



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Committee for Education**

Veronica Bintley  
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
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BT19 7PR

10 May 2013

**Our Ref: PMcC/CMcN/536**

Dear Veronica

**Early Years: Learning to Learn consultation**

The Committee received a Departmental briefing on 24 April 2013 on responses to the Learning to Learn consultation. The Committee also considered responses from its informal stakeholder event held on 16 January 2013 and received a briefing from Assembly Research on 1 May 2013. The following response was agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 8 May 2013.

The Committee agreed that it welcomed the proposed review of the effectiveness of Sure Start and that it would encourage the Department to work more closely with OFMDFM in its review of child care with a view to the development of complementary proposals which better tackle the needs of the 0-3 age group. In line with this and with feedback from stakeholders, the Committee further agreed that the Department should give consideration to

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the development of “educare” provision similar to that which is available in other jurisdictions.

Further to the above and pending the outcome of OFMDFM's work, the Committee agreed to request that the Department reconsider its proposals to limit all new full time Early Years provision and to also reconsider the proposal to bring forward legislation which would limit participation in pre-school provision to one year only.

The Committee agreed that it welcomed the extension of the Foundation Stage to include a non-compulsory pre-school year and the refocusing of the Extended Schools Programme to include nursery schools and nursery units with additional resources going to voluntary and private settings. The Committee also agreed that it supported the extension of the SEN pilots and the development of better continuous professional development for pre-school staff. The Committee agreed to request an update on the SEN pilots from the Department.

The Committee also noted with interest the proposal relating to the Early Years Education clusters and agreed to request a progress update from the Department in the autumn.

The Committee noted with some caution proposals relating to the piloting of different staff/children ratios and standardised patterns of attendance. The Committee sought assurances that child safety, staff workload and parental preference would be important considerations in the establishment and evaluation of such pilots.

The relevant papers from Assembly Research and the informal stakeholder event are enclosed for your information.

Yours sincerely

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