



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Education

### Minutes of Proceedings

20 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  
Mr Jon Burrows MLA  
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA  
Mrs Julie Middleton MLA

**In attendance:**

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



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**Attended via teleconference facilities:**

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

**1. Apologies**

No apologies were received.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

None.

**3. Declaration of Interest**

Mr Mathison made a declaration of interest that his wife was employed by Angel Eyes NI.

Mr Brooks made a declaration of interest that his wife is on the Board of Governors at Mitchell House Special School.

Ms Hunter made a declaration of interest that she is a member of the technical advisory council for Synthesia AI.

Mr Burrows joined the meeting at 2.03pm



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#### 4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education to the Committee for Justice regarding the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Education Authority to ask for further information.

The Committee noted the list of correspondence received to date on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to establish the level of engagement between principals of special schools and the Education Authority and to establish there is confirmation from Education Authority that schemes can be delivered safely.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to establish the level of support offered to the principals of special schools delivering schemes.

Mr Sheehan raised an issue regarding integrated education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the Department of Education on integrated education.

#### 5. Draft Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 13 May 2026.

#### 6. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations - Oral Briefing by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.14pm



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Marie O'Shea, Chairperson, Education Trade Union Group, Irish National Teachers' Union;

Samantha Bronze, Education Trade Union Group Representative, UNISON;

Sally Rees, Education Trade Union Group Representative, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers; and

Janette Murdoch, Education Trade Union Group Representative, NIPSA

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

**7. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Oral briefing by the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.22pm.

Joanne Whyte, President, National Association of Head Teachers;

Pauline Hurst, Member, Ulster Teachers Union;

Maxine Murphy Higgins, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers;

Bronagh Wright, Member, National Education Union; and

Noreen Kelly, Member, Irish National Teachers' Organisation



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The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations.

Mr Brooks left the meeting at 3.50pm

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 3.54pm

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Brooks rejoined the meeting at 3.54pm

Mrs Middleton left the meeting at 3.54pm

Mr Burrows rejoined the meeting at 3.57pm

Mrs Middleton rejoined the meeting at 3.58pm

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 4.01pm

Mr Sheehan rejoined the meeting at 4.03pm

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 4.11pm

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 4.11pm

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

The Committee adjourned at 4.19pm

Mrs Mason rejoined the meeting at 4.20pm

The Committee resumed at 4.28pm



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**8. SL1 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 – Oral briefing from the Department of Education and the Education Authority**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4.28pm

Deirdre Ward, Director for Special Educational Needs Strategic Policy, Department of Education;

Elaine Craig, Director for Special Educational Needs Statutory and Educational Psychology Service, Education Authority;

Julie McBride, Head of Special Education Review Team, Department of Education; and

Tracey Logan, Interim Head of SEND Statutory Services, Education Authority

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Education for the Minutes of meetings of the joint Health and Education Oversight Group.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

**9. General Teaching Council Bill – Committee Consideration of Report**

The Committee considered the General Teaching Council Bill report.

Powers and Membership

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with this section as drafted.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with this section as drafted.



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### Executive Summary

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 1-8 as drafted.

### Background

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 9-32 as drafted.

### Committee Approach

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 33-43 as drafted.

### Consideration of the Bill

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 44-58 as drafted.

### Clause by Clause Consideration

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with this section as drafted.

### Clause-by-Clause Scrutiny of the Bill

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with clause 226-229 and clause by clause decisions for clauses 1-16 and the Long Title as drafted.

### Appendices

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with this section as drafted.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that an electronic copy of the Bill report be published on the Committee's webpage and sent to all organisations that provided evidence to the Committee on the Bill. The Chairperson informed Members that this concluded Committee Stage of the Bill.

This agenda item was reported by Hansard.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 5.07pm

Mrs Mason left the meeting at 5.20pm

### 10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

10.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Office regarding the 5<sup>th</sup> Statutory Report on Advancing Shared Education.

10.3 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding tax free childcare eligibility.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to establish the position of the Wear and Tear Allowance and to ask for a copy of the Impact Assessment of the Allowance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the originators of this issue.



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10.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding religious education syllabus.

10.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding funding allocation on SEN Review.

10.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding outdoor learning in schools in 2026.

10.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding SEN summer scheme cancellations.

10.8 The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Authority regarding a recent cyber-attack.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education to establish the position for a new IT platform for schools.

10.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to establish the level of engagement of both the Departments of Health and Education in scoping a counselling intervention replacement to the Healthy Happy Minds programme.

10.10 The Committee noted correspondence from GTCNI regarding induction period for fully qualified teachers.



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10.11 The Committee noted an invitation from British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

10.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill and Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

10.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

10.14 The Committee considered correspondence from Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association requesting to meet.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share this correspondence with Committee for Economy to be considered the concurrent Committee meeting.

10.15 The Committee considered correspondence from Angel Eyes Northern Ireland regarding SEN Regulations.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Education to answer the issues raised.

10.16 The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding SEN post-primary placements.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to Education Authority to address the issues raised and encourage the Authority to meet with the individual.



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10.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

10.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Office regarding GTCNI Retention and Disposal Schedule.

10.19 The Committee considered correspondence from BookTrust NI requesting to meet the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a meeting with BookTrust NI in the Autumn session.

10.20 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the integrity and quality of official education statistics in Northern Ireland.

10.21 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education regarding allocation of SEN placements for 26-27 year.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to this issue at the Ministerial briefing scheduled for 10 June 2026.

10.22 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Executive Office regarding Politics in Action report from Cross and Passion College.

10.23 The Committee considered correspondence from Danny Baker MLA regarding Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Department of Communities to ask for a reply to correspondence previously issued.

10.24 The Committee noted correspondence from Pat Sheehan MLA advising of suggested revisions from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to a Research paper regarding Irish-medium Education (Workforce Planning) Bill.

10.25 The Committee considered further correspondence from an individual regarding SEN post-primary placements.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to Education Authority to address the issues raised and encourage the Authority to meet with the individual.

### **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 27 May 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.48pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**27 April 2026**