



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

06 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 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
- Ms Cara Hunter MLA
- Mrs Cathy Mason MLA
- Mrs Julie Middleton MLA

In attendance:

- Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Jonathan Lamont (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
- Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

- Mr Jon Burrows MLA



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The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Jon Burrows MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Ms Julie Middleton MLA to the Committee.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Mr David Brooks MLA joined the meeting at 2.02pm

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted that the Committee Stage extension for the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill and the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill will be debated in Plenary on 12 May 2026.

Ms Michelle Guy raised an issue regarding Beechlawn School accepting children with severe learning difficulties (SLD).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Education and Education Authority to clarify the policy on schools with moderate learning difficulty (MLD) capacity admitting pupils with severe learning difficulties.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 29 April 2026.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 2.05pm.

6. General Teaching Council Bill – informal clause-by-clause consideration

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Education on approaches of other UK teaching regulators; a draft Bill Summary Table; and correspondence from the Bill Office on admissibility of amendments and proposed Committee amendments.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.05pm.

Mr Stephen Orme, Assembly Clerk, Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office; and
Mr Jonathan Redpath, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk, Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office.

The officials provided the Committee with a clause-by-clause briefing on the General Teaching Council Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Danny Baker left the meeting at 2.24pm

The Committee returned to public session at 2.25pm

The following officials joined the meeting

Mr Ian Gallagher, General Teaching Council;

Ms Julie Ann Stevenson, General Teaching Council;

Ms Mary Jackson, General Teaching Council;



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Ms Leanne Johnston, Department of Education;
Mr Mark Bailey, Department of Education; and
Mr Alan Boyd, Department of Education.

Mr Danny Baker joined the meeting at 2.22pm

The Committee continued its informal deliberations on the Bill.

The Committee moved to closed session at 2.38pm

The Committee informally considered the clauses of the Bill.

Ms Cathy Mason left the meeting at 2.45pm

The Committee returned to public session at 2.46pm.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Education to ascertain DSO rationale for the wording of Clause 2 and Clause 9.

7. Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill – Oral Briefing by Department of Education

The Committee noted a briefing paper and Bill papers.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.47pm.

Mr Eamonn McConville, Director of Transport and Food in Schools, Department of Education; and

Mr Jonathan Boyd, Head of Food in Schools Team, Department of Education.



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

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Education to propose amendment text to the bill to address technical aspects highlighted, to ensure those in post primary and asylum seekers are included and to address issues of difference in holiday dates, price setting and the variance in holidays across schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to establish the level of departmental engagement, previous arrangements for executive ringfencing of funding for holiday meal payments, and request the issue be brought to the attention of the Executive as a whole.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

8. Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill – Oral Briefing by Department of Education

The Committee noted a briefing paper and Bill papers.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.16pm

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

Mr Maurice Girvin, Head of Irish-Medium Education Team, Department of Education.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Cara Hunter joined the meeting at 3.21pm



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek assurance from the Department of Education that it is committed to work with the Committee on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to check its IME consultee list against that of the Department of Education's IMIE.

Agreed: Mr Pat Sheehan, Bill Sponsor, agreed to provide a list of names of primary school principals to hear evidence from.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 3.51pm

The meeting returned to public session at 3.58pm

9. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Briefing by Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Services

The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Services paper.

The following official joined the meeting at 3.58pm

Ms Sinead McMurray, Research Officer, Northern Ireland Assembly.

The official provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Cathy Mason left the meeting at 4.19pm

Mr Danny Baker left the meeting at 4.22pm



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Research paper to the Department of Education for information and to request reply to scrutiny points raised.

The Committee moved to closed session at 4.23pm

10. Committee Bill to Allow all Pupils the Choice to Wear Trousers – Briefing by Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office

The Committee noted the drafts of the Committee Bill and a Bill commentary document.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.23pm

Ms Barbara Love, Assembly Clerk, Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office; and
Ms Maeve Corrigan, Legal Advisor, Northern Ireland Assembly Legal Services.

Ms Cathy Mason returned to the meeting at 4.25pm

Mr Danny Baker returned to the meeting at 4.27pm

The officials provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the Committee Bill to Allow all Pupils the Choice to Wear Trousers.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee returned to public session at 4.51pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to proceed with draft bill version 1A; and that officials would now prepare an accompanying EFM for the Bill.

11. Correspondence

11.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.



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11.2 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

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

11.3 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for April from Investment Strategy Northern Ireland.

11.4 The Committee noted the oral statement from the Minister of Education regarding the Independent Review of Teacher Workload report.

11.5 The Committee noted the oral statement from the Minister of Education regarding the North South Ministerial Council Education Sectoral meeting held on 22 April 2026.

11.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding the TransformED One Year On event for diaries.

11.7 The Committee noted the correspondence from an individual regarding the Special Educational Needs Regulations 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence for consideration on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply informing the individual of the scheduled briefing from Caleb's Cause Northern Ireland.

11.8 The Committee noted the correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the role of Health Visitors in early intervention for children.

11.9 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding parental choice and the future of Wallace Prep School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Chair of the Board of Governors at Wallace School for comment.

11.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Controlled Schools' Support Council regarding the Sharing Impact in School Improvement event for diaries.

11.11 The Committee noted the 64th Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.



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11.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding NIFSA and the proposed Outdoor Learning Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue at the next Ministerial briefing

11.13 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a student's suspension from Riverside School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Education Authority for an update on resources for SEN pupils.

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 13 May 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.03pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
13 April 2026