Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

21 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present:
Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Danny Baker MLA
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA
Mrs Cathy Mason 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 Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Aisling Willighan (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

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1. Apologies

Apologies were received from David Brooks MLA, Jon Burrows MLA, Cara Hunter MLA and Pat Sheehan MLA.

The Committee was not quorate for decision-making, therefore evidence could be heard; but no decisions were agreed.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee discussed the recent email correspondence to local schools regarding security issues, and considered requesting information from EA on how they advise principals centrally; how communications can be handled to avoid premature attribution; how DE and EA can best provide reassurance; what progress has been made iro the review of emergency communications and protocols due to extreme weather; and what additional work may be required for DE and EA to engage with PSNI in determining who takes the lead in security emergencies.

3. Declaration of Interest

No declarations were made.

4. **Matters Arising**

The Committee discussed the report of the Socioeconomic Deprivation and Educational Underachievement event, which focused on learning about boys.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Permanent Secretary regarding attendance at Committee meetings.

5. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the Minutes of the meeting on 14 October 2026.

The Committee moved to closed session at 2.20pm.

6. School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

The following official joined the meeting at 2.20pm

Stephen Orme, Assembly Clerk, NIA Bill Office

The official briefed the Committee on scheduling the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The meeting returned to public session at 2.26pm

7. Strong Foundations: Reading and Spelling – briefing from Dr Sharon McMurray

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.30pm

Dr Sharon McMurray, Teacher Educator (retired), Stranmillis University College

The witnesses briefed the Committee on approaches to the teaching of phonics, and the equity of combining systematic and synthetic phonics teaching for extensive pupil success as opposed to synthetic phonics only which does not work for 25% of pupils.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The meeting moved to closed session at 3.27pm

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8. Legal Advice – oral briefing by Northern Ireland Assembly Legal Services

The following official joined the meeting at 3.33pm

Rebecca Ellis, Legal Services, Northern Ireland Assembly

The official provided the Committee with legal advice regarding non-attendance at Committee meetings of departmental officials.

The meeting moved to public session at 4.30pm

Due to lack of quorum no other business could be considered.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee for Education meeting will be held on Wednesday 04 November 2026 at 2:00pm in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.40pm.

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
04 November 2026