



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

18 March 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

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)

Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Present via teleconference facilities:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Apologies:

Mr Jon Burrows MLA



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The meeting commenced at 2:01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr Burrows.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 11 March 2026.

6. Effective School Leadership in Disadvantaged Schools

The Committee noted a briefing paper and a report on Effective School Leadership in Disadvantaged Schools.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:03pm.



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Professor Noel Purdy, Director of Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement, Stranmillis University College

Dr Emilia Symington, Researcher, Stranmillis University College

Ms Katrina Moore, Retired Principal, Malone Integrated College

Mr Pádraig Ó Mianáin, Retired Principal, Saint Brigid's College.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Effective School Leadership in Disadvantaged Schools.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Martin joined the meeting at 2:26pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education sharing the research seeking:

- An assessment of how he envisages translating the good practice represented into a whole-system impact; and
- an update on progress on the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee report 'Closing the Gap'.

7. Youth Services - Oral Briefing by Department of Education, and Education Authority Officials

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on issues raised by Youth Work Alliance.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:28pm.

Ms Julie Humphries, Head of Youth Work Policy Team, Department of Education

Mr Andrew Scott, Director of Collaborative Education and Youth, Department of Education

Dr Tomas Adell, Chief Transformation Officer, Education Authority

Ms Arlene Kee, Assistant Director, Youth Services, Education Authority.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Youth Services.



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This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Martin left the meeting at 3:28pm.

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that he was a parent of a Young Person who went through the Creative Arts and Digital Innovation (CADi) programme.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted correspondence from PlayBoard NI asking to brief the Committee on its report 'Why Play Matters in Primary school'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with Playboard on the report.

8.3 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on Safeguarding Children with Allergies.

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

8.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on the accuracy of attendance and absence recording in schools.

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

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the Commissioner for Public Appointments on the role of the commissioner in relation to the GTC Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for the GTC Bill.

8.6 The Committee noted the 59th report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding a proposed visit to its Belfast office to see a demonstration of the Digital Statementing System.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that members would liaise with the Committee office regarding availability.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding SEN Provision at St Paul's High School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to evidence for its Strategic Review of Current SEN provision and Transformation Agenda.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education and the Education Authority regarding accommodation needs for SEN provision.

8.9 The Committee noted correspondence followed by an update requesting to rescind the correspondence.

8.10 The Committee noted correspondence from OFCOM on its call for action from social media firms to protect children.

8.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Dr Aisling Hylands providing a policy brief on Early Years Workforce Support Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with Dr Hylands on Early Years Workforce Support Policy.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Mr Martin rejoined the meeting at 4:28pm

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

10. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.



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11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 25 March 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
25 March 2026