Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education

End of Session Report

1 September 2025 – 31 August 2026

Report:



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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List of abbreviations and acronyms used in the report

RaIse	Assembly Research and Information Services (RaISe)
DE	Department of Education
RSE	Relationship and Sexuality Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
BTMM	Baker Tilly Mooney Moore

Remit, Powers and Membership of the Committee

The Committee for Education is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with Paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order No 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department of Education and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has the power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister of Education.

The Committee has nine members, including a chairperson and deputy chairperson, with a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee during the current mandate has been as follows:

The Committee has 9 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

- Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Danny Baker MLA
- Mr David Brooks MLA [12]
- Mr Jon Burrows MLA [34]
- Mrs Michelle Guy MLA[5]
- Ms Cara Hunter MLA
- Mrs Cathy Mason MLA
- Mrs Julie Middleton MLA [6789]



[1] With effect from 1 July 2025, Mr David Brooks replaced Ms Cheryl Brownlee

[2] With effect from 9 June 2025, Ms Cheryl Brownlee replaced Mr David Brooks

[3] With effect from 8 September 2025, Mr Jon Burrows replaced Mr Colin Crawford

[4] With effect from 7 October 2024, Mr Colin Crawford replaced Mr Robbie Butler

[5] With effect from 9 September 2024, Mrs Michelle Guy replaced Ms Kate Nicholl

[6] With effect from 5 May 2026, Mrs Julie Middleton replaced Mr Peter Martin

[7] With effect from 2 March 2026, Mr Peter Martin replaced Mr Gary Middleton

[8] With effect from 23 September 2025, Mr Gary Middleton replaced Mr Peter Martin

[9] With effect from 16 September 2024, Mr Peter Martin replaced Ms Cheryl Brownlee

Review of 2025 – 2026 Session

Primary Legislation

General Teaching Council Bill

The General Teaching Council Bill was introduced on 24 November 2025 with the intention to reinstate the Board of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI).

The Committee Stage commenced on 3 December 2025 with the Committee issuing a call for evidence which received 8 responses providing views on the Bill.

The Committee took oral evidence on the Bill from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council; the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; and Department of Education officials.

The Committee undertook formal Clause-by-Clause scrutiny of the Bill on 13 May 2026 and formally agreed its report at its meeting on 20 May 2026.

The Committee awaits the scheduling of amending stages by the Minister.

Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

The Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill is a Member's Bill introduced by Pat Sheehan MLA. Its principal purpose is to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to prepare, publish and lay before the Assembly a strategic workforce plan for the Irish-Medium Education sector, with defined timelines for publication and reporting.

The Committee Stage commenced on 15 April 2026 with the Committee issuing a call for evidence which received 7 responses providing views on the Bill. The Committee took oral evidence on the Bill from the Bill Sponsor; Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe); the Department of Education; Coláiste Feirste; Gaelcholáiste Dhoire; CnaG; Altram; the Youth Assembly; and the Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh.

The Committee undertook formal Clause-by-Clause scrutiny of the Bill on 24 June 2026 and formally agreed its Committee Stage report at the meeting of 1 July 2026.

Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill

The Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill is a Member's Bill introduced by Mr Danny Baker MLA. The Bill seeks to amend the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to address holiday hunger by providing permanent direct payments to the parents of eligible children and young people during school holiday periods in place of free school meals.

The Committee Stage commenced on 14 April 2026 with the Committee issuing a call for evidence which received 19 responses providing views on the Bill. The Committee took oral evidence on the Bill from the Bill Sponsor; Assembly Research and Information Service; the Department of Education; Children in Northern Ireland; the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People; and the Youth Assembly.

The Committee undertook formal Clause-by-Clause scrutiny of the Bill on 1 July 2026 and formally agreed its report at its meeting on 1 July 2026.

Education Inspections Bill

The Education Inspections Bill was introduced on 19 May 2026 with the aim to strengthen and modernise the education inspection system in Northern Ireland.

The Committee Stage commenced on 14 April 2026 with the Committee issuing a call for evidence and scheduling oral evidence for the autumn term.

School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

When the Committee carried out its scrutiny of the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill it consulted widely with stakeholders and young people and identified widespread support for allowing girls the right to wear trousers as part of their school uniform. The Committee attempted to amend to Bill to include this right and when it unable to proceed with amendments it agreed to introduce its own Committee Bill. The Bill was introduced on 22 June 2026, completing its 2nd stage on 30 June 2026 and is currently going through its Committee stage.

Subordinate Legislation

The Committee has considered a total of three statutory rules laid by the Department for Education.

SR Number	Title	Assembly Procedure	Status
SR 2026/53	The Education (Pupil Reporting) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025	Draft Negative Resolution Procedure	Statutory Rule - Complete and Committee Content
SR 2026/106	The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026	Draft Negative Resolution Procedure	Statutory Rule - Complete and Committee Content
	Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026	Affirmative Resolution Procedure	Proposed Statutory Rule - In Progress

Legislative Consent Motions

During the period covered within this report, no Legislative Consent Motions have been laid by the Minister of Education.

Inquiries

Inquiry into a Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation agenda

The Committee continued its inquiry into a Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation agenda in this session. A draft report was considered at its meeting on 1 July 2026, and the Committee agreed to consider this further following summer recess.

mini-inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education

During the period covered within this report, the Committee decided to initiate a mini-inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education.

This was in the context of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 to mandate factual, evidence-based RSE; and the Curriculum (Circumstances in which a Pupil may be Excused from Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Education) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023.

The Committee agreed a report on the inquiry at its meeting on 1 July 2026.

EU Scrutiny

The Committee did not undertake any EU-related scrutiny during the session.

Budget Scrutiny

The Committee engaged with officials on the Department of Education budget throughout the session, taking oral briefings at its meetings on 12 November 2025 and 1 July 2026.



Policy Scrutiny

Strategic priorities

The Committee has selected as its strategic priorities: links between Educational Underachievement and Socioeconomic Deprivation; Special Educational Needs; Early years and Childcare; and a theme of Outdoor Education.

Underachievement and Deprivation

The Committee took evidence from educational leaders on effective school leadership in disadvantaged schools at its meeting on 18 March 2026. The Committee has undertaken two stakeholder meetings, commissioned research and scheduled a further stakeholder meeting to focus on the specific impact on boys.

Special Educational Needs

The Committee has continued with its inquiry into a Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation agenda and expects to conclude its report on the matter on 23 September 2026.

Childcare and Early Years

The Committee has engaged with stakeholders and the Department of Education on childcare and early years related matters including changes to the Tax-Free Childcare scheme. The Committee took evidence from Departmental officials on the childcare strategy at its meeting on 13 May 2026.

Outdoor Education

Following up on work done in the previous session, the Committee brought forward a motion to the Assembly proposing smart targets on the Department in regard to Curriculum Mainstreaming and a Strategy for Outdoor Learning in Schools. The motion was debated and agreed by the Assembly in plenary on 24 November 2025.





Engagement

The Committee has sought to maximise its available time to concentrate on meeting with stakeholders. It hears regularly from the Youth Assembly and other youth panels.

The Committee held an event to hear from stakeholders on the delivery of support for pupils with special educational needs event on 11 November 2025.

The Committee held an event to hear from stakeholders their experience, perspectives and proposed changes to the Northern Ireland curriculum on 3 Feb 2026.

The Committee has received positive feedback on the engagement and outreach it conducts and continues to respond to feedback for continuous improvement.

Committee Motions

During the period of this report, the Committee agreed 1 motion.

The Committee motion on Curriculum Mainstreaming and Strategy for Outdoor Learning in Schools. This was debated by the Assembly sitting in plenary on 24 November 2025 and agreed by the House.

Likely key priorities for the next session

The Committee continues to deal with legislative matters as a priority and to work on its strategic priorities and theme as time allows. The Committee will reflect on its end-of-mandate achievements and prepare a legacy report to inform the work of its successor Committee for Education.

External meetings

The Committee held no external meetings in the session.

Outputs to date

Appendix 1 – Session facts and figures

Committee meetings & visits

Session	Number of meetings held	Percentage minutes public/closed	Number of meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Number of committee visits
2025/2026	39	Public – 90% Closed - 10%	0	0

Statutory Rules

Session	Negative Resolution	Affirmative Resolution	Draft Affirmative	Confirmatory	Not laid	Total
2025/2026	2	1	0	0	-	3

Witnesses

Session	Organisations which gave evidence to the committee
2025/2026	48

Appendix 2 – Committee expenditure

Table 1 – Expenditure for the period 1September 2025 – 31 August 2026

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel	Committee members, staff travel and subsistence relating to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	£0.00
Advertising	Includes the cost of advertising relating to: • The General Teaching Council Bill; • The Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill; • The Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill; • The Education Inspections Bill; and • The Inquiry into a Strategic Review of Current SEN Provision and Transformation agenda	£5059.76
External Consultancy	Includes costs associated with committee use of external consultants to assist in consideration of legislation, inquiries, etc.	£0.00
Refreshments and Hospitality	See below	£0.00
General expenditure	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, committee events, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, and conference fees for members etc.	£2396.32
TOTAL		**£7456.08**

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