



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

25 February 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr Jon Burrows 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 Niamh Devlin (Research Officer) (Item 7 only)

Mr Nathan Mulholland, (Research Officer) (Item 7 only)

Ms Barbara Love (Bill Clerk) (Item 7 only)

Ms Maeve Corrigan (Legal Advisor) (Item 7 only)



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Attended via teleconference facilities:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Middleton.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Work Alliance regarding funding for the youth sector.

Ms Hunter joined the meeting at 2:03pm

The Committee discussed the Minister of Education's announcement that all schools would be expected to provide specialist classes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking clarity on:

- The legal standing of the Minister's letter to schools;
- Whether the Minister will be issuing directions and or guidance;
- What action will be taken if schools fail to provide special classes;
- How the implementation of the scheme will be incorporated within the ongoing industrial dispute with NAHT re workload.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.



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4. Matters arising

4.1 The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority on the enhanced support model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity on public engagement and consultation, and costing and evaluation of pilot programmes.

4.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding rescheduling briefings in relation to SEN.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking that a merged briefing take place as soon as possible.

4.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Office of the Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland sharing correspondence with the Minister and the Department of Education in regard to Restraint and Seclusion Guidance.

4.4 The Committee noted correspondence from Tiny Life regarding funding and that an informal meeting with Tiny Life has been arranged for Tuesday 3 March 2026.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 18 February 2026.

6. SL1 - Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations 2026 - Oral Briefing by DE and EA Officials

The Committee noted the SL1, and the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:27pm.

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



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

Dr Tomas Adell, Chief Transformation Officer, Education Authority

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

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the SL1 and draft special educational needs regulations.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking:

- An outline of precisely where each proposed regulation will deviate from current arrangements;
- Clarification as to who will be delivering Speech and Language Therapy; and
- Information on services for Irish Medium schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education seeking information on the provision of Free School Meals for children with Avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for evidence on the SL1 and draft regulations, which will run for at least 4 weeks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move closed session at 3:28pm.

7. Proposed Committee Bill to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers - Oral Briefing by RalSe

The Committee noted an Assembly research paper and a summary of the Committee's Citizen space survey.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:28pm.

Ms Niamh Devlin, Research Officer, NIA Research and Information



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Mr Nathan Mulholland, Research Officer, NIA Research Office

Ms Barbara Love, Assembly Clerk, NIA Bill Office

Ms Maeve Corrigan, Legal Advisor, NIA Legal Service

Mr Burrows joined the meeting at 3:30pm.

Witnesses briefed the Committee on the Research paper.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on scrutiny points including:

- Monitoring of compliance; and
- Why changes were made to new guidance on PE Kit removing references to uniform acting as a barrier to participation.

The Committee returned to public session at 4:08pm

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education providing an update on Special Education Needs (SEN) Placements.

8.3 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding engagement with the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the Minister's response with the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

8.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on Guidance for Schools on Adverse Weather Conditions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the Minister's response with school principals who had raised concerns with it.



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8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Feeding Britain & Advice NI regarding the automatic enrolment to free school meals for Universal Credit claimants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education and the Minister for the Economy seeking an update.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding the Statutory Duty under Section 5 Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1989.

8.7 The Committee noted an invitation from UNISON to the Classroom Assistants Campaign Launch.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual regarding the HMRC Tax-Free Childcare Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to HMRC and the HM Treasury seeking further information on the operation of the scheme in Northern Ireland.

8.9 The Committee noted a submission from Women's Policy Group NI on the Proposed Committee Bill on the right to choose to wear trousers in school.

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

8.10 The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause NI on post-18 support for Children with Special Educational Needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to its Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda.

8.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Belfast Works Connect providing a briefing paper on Local Growth Fund: Sustaining Place Based Support.

8.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the Spring Supplementary Estimates, Vote on Account and Budget Bill 2026.

8.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Bill Office on the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill.

8.14 The Committee noted a submission from Belfast City Youth Council on the Proposed Committee Bill on Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School.



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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the group to its consultation list.

8.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the Department for Education 5-Year Budget Strategy.

8.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Education providing the Consultation Report on The future of CCEA GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking further information.

Ms Hunter made a declaration of interest that she is a member of the Technical Advisory Council member for Synthesia AI.

8.17 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing additional information on the SEN Delivery Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to its Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda.

8.18 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority providing information on Parental Support Classes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to its Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation Agenda.

8.19 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on Air Quality in Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to follow up unanswered questions with the Department of Education.

8.20 The Committee noted the Fifty-Seventh Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

8.21 The Committee noted an invitation to Clean Air in Schools: Leaders Making it Happen Webinar.



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8.22 The Committee noted a response from the Children's Law Centre regarding the Minister's response on Transgender Guidance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Minister of Education.

8.23 The Committee noted correspondence from Department of Education providing a copy of the School Uniforms Guidelines.

8.24 The Committee noted correspondence from Individual regarding concerns about the increase in Music tuition fees being backdated to January 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking further information on the changes.

8.25 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a written Ministerial statement on Transforming Together: Understanding the Pathway to Integrated Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek oral briefing from the Department on the content of the statement.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

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

10. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.



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11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

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

The meeting was adjourned at 4:31pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
4 March 2026