



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

18 February 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr David Brooks MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Damien Brown (Clerical Officer)

Ms Barbara Love (Bill Clerk) (Item 8 only)

Ms Maeve Corrigan (Legal Advisor) (Item 8 only)

Attended via teleconference facilities:

Mr Jon Burrows MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA



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Apologies: Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Gary Middleton MLA

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Middleton and Mr Sheehan.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson referred members to reports the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) have declared a trade dispute with the Department of Education over workload and school maintenance and funding pressures.

Mrs Guy joined the meeting at 2:03pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education asking him to engage urgently with NAHT to resolve outstanding issues and keep the Committee informed of progress.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters arising

The Committee discussed concerns about funding for Youth Services. Members noted that the Committee would be taking evidence on Youth Services from the Department of Education and the Education at a future meeting.



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5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 11 February 2026.

6. Restrictive Practices - Oral Briefing by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Children's Law Centre

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Children's Law Centre.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:10pm.

Mr Chris Quinn, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Northern Ireland
Commissioner for Children and Young People

Ms Rachel Hogan, Special Education Needs Representative, Children's Law
Centre

Mrs Deirdre Shakespeare, Parent.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the use of restrictive practices in educational settings.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education setting out its desire to see progress on this matter and seeking:

- A draft copy of the guidance being produced by the Department; and
- Copies of correspondence between the Department and members who left the task and finish group.



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7. Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda - briefing on Transformation projects - Oral Briefing by Department of Education and Education Authority Officials

The Committee noted briefing papers from the officials.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:17pm.

Ms Deirdre Ward, Director for SEN Strategic Policy, Department of Education

Ms Julie McBride, Head of Special Education Review Team, Department of Education

Dr Tomas Adell, Chief Transformation Officer, Education Authority

Mr Craig Donnachie, SEN Transformation Programme Director, Education Authority

Witnesses briefed the Committee on the Transformation projects.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to

The Committee adjourned at 4:12pm

The Committee resumed at 4:22pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that officials would provide a written briefing on its evidence base re inclusivity best practice in other jurisdictions; and to accept an invitation from the Education Authority to see a demonstration of the new digital system for statementing, diaries permitting.

The Committee moved to closed session at 4:23pm.

8. Proposed Committee Bill to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers - Legislative Competence

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Legal Services.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:23pm.



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Ms Barbara Love, Assembly Clerk, NIA Bill Office

Ms Maeve Corrigan, Legal Advisor, NIA Legal Service

Witnesses briefed the Committee on proposed committee Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 5:00pm.

The Committee returned to public session at 5:03pm

9. SL1 - Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026

The Committee noted an SL1 for the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026.

The Committee discussed Assembly procedures for processing delegated legislation.

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 5:16pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer an online survey on the delegated legislation until it had received an oral briefing at its meeting on 25 February.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted a correspondence Index.

10.2 The Committee noted the 56th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10.3 The Committee noted a response from the GTCNI on Teacher Registration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

10.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on Irish Medium Funding.



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10.5 The Committee noted correspondence from NASUWT on the Right to choose Trousers Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the submission to papers for the Bill.

10.6 The Committee noted correspondence from NICCY regarding the Minister of Education's response on Transgender Guidance.

10.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on Private Tutoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the individual who raised this matter with it.

10.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding TransformED and Qualifications Reform.

10.9 The Committee noted a submission from the Women's Regional Consortium Submission on the Right to choose Trousers Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the submission to papers for the Bill.

10.10 The Committee noted a submission from NICCY on the GTCNI Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the submission to papers for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

10.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the Review of Arm's Length Bodies.

10.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

10.13 The Committee noted a submission from the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland regarding the GTC NI Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the submission to papers for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

10.14 The Committee note a response from the Education Authority on the collection of data on pupils with Rare Diseases.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Rare Diseases Partnership.

10.15 The Committee noted amended correspondence from NICCY regarding the Minister of Education's response on Transgender Guidance.

10.16 The Committee noted correspondence from Tiny Life seeking a meeting regarding future funding for the TinyStart programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal meeting with Tiny Life.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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

11. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:24pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
25 February 2026