Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

14 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA
Mr Danny Baker MLA
Mr David Brooks MLA
Mr Jon Burrows MLA
Mrs Julie Middleton MLA

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

Attended via teleconference facilities:
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted:

- The completion of amending stages for the ○ Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill, and ○ the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill,
- The completion of the Committee Stage report on the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill.

Mr Burrows joined the meeting at 2.02pm.

3. Declaration of Interest

Mr Baker made a declaration of interest that his son attends Glór na Móna youth project.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed members that due to loss of quorum at its previous meeting during the Education Authority briefing regarding Local Impact Teams, the Committee were unable to agree follow up actions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking:

- further information on the Code of Practice, including Local Impact Team system access points within the Code of Practice; and

- What can be done to streamline the process of pre-school access to the Local Impact Team system.

The Committee noted correspondence from Cara Hunter MLA suggesting possible witnesses for Committee engagement on curriculum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed seek briefings from the suggested witnesses.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee to the Department of Education Permanent Secretary.

The Chairperson emphasised to members the importance of maintaining privilege when considering legal advice.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of its meeting held on 7 October 2026.

6. Irish-Medium Youth Sector - Oral Briefing by Foram na nÓg

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.10pm

Ms Orliath Mhic Leannáin, Director, Fóram na nÓg

Mr Ciaran Mac Giolla Bhéin, Chairperson, Fóram na nÓg

Mr Eoghan Ó Chonghaile, Young Person, Stronger Futures Policy The

witnesses briefed the Committee on the Irish-Medium Youth Sector

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education regarding the issues raised by Foram na nÓg.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a joint briefing from the Department of Education and the Education Authority on the ‘Stronger Futures’ youth work policy as it relates to the Irish-Medium youth sector.

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7. Youth Work - Oral Briefing by Youth Organisations

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:07pm

Mr Michial Dudley, Chief Executive Officer, Boys & Girls Clubs (NI)

Mr Stephen Dallas, Chief Executive Officer, The Bytes Project

Mr Mark Clegg, Director, Youth Action Northern Ireland

Mr Tony Silcock, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Initiatives NI

Mr John Peacock, National Director, YMCA Ireland The

witnesses briefed the Committee on Youth Work This

was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Guy joined the meeting at 3.55pm.

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

- seeking clarity on the policy and timescales for delivery;
- reflecting concerns that there was no way for youth groups to engage with the Department on policy;
- reflecting feedback about the codesign process; and
- seeking information on the quality assurance functions of the Department and Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 3.57

8. Legal Advice - Oral Briefing by Assembly Legal Services

The Committee discussed legal advice.

Mr Burrows left the meeting at 4.23pm

The Committee moved to public session at 4:26pm

The Committee noted that it would receive a briefing on further legal advice at its next meeting on the non-attendance of Departmental officials at Committee meetings.

The Committee noted that a briefing with the Head of the Civil Service had been arranged for 4 November.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk would liaise with the Head of the Civil Service on arrangements for this meeting.

9. Education Inspections Bill - Oral Briefing by DE/EA Officials

The Committee noted that the Department of Education has indicated that officials would not be attending the briefing.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

10.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the transformation of Larne & Inver Primary School to Controlled Integrated Status.

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

10.3 The Committee noted a reply from the Department of Education regarding the affordability of school uniforms.

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

- the data that it collected in relation to school uniform costs in pre-legislative work on the review of school uniform grant;
- how the Department is benchmarking “affordability”and

- The categories, nature and purpose of data currently being collected in relation to school uniform costs.

10.4 The Committee noted a reply from the Department of Education providing a written briefing on the Temporary Variation policy.

10.5 The Committee noted a reply from the Department regarding grant funding streams, further information on phone pouches scheme and the minor works list.

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

- clarification of the status of the Minor Work Programme; and
- clarification of the decision and funding mechanism used to identify funding for Richhill AFC.

10.6 The Committee noted a response from the Education Minister to concerns raised by the National Education Union about the implementation plan for the Independent Review of Workload and industrial action.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the National Education Union.

10.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the recent Ministerial statement on the socially disadvantaged circumstances (SDC) criterion for pre-school admissions and the associated public consultation

10.8 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education indicating that ETI has assessed that it has the capacity to develop appropriate inspection guidance and to undertake inspection activity in relation to the RE provisions of the Education Inspections Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to papers for the Education Inspections Bill.

10.9 The Committee noted correspondence from a school regarding the briefing by officials on 23 September 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for Education seeking a response to the issues raised.

10.10 The Committee noted correspondence from CRUSE Bereavement Service regarding the omission of grief and bereavement education from the TransformED redesign of curriculum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education asking it to respond directly to CRUSE Bereavement Service and provide the Committee with a copy of its response.

10.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Penguin Books regarding ensuring that reading for pleasure is a priority for children and young people.

10.12 The Committee noted a written briefing from CCEA regarding the changes planned for the November examination series.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite CCEA to provide it with an oral briefing.

10.13 The Committee noted correspondence from Co-operation Ireland seeking to arrange a briefing with the Committee from young people on its Future Leaders programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with Co-operation Ireland.

10.14 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from a nursery school to the Minister of Education regarding the review of funding for Non-Statutory Pre-School Providers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking it to copy the Committee into its response.

10.15 The Committee noted from the Independent Autism Reviewer raising concerns about rising school energy costs and Education Authority advice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education asking it to respond directly to the Independent Autism Reviewer and provide the Committee with a copy of its response.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek a briefing from DE and EA regarding baseline school funding.

10.16 The Committee noted correspondence from NICCY regarding intractable issues in a school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a meeting in closed session with NICCY and concerned parents.

10.17 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy seeking views on the Regional Balance Bill.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to respond indicating that had no views on the Bill.

10.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy providing a copy of correspondence to the Department of Education regarding evidence it had taken on the Local Growth Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking details on its engagement and support for community and voluntary sector services supporting young people not in education, employment or training.

10.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Ad Hoc Committee on the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill on the Publication of its report on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek advice from the Assembly Bill Office on potential amendments to the Bill.

10.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure seeking views on the Display of Flags and Emblems Bill.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to respond indicating that had no views on the Bill.

10.21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure seeking views on the Harbours Bill.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to respond indicating that had no views on the Bill.

10.22 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure seeking views on the Tree Protection Bill.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to respond indicating that had no views on the Bill.

10.23 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities on the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

10.24 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance sharing information from the Department of Finance providing information in relation to the contract for the Supply of Agency Staff.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking the reasons that its costs for agency staff had risen.

10.25 The Committee noted correspondence from Queen's University Belfast to Department of Education regarding the briefing to Committee on 23 September 2026 along with a reply from a departmental official.

10.26 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding language provision in schools and the TransformED proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this correspondence in briefings on curriculum scheduled for 25 November 2026.

10.27 The Committee noted correspondence regarding a response provided by the Department of Education to an Assembly Question on the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Bursary Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarity on its response to the Assembly Question.

10.28 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual highlighting restrictions on school trips and voluntary activities where school fees are outstanding in a number of voluntary grammar schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking information about any policy that should dictate behaviour in relation to this.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Governing Bodies Association seeking its view on this matter.

10.29 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding concerns about the operation of the Enhanced Support Model (ESM), the management of Special Educational Needs (SEN) statements, and allergy safeguarding in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority regarding the issues raised in the correspondence.

10.30 The Committee noted a copy of a response from Ulster University to the Department of Education's consultation on the draft Technology and Design framework for Curriculum 2028.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education regarding the concerns raised in the correspondence.

10.31 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual proposing that basic, age-appropriate education on common menstrual health conditions be explicitly included as a statutory requirement within the new Personal, Social, Civic and Careers (PSCC) subject in the curriculum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the correspondent seeking a written briefing paper on the proposals.

10.32 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding comments made by officials in a Committee briefing on 23 September 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with correspondents that had raised this issue with it.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

12. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 21 October 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.02pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
21 October 2026