



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

28 January 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Brooks MLA

Mr Jon Burrows MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Present via teleconference facilities:

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Apologies:

Mr Gary Middleton MLA



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

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr Middleton.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee will be holding a stakeholder event on Curriculum review on Tuesday 3 February 2026 from 4-7pm in room 115, Parliament Buildings.

The Committee discussed recent school closures due to storm Chandra.

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 2:09pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking clear guidance for schools giving support and direction to enable principals clarity and opportunity to plan and manage risk protocols and build school resilience for such weather and other adverse events.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters arising

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Education on Strule Shared Education Campus.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it no longer required an oral briefing on the Strule Campus.



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Mrs Guy joined the meeting at 2:13pm.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 21 January 2026.

Mr Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 2:14pm.

6. Proposed Committee Bill to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers - Oral Briefing by Youth Assembly

The Committee noted a report prepared by the Youth Assembly

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:14pm.

Mr James Maginn, Member, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Mr Dáire McConnell, Member, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Ms Ellie Simpson, Member, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Ms Neala Owens, Member, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Mr Raphael MacMillan-Sharkey, Member, Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on school uniform.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 3:10pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:12pm.

Mr Brooks declared an interest as his wife was a former Governor of Grovenor Grammar School.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking what youth engagement he has carried out, and encouraging him to engage with the Youth Assembly, on this matter.

The Committee adjourned at 3:10pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:12pm.

7. General Teaching Council Bill - Oral Briefing by Department of Education officials

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department of Education

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:18pm.

Mr Mark Bailey, Director of Education Workforce, Department of Education

Mr Alan Boyd, Head of GTCNI Interim Sponsorship Team, Department of Education

Ms Leanne Johnston, GTCNI Interim Sponsorship Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the General Teaching Council Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking it to provide the business case for the bill.

The Committee adjourned at 4:09pm

The Committee resumed at 4:15pm

The Committee moved to closed session at 4:15pm



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8. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry - Consideration of draft report

The Committee considered a draft report for its Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry.

The Committee returned to public session at 4:36pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a draft report at its meeting on 11 February 2026.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly's 'Big Youth Survey' Report.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from MindWise regarding upcoming events.

9.4 The Committee noted the General Teaching Council Annual Report and Accounts for 2024/25.

9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding safeguarding concerns in relation to home to school transport.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Communities providing the Further Education Sector Retention and Disposal schedule.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Rebecca Davis providing a copy of an open letter to the Minister to the Committee regarding clean air in schools.

Mr Matheson made a declaration of interest that he was a signatory to the letter.

Mrs Guy made a declaration of interest that she was a signatory to the letter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DE and PHA to put the questions raised and inquire what funding streams are available for the proposals.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual concerned with the pressures affecting SENCO's due to excessive workload.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to its inquiry into SEN Education.

9.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Middletown Centre for Autism regarding its Best Practice day “Can’t Not Won’t – Reframing School Non-Attendance for Autistic Students” held on 22 January 2026.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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

11. Any Other Business

The Committee agreed to share its recent correspondence from the Mental Health Champion with the Department, having received her consent to do so.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
4 February 2026