



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

01 July 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 Cathy Mason MLA
Mrs Julie Middleton MLA

In attendance:

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



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Attended via teleconference facilities:

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Jon Burrows MLA and Ms Cara Hunter MLA.

Michelle Guy joined online at 2.01pm

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed the School Uniform (Trousers) Bill passing Second Stage.

The Chairperson noted that amendments and potential rescheduling of the General Teaching Council Bill will be considered in the autumn term.

3. Declaration of Interest

None

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education providing a Written Ministerial Statement on SEN Regulations.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education to propose enhanced communication between Committee and Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask whether NSPCC safeguarding material is not accessible by schools, why this might be, and to establish who can provide this resource to schools.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 24 June 2026.

6. Budget Update – oral briefing by Department of Education

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.13pm

Neil Palmer, Finance Director, Department of Education

Conor O'Neill, Deputy Finance Director, Department of Education

Stephen Creagh, Deputy Director Investment and Infrastructure, Department of Education

The officials provided the Committee with a budget update.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to ask for a detailed breakdown of Early Years and Children budget and further information on the capital funding for Strule Shared Education Campus.



David Brooks left the meeting at 2.35pm

David Brooks rejoined the meeting at 2.46pm

7. Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill – clause-by-clause consideration

The Committee considered the clauses of the Bill.

Clause 1

The following amendment was considered:

Amendment 1

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 5 - Leave out “a financial payment” and insert “financial payments”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 1 to the Assembly.

Amendment 2

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 11 - Leave out “payment” and insert “payments”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 2 to the Assembly.

Amendment 3

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 14 - Leave out “payment” and insert “payments”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 3 to the Assembly.



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Amendment 4

Clause 1, Page 2, Line 6 - Leave out “payment” and insert “payments”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 4 to the Assembly.

Amendment 5

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 6 - Leave out “who would normally be in attendance at school”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 5 to the Assembly.

Amendment 6

Clause 1. Page 1, Line 9 - At end insert – “(1BA) Without prejudice to the generality of Article 58(1A), where a pupil is attending school on a day within any relevant period, that pupil shall be entitled to both the free school meal and the financial payment detailed in (1A).”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 6 to the Assembly.

Amendment 7

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 13 - At end insert – “(1CA) If an eligible parent does not have access to a bank account, the Authority shall, in accordance with arrangements approved by the Department, make the financial payments by an alternative method.”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 7 to the Assembly.



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Amendment 8

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 14 - Leave out from the second “the” to the end of line 18 and insert— “a daily allowance specified by the Authority, in accordance with arrangements approved by the Department.”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 8 to the Assembly.

Amendment 9

Clause 1, Page 2, Line 10 - Leave out from “current” to “payable” and insert “daily allowance specified”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 9 to the Assembly.

Amendment 11

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 7 - Leave out from “The category” to “children” on line 8 and insert “*Article 58(1A) applies to parents of pupils who*”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 11 to the Assembly.

Agreed: Subject to the above amendments, the Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 1.

Amendment 10

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 16 - Leave out from “the Summer” to the end of line 19 and insert -

“(a) Summer holidays (all weekdays in July and August);

(b) Halloween (five weekdays specified in arrangements under Article 58(1A));



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- (c) Christmas (ten weekdays specified in arrangements under Article 58(1A));
- (d) February mid-term (five weekdays specified in arrangements under Article 58(1A)); and
- (e) Easter (ten weekdays specified in arrangements under Article 58(1A)).”

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 10 to the Assembly.

Agreed: Subject to the above amendments, the Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 2.

Amendment 12

Clause 3, Page 2, Line 24 - At end insert - “relevant period” has the meaning given in Article 2(2) of the 1986 Order.’

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 12 to the Assembly.

Agreed: Subject to the above amendments, the Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 3.

Amendment 13

Clause 4, Page 2, Line 35 At end insert— “(5) Any provisions under subsection (4) -

(a) which repeal or revoke, or alter, remove or add to any text of, any primary legislation may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly, and

(b) are otherwise subject to negative resolution.”



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David Brooks and Julie Middleton indicated that, although they would not seek divide the Committee in agreeing the Bill, they do not support the principles of the Bill. They noted that this position is without prejudice to any decisions they might take during the subsequent stages of the legislative process.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content to propose amendment 13 to the Assembly.
- Agreed:** Subject to amendments, the Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 4.
- Agreed:** The Committee instructed the Bill Office to make the agreed amendments to the Bill.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed the clauses of the Bill.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

8. Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill – consideration of draft Report

The Committee considered the Bill Report and correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Department of Education on the proposed amendment
- Agreed:** The Committee instructed the Bill Office to make the agreed amendments to the Bill.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed the content of the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.



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9. Relationships and Sexuality Education Inquiry – consideration of draft report

The Committee considered the Bill Report.

David Brooks and Julie Middleton indicated that, in principle they are not endorsing this report; notwithstanding common grounds on matters such as safeguarding, violence against women and girls, consent and anti-bullying. On other issues such as abortion and gender ideology, they cannot agree and believe re certain recommendations and text which may be capable of being read with different emphases and interpretations it would be disingenuous to do so understanding the differing positions on committee. They noted that this position is without prejudice to any decisions they might take during the subsequent stages of the legislative process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a take-note debate on the its RSE Mini-inquiry.

Danny Baker left the meeting at 3.45pm

Danny Baker rejoined the meeting at 3.52pm

10. Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda – consideration of draft report

The Committee considered the draft report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to the Report in the autumn session.



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11. SR 2026/106 Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered SR2026/106 – the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. The Rule will modernise the and simplify how grant-aided schools plan for improvement.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2026/106 The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the Rule.

12. Correspondence

12.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

12.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding HM Treasury Open Book Review of Executive Budget.

12.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Integrated Education Fund regarding the 'Integrated Education Demand: Evidence, Insights and Limitations Report'.

12.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding consistency and effectiveness of CRIAs and EQIAs.

12.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Outscape regarding Outdoor Recreation Strategy.



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12.6 The Committee considered correspondence from Department of Education regarding briefing from Benedict Blythe.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Benedict Blythe Foundation.

12.7 The Committee considered correspondence from Department of Education regarding Caleb's Cause NI transitions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Caleb's Cause NI.

12.8 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the recent Caleb's Cause NI briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Caleb's Cause NI.

12.9 The Committee considered correspondence from Department of Education regarding its Review of Behaviour Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to recommend a trauma-informed approach to this Policy.

12.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the NEU Ballot for industrial action.

12.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding its 2026/2027 Business Plan.

12.12 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Benedict Blythe Foundation.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to Benedict Blythe Foundation.

12.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding an Integrated Education written briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer to this in its oral briefing from the Department the Autumn session.

12.14 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Education Inspections Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ensure him the Committee will not delay the process of the Bill and that the Committee Stage will be completed by 09 December 2026.

12.15 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding the Private Members' Bills.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Private Members' Bill papers.

12.16 The Committee noted correspondence from Department of Education regarding prosecution for school non-attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer this to the correspondent who originally raised the matter.

12.17 The Committee considered correspondence from BrainBodyBalanceNI regarding child wellbeing and education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for a detailed written briefing.



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12.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding nursing cover at SEN summer schemes.

12.19 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding Caleb's Cause NI transitions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Caleb's Cause NI.

12.20 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding Holiday Meal Payments (social supermarkets).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Private Members' Bill papers.

12.21 The Committee noted the written Ministerial Statement regarding the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

12.22 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding SEN summer schemes.

12.23 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Economy regarding Regional Balance Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply with a nil return.

12.24 The Committee noted the 70th report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.



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12.25 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding its inquiry into performance and culture of Northern Ireland Civil Service.

12.26 The Committee noted correspondence from Children in Northern Ireland regarding its Report 'Left Out: Disabled Children's Rights and Experiences'.

12.27 The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs regarding the Hunting with Dogs Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide a nil return.

12.28 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the ITE Bursary Scheme.

12.29 The Committee noted the June Investing Activity Report from Investment Strategy Northern Ireland.

12.30 The Committee considered correspondence from Feeding Britain and Advice NI regarding free school meals expansion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Private Members' Bill papers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the Committee for Communities.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the correspondence in the Private Members' Bill papers.



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12.32 The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Authority regarding pupil registration procedures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the reply to the individual who raised the issue.

12.33 the Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority regarding Oakwood School and Assessment Unit.

12.34 The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Authority regarding restrictive physical interventions data.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the individuals who raised the issue for their information.

12.35 The Committee noted correspondence from Angel Eyes NI regarding the Department of Education reply to SEN Regulations.

12.36 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding consultation on the new Religious Education Syllabus.

12.37 The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for Integrated Education regarding the Integrated Education Demand Report.

12.38 The Committee noted correspondence from MathsBuddy regarding the consultation on TransformED revised curriculum for Mathematics.



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12.39 The Committee noted correspondence from MathsBuddy regarding the consultation on TransformED revised curriculum for English.

12.40 The Committee noted correspondence from Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists regarding SEN Regulations.

12.41 The Committee considered correspondence from Department of Education regarding Primary Children Looked After Advisory Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

12.42 The Committee noted correspondence from the Independent Autism Reviewer.

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.



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15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 16 September 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.57pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
16 September 2026