



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

27 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Brooks MLA

In attendance: Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Attended via teleconference facilities:
Mr Danny Baker MLA
Mr Jon Burrows MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA



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Apologies: Mrs Julie Middleton MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs Julie Middleton MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

None.

3. Declaration of Interest

Ms Hunter made a declaration of interest that she is a member of the technical advisory council for Synthesia AI.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 20 May 2026.



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6. Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill – Oral briefing by school principals

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.02pm

Micheál Mac Giolla Ghunna, Principal, Coláiste Feirste

Diarmaid Ua Bruadair, Principal, Gaelcholáiste Dhoire

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.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

7. Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill – Oral briefing by Children in Northern Ireland

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.05pm

Dr Ernest Purivs, Head of Policy, Children in Northern Ireland

Bethany Ebron, Chief Executive Officer, Community Intercultural Programme,
Children in Northern Ireland

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

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 3.06pm



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This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 3.13pm

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 3.30pm

Mr Burrows rejoined the meeting at 3.33pm

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

The Committee moved into closed session at 3.57pm

8. Committee Bill to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers – Committee consideration

The Committee considered the draft Explanatory and Financial Memorandum and a notification letter to the Office of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly regarding introduction of the Committee Bill.

The Committee returned to public session at 4.09pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum and the letter to the Office of the Speaker.

9. Convention Rights for Private Members' Bills – Briefing by Legal Services

The Committee agreed the Convention Rights memos for both the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill and Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.



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10. General Teaching Council Bill – Retention and Disposal Schedule

The Committee considered the General Teaching Council Bill Retention and Disposal Schedule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it had no objection to the General Teaching Council Bill Retention and Disposal Schedule.

The Committee adjourned at 4.16pm

The Committee resumed at 4.27pm

11. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Committee consideration

The Committee considered the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026. A number of Members advised that their position would be consistent with that of Children’s Law Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue next week and to come to a position.

12. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Oral briefing from Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

The following witnesses joined the meeting online at 4.36pm

Ruth Sedgewick, Head of Northern Ireland Office, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Sue McBride, Policy Advisor, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists



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The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme: Interim evaluation report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to both the Department of Education and the Department of Health to:

- Establish the extent of joint commissioning of Speech, Language and Communication services;
- Consider creating the role of senior cross-departmental SLTC champion;
- Consider secondment of Speech and Language therapists into the Department to influence strategy;
- Seek enhancement of apprenticeship opportunities in allied health professions;
- Outline progress with the programme for screening in SLCT for early years and primary; and
- register Committee concerns that there is no reference to SLCT within the proposed Graduated Response Framework.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

13. Correspondence

13.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.



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13.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

13.3 The Committee considered an invitation from Glenveagh School for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend a cross-directorate meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson will attend the meeting.

13.4 The Committee considered correspondence from Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster regarding Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Bill Sponsor.

13.5 The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Authority regarding special school summer schemes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Education Authority in the Autumn session.

13.6 The Committee noted the correspondence from the Committee for Health making a nil return regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill and the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

13.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Communities regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with Department of Communities officials.



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13.8 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the Education Authority Behaviour Support Unit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from Education Authority.

13.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with Department of Communities officials.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education for comment.

13.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

13.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding prosecution for non-attendance.

13.12 The Committee noted correspondence from HERe NI regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

13.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding the Five-Year Budget Strategy for Education consultation report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue during the Ministerial briefing on 10 June 2026.



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13.14 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding its 'Business Plan 2025-26 End of Year Report on progress'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue during the Ministerial briefing on 10 June 2026.

13.15 The Committee considered correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding the absence of budget for 2026-27.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to establish the impact of the absence of a budget for 2026-2027 and request written and oral briefing from the Department of Education on this issue.

13.16 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual providing follow-up evidence to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer this to the Department of Education for comment.

13.17 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a Special Education Needs post-primary placement.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Education to seek to expedite the provision of departmental advice on the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite primary school principals to give evidence as part of the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.



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14. Any Other Business

The Clerk advised that following input from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the RaISe team amended and republished its paper re the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill on the Education Committee website. A draft letter to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will be provided in matters arising on 3 June for the Committee's approval.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 03 June 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.25pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
03 June 2026