



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2014
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Kinahan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Stephen Moutray MLA
Sandra Overend MLA
Seán Rogers MLA
Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paula Best (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Jonathan Watson (Clerical Supervisor)
Alicia Muldoon (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

Robin Newton MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.29am.

1. Apologies:

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 New Member

The Chairperson welcomed Sandra Overend MLA to the Committee for Education.

2.2 Examination Results

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's congratulations to Northern Ireland students, teachers and parents following the GCSE and A-level results and noted in particular the improvement in attainment in GCSE English and Maths.

10.32am Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) highlighting the complexity and labour intensive nature of the process by which examination results are communicated by CCEA to schools and then to school pupils and seeking assurances that action is to be taken to improve this process.

2.3 Irish American Partnership

Members noted that on behalf of the Committee, Trevor Lunn had met with representatives of the Irish American Partnership (IAP) on Tuesday 26 August 2014.

Agreed: Given the IAP's interest in the teaching of science in schools, the Committee agreed to write to the IAP advising of the Committee's ongoing engagement with the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition.

2.4 Northern Ireland Nurture Group Network

The Chairperson informed Members that he had attended the annual Northern Ireland Nurture Group Network conference on Wednesday 27 August 2014.

2.5 DE 2013-14 Resource Accounts

The Chairperson advised Members that the Department of Education 2013-14 Resource Accounts had been laid in the Business Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification, at the briefing next week from officials, in respect of:

- the status of the Resource Allocation Budgets for Arms Length Bodies and the Department's budget position for 2014-15;
- the Excess Vote identified in the Resource Accounts which refers to a reported £6.3m of irregular expenditure against Request for Resources A in 2013-14;
- the Ministerial Direction process identified in the Resource Accounts which was initiated by the Permanent Secretary in 2013-14 but was not formalised; and
- the risk management issues set out in the Resource Accounts, in particular: the levels of assurance provided by Arms Length Bodies; the financial management arrangements in the Belfast Education and Library board (BELB); and the transfer of Bloomfield Collegiate to Controlled status etc..

2.6 CCEA 2013 -14 Annual Report and Accounts

The Chairperson advised Members that the CCEA 2013-14 Annual Report and Accounts had been laid in the Business Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on

- the delayed Performance Related Pay awards to the Chief Executive and Directors in respect of 2011-12 and 2012-13;
- the appointment of the permanent Chief Executive of CCEA; and

- the risk identified in the CCEA Annual Report and Accounts associated with CCEA “not having an approved budget and work programme at the beginning of the financial year”.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to CCEA regarding: the appointment of the Chief Executive; the reported risks in respect of its budget; and references in its Annual Report and Accounts to high and critical risks.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings of 1 and 2 July 2014.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

10.41am Jonathan Craig joined the meeting.

5. School Redundancies – Written Briefing

The Committee noted:

- recent correspondence from the Department and the Minister regarding School Redundancies;
- copies of Management Side minutes from the period January to May 2014; and
- copies of correspondence which was issued to Employing/Funding Authorities throughout the School Redundancy process by the Department and templates of letters which were issued by Employing/Funding Authorities to teachers following an application for redundancy.

11.03am Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a further oral briefing on School Redundancies and in particular addressing:

- how the Department and Employing/Funding Authorities communicated with relevant teachers following the final redundancy decisions;
- the lessons learned in respect of communication and co-ordinated action by the Department with the Employing/Funding Authorities;
- whether the Department makes appropriate use of the Management Side meeting, given that the concerns raised (and minuted) by the Employing/Funding Authorities do not appear to have been heeded;

- why the financial criteria for redundancy was changed during this process; and
- the overall implications for the school workforce of the this process including any remaining redundancy pressures.

6. Correspondence

6.1 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education following an NSPCC briefing on ‘Safeguarding of Children in the Revised Curriculum’. Members noted that the Minister is to bring forward anti-bullying legislation in this mandate.

6.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the PriceWaterhouseCoopers(PWC) 2001 Review of Teachers’ Health and Wellbeing report. Members noted that the Department had subsequently identified a number of measures designed to enhance teacher well-being.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the effectiveness of the relevant measures designed to enhance teacher well-being.

6.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding engagement by parents with the Early Years allocation process and DE’s review of Early Years patterns of attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department of Education seeking clarification as to whether parental engagement with the Early Years allocation process is in fact reducing and seeking confirmation that the process of standardising attendance is intended to lead to equal availability of full-time provision throughout Northern Ireland.

11.12am Maeve McLaughlin rejoined the meeting.

6.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education in respect of the Needs Model; the Drumragh Integrated College Judgement and Early Years Development Proposals (DPs) and Article 64 considerations.

Members also noted correspondence from Nigel Frith, Principal of Drumragh Integrated College seeking progress on the re-taking of the Drumragh Integrated College DP decision.

Additionally Members noted correspondence from the Department of Education replying to Committee queries in respect of Integrated Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the re-taking of the Drumragh Integrated College DP decision.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification as to how and when Integrated Education sector growth, over and above population growth, has been included in Area Plans.

6.5 The Committee noted a request from the Committee for Employment and Learning for a joint briefing on the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland Bill.

6.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Special Education Needs (SEN) and Inclusion Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the new right of appeal for parents of SEN children aged under two in respect of an ELB's decision relating to SEN statements.

6.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) regarding DE guidance on the Community Use of School Premises. Members noted that the guidance requires schools to have insurance coverage in the amount of £10m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether insurance issues have discouraged community use of school premises and suggesting that consideration may be given to revising the levels of insurance that are required.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to give further consideration at the meeting on 10 September 2014 to education-related community planning issues.

11.23am Stephen Moutray left the meeting.

6.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Employment and Learning relating to the Tapestry of Colours education resource.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department seeking information as to how schools are encouraged to facilitate tolerance and mutual understanding among pupils and whether the Tapestry of Colours education resource is to be employed in this regard.

6.9 The Committee noted responses from the Department of Education enclosing the evaluation framework for the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) – Shared Campuses initiative.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Department on the protocol for the Shared Campuses initiative prior to the next round of funding. The Committee also agreed to seek assurances that lessons learned from previous shared education programmes will be incorporated in relevant future funding rounds.

6.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister relating to its inquiry into Together: Building a United Community.

6.11 The Committee noted responses from the Department of Education regarding the capital budget for 2014-15; the capital works projects protocol; and the use of economic appraisals for the Edenderry Nursery and Glenwood Primary capital projects.

The Committee also noted correspondence from the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland enclosing the Department of Education capital activity reports for July and August 2014.

Additionally, the Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson from the All Party Group (APG) on Construction to attend its meeting on Tuesday 16th September at 12.30pm to discuss the DE capital programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that - diaries permitting - the Chairperson would attend the APG Construction meeting on behalf of the Committee.

6.12 The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Education to a letter from a pupil from St Martin's Primary School who participated in the Fermanagh Shared Education Partnership.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the Principal of St Martin's Primary School, Fermanagh for his information.

6.13 The Committee noted an invitation from the Royal Society of Chemistry for the Chairperson to speak at the Science and Stormont event on Monday 13 October 2014, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings at 1:30 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that - diary permitting - the Chairperson would attend this event on behalf of the Committee.

6.14 The Committee noted an invitation from the Federation of Passenger Transport Northern Ireland to attend its Safe Transport Awareness Event on Tuesday 23 September 2014, Long Gallery at 12 noon.

6.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in respect of queries from Young Enterprise Northern Ireland re: European Social Funding.

The Committee also noted correspondence from the Special European Union Programmes Body regarding its submission to the Peace IV Consultation.

Additionally, the Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on PEACE IV 2014-2020 and the DE International Education Programme 2013-14 End of Year report.

6.16 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on the increase in the number of pupil exemptions from examination statistics.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek: an update from the Department on the working group reviewing the relevant ineligibility criteria and information on the progression routes and the numbers of pupils who drop out of formal education including school in lower sixth year.

6.17 The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA relating to reported problems associated with the OCR GCSE in Computing. Members noted that CCEA has indicated there is no anticipated impact on learners in Northern Ireland.

6.18 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the job evaluation process for classroom assistants.

6.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education in respect of the costs associated with Nursery Principal Release Time - £1.21m per year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking if it has any plans to fund Nursery Principal Release Time.

6.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing further information on:

- the Savings Delivery Plan: 2012/13 Achievement Report;
- the Business Plan 2013/14: End Year Report on Progress;
- the Business Plan 2014/15;
- Q1 Year 3 update on the Programme for Government; and
- the role of the Permanent Secretary.

6.21 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the anticipated audit and confirmation processes for the funding allocated to schools under the revised Common Funding Scheme. Members also noted that the Department had confirmed that there has been initial co-operation with the Northern Ireland Administrative Data Research Centre.

6.22 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the £5m increase in Teacher Substitution costs.

6.23 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the consultation on the proposed changes to contributions for members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS).

6.24 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the 'Buddy up' Programme. The Department advised that the existing Buddy Up programme is not funded by DE as part of its T:BUC commitments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking that the Committee be kept updated on the implementation of the DE T:BUC 'Buddy up' Scheme.

6.25 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding the Administration of Medication in Schools Guidance. Members noted an Education and Training Inspectorate report which argues that the current guidance offers a detailed and robust framework for supporting the medication needs of all pupils.

The Committee also noted correspondence from Asthma UK regarding the consultation on changes to the regulations relating to the supply of asthma inhalers in schools for use in emergencies.

6.26 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing a response to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment (ETI) Committee regarding the Green Investment Bank- Energy Efficient Workshop. The Department indicated that there is no obvious means by which it can engage with the Green Investment Bank.

6.27 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Nurture Group Network for the Chairperson to attend its annual conference on 27 August 2014, St. Joseph's Primary School, Antrim.

6.28 The Committee noted correspondence from the Home to School Transport Review Panel, regarding a briefing on the Home to School Transport Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the Home to School Transport Report as soon as possible.

6.29 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly European Officer enclosing a list of relevant EU events and conferences through to January 2015.

6.30 Members noted an invitation from Queen's University Belfast to a book launch (Authority and the Teacher) hosted by the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast, Wednesday 29 October 2014, 1:45pm.

6.31 The Committee noted a request from Parents' Education as Autism Therapists (PEAT) to meet with the Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that – diaries permitting - it was content for the Chairperson to meet with PEAT.

6.32 Members noted an invitation to view children's art work sponsored by BELONG Northern Ireland in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Monday 8 September 2014, 4pm.

6.33 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education enclosing a copy of the Written Ministerial Statement regarding Teacher Eligibility. Members noted that the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland (GTCNI) will brief the Committee on this matter, later in September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to GTCNI asking that it supplement its briefing with information on its resource position in respect of its additional responsibilities following the anticipated passage of the GTCNI Bill.

6.34 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned grandparent relating to the teaching profession in Northern Ireland.

6.35 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the recommendations in the CREDIT (Classrooms Re-Imagined Education in Diversity and Inclusion for Teachers) Report.

6.36 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education in response to Committee queries, initially from a concerned parent, on the policy for Home Tuition Support for Children with SEN.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Department's correspondence to the concerned parent for information.

6.37 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education including revised Departmental guidance to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in respect of Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS).

6.38 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education on the relevant recommendations (specifically literacy and numeracy) in the Advisory Group on Alleviating Hardship report published by OFMDFM.

6.39 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Health Agency on the Reviews of Multi-Disciplinary Teams and Allied Health Professionals.

6.40 The Committee noted an invitation from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson relating to the visit to Parliament Buildings by the BBC Director General, Lord Hall, Wednesday 8 October 2014, 11am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to decline the invitation owing to a scheduling clash with an Education Committee meeting.

6.41 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding school uniform issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Competition and Markets Authority seeking an update on its consideration of competition issues relating to school uniform retailers in Northern Ireland.

7. End of Session Report 2013 – 2014

The Committee noted its draft End of Session Report for 2013 – 2014.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted correspondence from BELB postponing a scheduled briefing on Elective Home Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule this briefing as soon as possible.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a meeting at the annual BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition in Dublin in January 2015.

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

9. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update from the Department on measures to introduce flexibility in respect of school starting age.

10. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 10 September 2014 at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.39am.

Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education
10 September 2014