



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 13 JANUARY 2016
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jonathan Craig MLA
Chris Hazzard MLA
Danny Kennedy MLA
Trevor Lunn MLA
Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Robin Newton MLA
Seán Rogers MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)
Simon Kelly (Assembly Legal Advisor– item 1 only)

Apologies:

Pat Sheehan MLA

The meeting commenced in private session at 9:49am.

1. Shared Education Bill – legal advice - Assembly Legal Services

Assembly Legal Services joined the meeting at 9:49am.

The Committee considered legal advice relating to the Shared Education Bill.

The Committee noted tabled correspondence from the Department in respect of Committee amendments to the Shared Education Bill.

Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting at 9:51am.

Trevor Lunn joined the meeting at 9:52am.

Danny Kennedy joined the meeting at 9:54am.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Assembly Legal Services left the meeting at 10:01am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of a Departmental amendment relating to the inclusion of children with no religious belief in Shared Education, for consideration at the meeting of 20 January 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would likely consider, at Further Consideration Stage, the Departmental text designed to revise the Committee amendment relating to a duty on the Department in respect of Shared Education, which adds the wording “so far as its powers extend”.

The meeting moved into public session at 10:11am.

2. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

3. Chairperson’s Business

3.1 Committee visit to Dublin

The Chairperson advised that along with 2 Committee Members, he had visited Dublin on Thursday 7 January 2016 where they: informally met with the Oireachtas Committee for Education and Social Protection; attended the BT Young Scientist Exhibition; and met with representatives of the Higher Education Authority and the Irish Universities Association.

Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 10:15am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to express its thanks to: the Oireachtas Committee for Education and Social Protection; BT; the Higher Education Authority and the Irish Universities Association.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to all of the Northern Ireland schools who submitted projects to the BT Young Scientist Exhibition in order to congratulate them and encourage their continuing involvement in this event.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek clarification from the Department as to the financial and other support provided to schools in order to facilitate their participation in the BT Young Scientist Exhibition event.

Agreed: As part of its consideration of the promotion of STEM in schools, the Committee agreed that it would invite BT to make an oral presentation on the BT Young Scientist Exhibition event.

Agreed: Further to its consideration of the transferability of A-levels, the Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the numbers of A-level candidates successfully obtaining 3 or 4 A-levels including applied A-levels. The Committee also agreed to seek further information as to how the Department ensures that careers teachers are made aware of university and institute of technology places and scholarships etc. in the Republic of Ireland.

3.2 Budget 2016-17 – National Insurance

The Committee noted that the Department had advised Members, at its previous meeting, of a £30m pressure associated with changes to National Insurance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a breakdown of the pressure faced by each of its Arms Length Bodies in respect of National Insurance changes and an estimate of the impact of these changes on low paid workers employed in the education sector.

Sean Rogers left the meeting at 10:26am.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 6 January 2016.

Sean Rogers rejoined the meeting at 10:28am.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Committee Stage - Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill

The Committee noted a copy of the Addressing Bullying in Schools EQIA screening information from the Department of Education. The Committee also noted 16 written submissions from stakeholders to the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the written responses on the Committee's webpage, share them with the Department and include them in the Committee's report.

5.2 Shared Education Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Equality Commission on the "reasonable numbers" wording in the Shared Education Bill.

6. The Teachers' Pension Scheme (Consequential Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 – Departmental oral briefing

A Departmental official joined the meeting at 10:30am.

Brian Quinn, Deputy Principal, Pensions Policy, Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team, Department of Education briefed the Committee on the Teachers' Pension Scheme (Consequential Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 10:30am.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

The official left the meeting at 10:37am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make and lay the proposed statutory rule in draft.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to forego an oral briefing on the draft rule when it is made and laid by the Department.

7. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum

The witnesses joined the meeting at 10:38am.

Dr Noel Purdy, Chairperson - Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum and Lee Kane, Regional Anti-Bullying Coordinator - Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Jonathan Craig rejoined the meeting at 11:01am

Members declared the following interests:

Danny Kennedy serves on the Boards of Governors of a number of schools.

Jonathan Craig serves on the Boards of Governors of a number of schools.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:47am.

8. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence Children’s Law Centre

The witnesses joined the meeting at 11:47am.

Rachel Hogan, Children’s Law Centre; and Kathryn Stevenson, Head of Legal Services, Children’s Law Centre briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 12:20pm.

Trevor Lunn left the meeting at 12:21pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:22pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department: seeking clarification as to the application of the provisions of the Bill for children in Education Other Than At School and to seek further information on the protections for school children that are currently in place in order to address incidents of bullying by teachers.

9. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence Tor Bank Special School and National Association of Head Teachers

The witnesses joined the meeting at 12:24pm.

Colm Davis, Principal - Tor Bank Special School; Harry Greer, President - NAHT(NI); and Helena Macormac, Policy Director, NAHT(NI) briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

Trevor Lunn rejoined the meeting at 12:25pm.

Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 12:52pm.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

The witnesses left the meeting at 1:04pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information as to the degree to which the Bill will permit school authorities to use their discretion in respect of incidents of bullying involving children with Special Educational Needs or children whose bullying behaviour can be linked to specific circumstances that require sensitive handling.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 The Committee noted correspondence from Include Youth and Business in the Community enclosing the executive summary of a report into the Aiming Higher: Project 100.

10.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in relation to record-keeping in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Jim Allister MLA, for his information.

10.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Strategic Leadership Forum for Special Schools enclosing a submission on Special Education in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Strategic Leadership Forum for Special Schools.

10.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in relation to the future of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

10.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister enclosing a copy of the Executive's Investment Strategy update document.

10.7 The Committee noted an invitation for the Chairperson to meet with the Education Minister from the Palestinian Authority on 20 January 2016.

Agreed: As the Chairperson was unavailable, the Committee agreed that Members would advise the Clerk of their availability to undertake this meeting.

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted that an informal briefing by Erasmus+ Connections on mental health in schools, will take place on Tuesday 19 January 2016 at 1:00pm in room 21.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to meet at 9:30am on Wednesday 20 January 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the Departmental briefing on the capital programme from 3 February to 10 February 2016.

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

12. Any Other Business

12.1 Budgets for Special Schools

Members expressed concerns at the possible cost implications associated with the Department's Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill for special schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the budget position for special schools and the consideration it has given to the cost implications for the provisions of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

12.2 Oversubscription in school places in Lagan Valley constituency

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarification on the Area Planning action it is undertaking in order to address over-subscription in schools (and pre-schools) in Dromore, Kinallen and Dromora.

13. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 20 January 2016, at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10pm.

Peter Weir
Chairperson, Committee for Education
20 January 2016