



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

4 March 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

Mr Peter Martin 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 Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA



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

1. Apologies

An apology has been received from Ms Hunter.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee discussed the launch of UNISON's Good Work Charter for Classroom Assistants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education and the Education Authority asking for a response to the issues raised in the Charter.

The Committee discussed an informal meeting with representatives of Tiny Life about concerns over funding arrangements on Tuesday 3 March 2026.

Mr Baker joined the meeting at 2:04pm

Mrs Mason joined the meeting at 2:04pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking information on:

- where he sees the work that Tiny Life delivers fits in with key strategic priorities for the Department; and
- if funding is not renewed how is the gap in services going to be filled.

The Committee noted that the First Stage had occurred of Committee Members' Private Members Bills:

- The Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill (Deputy Chairperson Pat Sheehan MLA); and
- The Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill (Danny Baker MLA).

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.



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4. Matters Arising

The Committee discussed correspondence from the Free Presbyterian Church on the proposed Committee Bill on the Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School.

The Committee discussed concerns regarding Special school summer schemes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department of Health seeking clarity on cross-departmental work to support these schemes.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 25 February 2026.

6. Proposed Committee Bill to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers - Oral Briefing by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and Youth Panel

The Committee noted a submission on the Bill from NICCY.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:17pm.

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

Ms Laura McFall, Participation Officer, Northern Ireland Commissioner for
Children and Young People

Ms Rhea Donnell, Representative, NICCY Youth Panel

Ms Astrid Knox, Representative, NICCY Youth Panel.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the proposed Committee Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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Mr Burrows joined the meeting at 2:43pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Minister of Education asking that he include a right for all pupils to choose to wear trousers in guidelines.

7. Proposed Committee Bill to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers - Oral briefing by Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Committee noted a written submission from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:01pm.

Ms Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Mr Colin Caughey, Director of Policy, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Ms Emma Osborne, Policy and Research Officer, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing in relation to the proposed Committee Bill.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Brooks made a declaration of interest that a relative of his wife is employed by the Free Presbyterian Church.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share correspondence from the Free Presbyterian Church on the proposed Committee Bill on the Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission seeking its views on exemptions from the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice on the issues raised in correspondence from the Free Presbyterian Church on the proposed Committee Bill on the Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School.



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8. General Teaching Council Bill

The Committee noted responses to its call for evidence on the General Teaching Council Bill.

Mr Martin left the meeting at 3:56pm.

Mr Baker left the meeting at 4:00pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland regarding the proposed structures for the General Teaching Council.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted an invitation from Open University to attend and/or address the book launch for Transforming Education Northern Ireland.

9.3 The Committee noted a submission from an Individual on the proposed Committee Bill on the Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School.

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

9.4 The Committee noted a submission from the Children's Law Centre on the proposed Committee Bill on the Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School.

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

9.5 The Committee noted an Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Open University regarding its Online Neurodiversity Hub.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from an Individual on Educational Governance and Newcomer Inclusion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this with the Department for reply.



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9.8 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health on the regulation of private tutoring.

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

9.9 The Committee noted a submission from the Free Presbyterian Education Board Of Presbytery on the proposed Committee Bill on Right to Choose to Wear Trousers to School.

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

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health on clean air in schools.

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

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information on financial pressures and savings.

9.12 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on the Independent Review of Teacher Workload.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NAHT seeking its views on the industrial dispute with the Department of Education.

9.13 The Committee noted the 58th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office on Windsor Framework and wider European Union issues.

9.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council providing an assessment of The Finance Minister's proposed 2026-27 Budget.

9.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing an update on action it has taken to reduce Tax Expenditure.



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9.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding an oral statement from the Minister of Education on the Future of CCEA GCSE, AS and A LEVEL Qualifications.

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.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 March 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:18pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
11 March 2026