



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

29 April 2026

**Meeting Location:** Room 29 Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker 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)

Ms Claire Milliken ( Senior Assistant Clerk) ( item 9 only)

Mr Jonathan Redpath (Bill Clerk) ( item 9 only)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Ms Karen Clarke (Research Officer) ( item 7 & 8 only)



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Ms Sinead McMurray (Research Officer) ( item 7 & 8 only)

**Apologies:** Mr David Brooks MLA

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

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Brooks.

### 2. Chairperson's Business

Ms Hunter joined the meeting at 2:01pm.

Mr Burrows joined the meeting at 2:02pm.

The Committee discussed the Minister of Education's Oral Statement on teacher workload, the associated published action plan and its impact on Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) workload.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education:

- Seeking clarity on the likely resource allocation required to implement the action plan;
- Asking if the document has been agreed with the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC);
- Asking what engagement the Department will have with the NITC to ensure that the action plan addresses concerns at school level;
- Asking what interventions are going to be taken forward to address SENCO workload; and
- Seeking assurance on the availability of earmarked funding for SENCO release.

### 3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted the signing and delivery of Committee Motions to extend the Committee Stage of the Irish-Medium (Workforce Plan) Bill to 30 August 2026, and to extend the Committee Stage of the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill to 18 September 2026.

The Committee discussed Special Educational Needs (SEN) placements.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to follow up previous correspondence to the Department of Education on this matter.

### **5. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 22 April 2026.

### **6. Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda – Committee Consideration**

The Committee noted correspondence providing information on WISH inclusive schools.

The Committee discussed its Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to item 10 at 2:14pm.

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

The Committee noted the 62th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee considered the Education (Pupil Reporting) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules was content with the technical aspects of the rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Education has considered the Education (Pupil) Regulations (Northern Ireland) and has no objection to the Rule.

### 11. Correspondence

11.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

11.2 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on St Paul's High School SEN Provision.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the Principal of St Paul's High School.

11.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Outscape about the Launch of a new People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland (POMNI) report.

11.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Principal of Ballymacward Primary School regarding concerns about funding for the Being Well Doing Well Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond indicating that it has written to the Department of Education about this matter and will forward the Department's response idc.

11.5 The Committee noted correspondence from AdviceNI and Feeding Britain providing a copy of correspondence to the Minister of Education regarding automatic enrolment to free school meals for Universal Credit Claimants.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department for Communities about the issues raised in the correspondence.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to papers for the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

11.6 The Committee noted the 62nd Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

11.7 The Committee noted correspondence responding to the Minister's reply on the ITE Bursary Scheme 2026-27.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on the Bursary Scheme.

11.8 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education indicating there would not be an extension on Pre-School Inclusion Funding. Members recorded their disappointment with this decision.

11.9 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on Curriculum Review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with NI Environment Link.

11.10 The Committee noted correspondence from Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI) providing a research report 'A Higher Skills Ambition for Northern Ireland'.

11.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists NI regarding the Special Education Needs (SEN) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the Department of Education seeking its views on the concerns raised.

11.12 The Committee noted correspondence from Benedict Blythe Foundation regarding engagement on possible legislation to protect children with allergies in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an informal meeting with the Benedict Blythe Foundation.

11.13 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on advice to parents of children joining the education system.

11.14 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding the Community and Voluntary Sector.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the ACCORD Partnership who raised these issues with it.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

11.15 The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding March Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

11.16 The Committee noted correspondence from Minister of Education regarding an oral Statement on the North South Ministerial Council meeting of 22 April 2026.

11.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Independent Autism Reviewer providing the First Annual Report of the Independent Autism Reviewer.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Reviewer recording its thanks for her contribution to the work of the Committee in her first year in post.

11.18 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant.

11.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance seeking views on the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted a nil response.

11.20 The Committee noted correspondence on the ITE Bursary Scheme 2026-27.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to item 7 at 2:25pm.

## **7. Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill - Oral Briefing by RaISe**

The Committee noted a briefing paper on the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:25pm.

Ms Karen Clarke, Research Officer, RaISe

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Martin made a declaration of interest that he was a special advisor to the Minister of Education when the initial holiday payment scheme was introduced.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed write to the Bills Sponsor regarding scrutiny points raised in the research paper.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Department of Education regarding scrutiny points raised in the research paper.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate to the Examiner of Statutory Rules scrutiny of the regulation-making powers in the Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities seeking information on:

- The feasibility of linking the scheme to social supermarket schemes including supermarket vouchers; and
- The value for money aspects and geographical reach of social supermarket schemes.

### **8. Irish Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill - Oral Briefing by RalSe**

The Committee noted a briefing paper.

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

Ms Sinead McMurray, Research Officer, RalSe

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on the Irish Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Bill Sponsor regarding scrutiny points raised in the research paper.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Department of Education regarding scrutiny points raised in the research paper.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate to the Examiner of Statutory Rules scrutiny of regulation-making powers in the Bill.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 5:47pm.

### **9. General Teaching Council Bill**

The Committee discussed the Clauses of the Bill

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 4:09pm

The Committee returned to Public session at 4:31pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education on terminology used in the Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission amendments to clauses 2 and 9 for consideration.

### **12. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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

### **13. Any Other Business**

The Committee discussed capital spending on the Irish-medium sector.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Education.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 6 May 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:36pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**6 May 2026**