



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2014
West Belfast Partnership Board

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Trevor Lunn MLA
Stephen Moutray MLA
Robin Newton MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Karen Jardine (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Sharon McGurk (Clerical Supervisor)
Sharon Young (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Jonathan Craig MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Seán Rogers MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.04am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were recorded as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 West Belfast Partnership Board

The Chairperson thanked the West Belfast Partnership Board for hosting the Committee meeting and St Mary's University College for facilitating car parking arrangements.

Pat Sheehan welcomed Members to the West Belfast constituency.

2.2 Ministerial briefing

The Chairperson referred Members to Ministerial correspondence relating to previous Committee requests for briefings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a briefing from the Minister at its meeting on Wednesday 9 April 2014 regarding progress towards ESA; vacancy control in the Education and Library Boards; and the Common Funding Scheme.

2.3 Meeting with Pasi Sahlberg

Members noted that, due to diary pressures, the planned meeting with Finnish educationalist Dr Pasi Sahlberg on Tuesday 25 February 2014 had been postponed. The Committee noted that work was continuing with officials from the Department for Employment and Learning to arrange another suitable date.

2.4 Momentum Digital Strategy

The Committee noted correspondence regarding the anticipated publication of the Momentum Digital Strategy relating to the inclusion of computer coding within the school curriculum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the authors of the Momentum Digital Strategy to provide a briefing as part of the Committee's wider consideration of STEM issues.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to invite Sentinus to brief Members on its work in promoting STEM.

2.5 Attendance at INTO Conference

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would attend the INTO conference to be held in Enniskillen on 28 February 2014.

3. Draft Minutes of 19 February 2014

Agreed: The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 The Committee noted a draft summary of the issues raised at the Associate Assessors' informal briefing event on 19 February 2014, held as part of the Committee's Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process. The Chairperson noted that this had been a useful evening, and thanked those Members who participated.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share an amended version of the draft summary, with the Associate Assessors for amendment and with the Department of Education for information.

4.2 The Committee noted further information relating to the Committee's Inquiry including a response from the Department relating to the consultation on the Formal Intervention Process; and further information from ETI including a copy of the "Inspection Leading to Improvement" document, and another document entitled "The Role of the District Inspector".

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the relevant papers should be published on the Committee's webpage with the other Inquiry papers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek further information on the role of Associate Assessors in particular in respect of their involvement in inspection teams.

5. Departmental Briefing: Inquiry into ETI and the School Improvement Process – Self Evaluation

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.14am:

Noelle Buick, Chief Inspector; Faustina Graham, Assistant Chief Inspector; Heather Jackson, Managing Inspector; and John Anderson, Managing Inspector.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and was recorded by Hansard.

11.23 Danny Kinahan joined the meeting.

11.53 Pat Sheehan left the meeting.

The Departmental officials left at 11.56am.

Members noted that a Committee visit to Antrim Grammar School was scheduled for Tuesday 4 March to further inform the Committee's understanding of self-evaluation in schools.

6. Departmental Briefing: NI Teachers' Pension Scheme – SL1 and SR – Departmental Briefing

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 11.57am.

Seamus Gallagher, Deputy Head of Pensions Policy Team; and Brian Quinn, Pensions Policy Team.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the proposed statutory rule:

“The Teachers’ Superannuation (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014” to be made.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for Education has considered: SR 2014/37 The Teachers’ Superannuation (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014, and has no objection to the rule.”

The Departmental officials left at 12.01pm.

7. Assembly Research Briefing - Inquiry into ETI and the School Improvement Process – Recap of Inquiry Papers

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the briefing from Assembly Research.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent regarding school starting age.

8.2 The Committee noted a response from the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB); Western Education and Library Board (WELB); and the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) regarding the use of Curriculum Complaints Tribunals.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding Savings Delivery Plan (SDP) Progress 2013/14, and noted that it is developing a new form of SDP reporting.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from Stranmillis University College (SUC) regarding the reported proposed merger with Queens University, Belfast.

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) regarding the level of support for Visually Impaired School Pupils.

8.6 Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment inviting the Education Committee to co-host a Northern Ireland Science Park Showcase Event.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment indicating its support and agreement to co-host the proposed event.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Asthma UK in respect of its campaign to encourage schools to store emergency inhalers. The Committee also noted a response in tabled items from the Department on this issue, which included information on the School Omnibus survey and guidance for schools on the administration of children’s medication.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from the Department to Asthma UK for comment, and to determine if the Departmental assurances provided address the relevant concerns.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to seek an update in respect of the Education and Training Inspectorate's review of the guidance for schools on the administration of children's medication.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the WELB highlighting changes to the teacher recruitment criteria for the literacy and numeracy Signature Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the General Teaching Council NI (GTCNI) to ask if it accepts WELB's assertion that the recruitment pool of appropriately qualified post-primary teachers has indeed been exhausted, and if this aligns with its own understanding of graduate teacher employment levels.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to Stranmillis University College; St. Mary's University College; and the School of Education at the University of Ulster, Coleraine in respect of the above.

8.9 The Committee noted a response from Queens University, Belfast in respect of proposed changes in other jurisdictions to GCSEs and GCE A-Levels.

8.10 The Committee noted correspondence from NEELB regarding the ongoing investigation and anticipated report into the communication of sensitive issues by a school.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NEELB to seek a copy of the relevant report.

8.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (COFMdFM) giving notice of its Inquiry into the Barroso Taskforce.

8.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (COFMdFM) regarding the Joint Ministerial Council (Europe) December 2013.

8.13 The Committee noted correspondence from WELB on the financial viability of post-primary schools in the WELB area.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to each of the Education and Library Boards and CCMS to request clarification on the definition of a "no longer financially viable school" and details of the numbers of primary and post-primary schools which fall into the category of "no longer financially viable" and the impact this is to have on Area Planning proposals.

8.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) identifying schools participating in the Community Rugby Programme.

8.15 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education in respect of a Committee briefing.

8.16 The Committee noted an invitation to the Rotary Club Technology Tournament for Schools to be held in Dungannon on Friday 7 March.

8.17 The Committee noted reported changes to the operation of a discretionary contingency fund which is ordinarily made available to schools with increasing enrolments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Department as to whether access to the contingency fund is restricted for schools with financial surpluses.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted that the Registrar of GTCNI may be unable to attend the meeting scheduled for 5 March 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the GTCNI on-line survey of perceptions of school inspection and improvement as either an oral or written briefing and, if time permitted, to include the deferred briefing from Assembly Research at the meeting of 5 March 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme as amended.

10. Any Other Business

Members noted that, following the meeting, representatives from the West Belfast Partnership Board would provide an informal briefing on the work of the Education and Training Forum.

11. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 5 March 2014 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.12pm.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
5 March 2014