



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Education

### Minutes of Proceedings

11 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 David Brooks MLA

Mr Jon Burrows MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Attended via teleconference facilities:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Apologies:

Mr Gary Middleton MLA

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



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### 1. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr Middleton.

### 2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted a record of an informal briefing with North West Counselling.

The Committee noted correspondence regarding the restructuring of statutory youth services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with the Department of Education and the Education Authority on youth services.

### 3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

### 4. Matters arising

The Committee noted the business case for the replacement of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding evidence that proposed legislation for a managing authority for the controlled sector will improve educational outcomes for pupils.

The Committee discussed tax changes and the impact of these on child minders.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education asking that he explore options with the Minister for Finance to delay implementation of this tax change until its local impacts are better understood.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **5. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 4 February 2026.

## **6. Pathways and Attendance - Oral Briefing by Department of Education Officials**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Education and a report from the Independent Autism Adviser on Parental Prosecution in Non Attendance Cases

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:13pm.

Ms Claire McClelland, Director of Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning, Department of Education

Mr Michael Leonard, Head of Additional Educational Needs Team, Department of Education

Mr Glenn McDonald, Head of Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team, Department of Education

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Pathways and Attendance.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

## **7. Education and Welfare Service - Oral Briefing by EA Officials**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:23pm.

Ms Eve Bremner, Chief Education Officer, Education Authority

Ms Una Turbitt, Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority

Dr Tomas Adell, Chief Transformation Officer, Education Authority



## Northern Ireland Assembly

Witnesses briefed the Committee on the Work of the Education and Welfare Service.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed write to the Education Authority noting its concerns that no data is available on the impact of parental prosecution for non-attendance on the child in each case, and seeking:

- Clarity on the suspension of funding for EOTAS settings and whether funding will be reinstated from June 2025 onward;
- Differentiation of the Education Authority's support under exceptional teaching arrangements (ETA) service and education welfare service (EWS) auspices respectively;
- Information on the objective criteria for prosecutions for non-attendance; and
- Information on the costs of prosecutions for non-attendance.

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 4:28pm.

The Committee adjourned at 4:28pm

The Committee resumed in closed session at 4:32pm.

### **8. Committee Deliberation on RSE Report**

The Committee noted a draft summary of recommendations and a chronology of evidence taken by the Committee.

The Committee moved to public session at 4:47pm.

The Committee discussed the draft recommendations of its report on the mini-inquiry into relationship and sexuality education and will consider the full report at a future meeting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed not to have the report of the mini-inquiry into relationship and sexuality education debated in plenary.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## 9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted the 55th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.2 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Minister of Education regarding concerns about the Education Authority's responsibility under Section 5 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking that it copy the Minister's response to the Committee.

9.3 The Committee noted an invitation to the Excellence in Integrated Education Awards event on 4 March 2026.

9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the use of smartphones in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with Smartphone-Free Childhood.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding a Ministerial statement on Religious Education in schools.

9.6 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education on the draft Budget.

9.7 The Committee noted an invitation from Victim Support NI to its annual conference on 24 February 2026.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a briefing paper on the Independent Review of Teacher Workload.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education noting concerns within the teaching sector on how the process has been managed and seeking clarity on which recommendations could be actioned in the short term.

9.9 The Committee a submission from the Controlled Schools' Support Council on the GTC NI Bill.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

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

9.10 The Committee noted a submission from NASUWT on the GTC NI Bill.

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

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the responsibility of schools to record data on attendance, absences and illness and provide this information to the Department of Education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking a response to the issues raised in the correspondence.

9.12 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on community ownership of youth provision.

9.13 The Committee noted an invitation from Aware NI to a mental health event.

9.14 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

9.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Benedict Blythe Foundation on school allergy safety.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking a response to the issues raised in the correspondence.

9:16: The Committee noted an invitation an invitation to the Chairperson to speak at a conference re Education for Citizenship.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would attend the event on the Committee's behalf.

### 10. 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.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

### **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 18 February 2026 at 2:00pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:02pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**18 February 2026**