare.

12.7 The Committee noted correspondence from CSSC regarding the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations (NI) 2026.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to evidence for its consideration of the statutory rule.

12.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Business Office regarding the Education (Pupil Reporting) (Amendment) Regulations.

12.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office providing a copy of correspondence to the Department of Education regarding the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant.

12.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy seeking a further joint event with the Committee for Education in respect of skills issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to engage with the Committee for the Economy to arrange an event.

12.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for the Executive Office providing a copy of correspondence to the Minister of Education seeking an update on the work being undertaken under the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls framework.

12.12 The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement regarding publication of a NICS HR Review.

12.13 The Committee noted correspondence from SIBNI providing the Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education.

12.14 The Committee noted an invitation to an Improving Air Quality in Schools – Leaders Making It Happen Webinar.

12.15 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding the ITE Bursary Scheme 2026-27.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share a response from the Department of Education on this matter.

12.16 The Committee noted an invitation from Cubbie to the opening of a Cubbie at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.



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12.17 The Committee noted a response from the Public Health Agency on Clean Air in Schools.

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

12.18 The Committee noted is a response from the Minister for Education on Updated Clean Air in Schools Guidance in England.

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

12.19 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing a written briefing paper on the Enhanced Support Model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to evidence for its SEN inquiry.

12.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing an SL1 for the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

12.21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding Conferences and Engagement Events in relation to the Enhanced Support Model.

12.22 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice seeking the Committee's views on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an nil response to the call for evidence.

12.23 The Committee noted an invitation to a Taking Boys Seriously - ARK Policy Roundtable event.

12.24 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding a demonstration of its Digital Statementing System.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond indicating that regretfully, members would be unable to attend the demonstration at this time.



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12.25 The Committee noted correspondence from Minister of Education regarding engagement with Executive Ministers on an Education and Training (Post Compulsory School Age) Bill.

12.26 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office providing the Public Reporting Programme 2026-2027.

12.27 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding the ITE Bursary Scheme 2026-27.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share a response from the Department of Education on this matter.

12.28 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on TFC Eligibility and Wear and Tear Allowance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Correspondent that raised this issue with it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking to receive a copy of any response from the Department of Finance on this issue.

12.29 The Committee noted correspondence inviting the Chair to speak at the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series event in the Long Gallery on 22 April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content that the Chairperson should speak on its behalf at the event.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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



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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 22 April 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:36pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
22 April 2026