



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 20 JANUARY 2016  
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)  
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)  
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)  
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)  
Caroline Perry (Assembly Research Services – item 6 only)

**Apologies:**

Danny Kennedy MLA  
Nelson McCausland MLA

*The meeting commenced in private session at 9:38am.*

**1. Shared Education Bill - “no religious belief” amendment**

The Committee noted correspondence providing clarification from the Department of Education on the Minister’s proposed amendment to the Shared Education Bill in respect of children with no designated religious belief.

*Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting at 9:40am.*

*The meeting moved into public session at 9:41am.*

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

### 3. Chairperson's Business

#### 3.1 Withdrawal of Examining Bodies

The Chairperson noted recent press reports relating to the withdrawal of the OCR and AQA examining bodies from the provision of GCSEs in Northern Ireland.

Members expressed concerns in respect of the possible adverse impact on Northern Ireland GCSE students and indicated the importance of co-operation between the Department, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the examining bodies in order to limit any unwelcome effects of the reported changes to GCSE provision.

*A Member declared the following interest:*

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

*Seán Rogers joined the meeting at 9:45am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking clarification:

- on the timing and the nature of the withdrawal of the 2 examining bodies;
- on reported gaps in CCEA's GCSE provision including ICT and psychology; and
- as to how the transition from the present competitive GCSE market to an effective CCEA monopoly is to impact on CCEA's dual governance arrangements which cover its role as examining body and regulator.

#### 3.2 Erasmus+ Connections – informal briefing – 19 January 2016

The Chairperson referred Members to a recent informal briefing with young people involved in the Assembly's Erasmus+ project and the related report dealing with mental health issues in education.

*Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 9:52am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue a letter of thanks to the young people involved in the Assembly's Erasmus+ project.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the report to the evidence received as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill and to forward the report to the Department for its commentary and to seek further information on: the consistency of pastoral care provision in schools; early intervention measures; and support for teachers dealing with pupils with mental health issues.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to forward a copy of the report to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee.

#### **4. Minutes of previous meeting**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 13 January 2016.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

##### **5.1 Rescinding decisions in respect of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider, at the meeting on 27 January 2016, to rescind its previous decision, not to seek an extension to the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

#### **6. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence - Assembly Research - Feedback from school children’s focus groups**

*A representative from Assembly Research Services joined the meeting at 10:00am.*

Caroline Perry, Assembly Research Services briefed the Committee on the feedback from school children’s focus groups on the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*The representative from Assembly Research Services left the meeting at 10:34am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department in order to seek commentary on:

- the scope of schools’ responsibility: in respect of bullying based on the repeated use of electronic communication and where a pupil is in the lawful control or charge of a member of the school staff;
- the consequences for schools who do not retain or dispose of records of incidents of bullying correctly or who publish this information in an inappropriate manner; and
- the suggestion that a record of an incident of bullying should only be made with the consent of the victim.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking oral evidence on: the inspection evidence relating to the quality and consistency of the provision of pastoral care in schools and the Department’s progress

with the Safeguarding Board in producing guidance that is to be issued to schools in order to tackle cyberbullying.

*Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 10:44am.*

## **7. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence - Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 10:47am.*

David Russell, Deputy Director, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC); Fiona O’Connell, Researcher, NIHRC; Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI); and Deborah Howe, Policy Manager, ECNI briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Peter Weir left the meeting and Sandra Overend assumed the chairpersonship at 11:28am.*

*Peter Weir rejoined the meeting and resumed the chairpersonship at 11:30am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission seeking information on the relevant constraints on school authorities in obtaining electronic information from the personal communication devices owned by pupils, in order to record or address cyberbullying incidents.

*The witnesses left the meeting at 11:46am.*

## **8. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 11:46am.*

Koulla Yiasouma, Commissioner, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY); and Mairéad McCafferty, Chief Executive, NICCY 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 12:01pm.*

*A Member declared the following interest:*

*Seán Rogers serves on a Board of Governors of a school.*

*The witnesses left the meeting at 12:23pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek commentary on the inclusion of independent schools in the provisions of the Bill.

## **9. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – oral evidence - Ulster Teachers' Union**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 12:24pm.*

Julie Orr, President, Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) and Sandra Brown, Ex-President, UTU briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 12:57pm.*

*The witnesses left the meeting at 1:11pm*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification as to how bullying data collected under the provisions of the Bill would be used in school inspections by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

## **10. Correspondence**

**10.1** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

**10.2** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life "Living with Difference – Community, Diversity and the Common Good".

**10.3** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding over-subscription in preschool education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking up-to-date information on the percentage of parents that exited the pre-school allocation process before its conclusion in Northern Ireland generally and in the East Belfast constituency, in particular.

**10.4** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the transfer of responsibility of Woodlands College from the Department of Justice to the Education Authority

**10.5** The Committee noted correspondence from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) enclosing a copy of a document entitled “The Programme for Government 2016/2020 Building a Better Future for All the Young People of Northern Ireland - A Perspective from the Council for Catholic Maintained School.”

**10.6** The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from a concerned teacher/PhD student to the Minister regarding educational provision for autistic children in mainstream schools.

**10.7** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel enclosing information on the PEACE IV programme.

**10.8** The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority setting out how a £5m allocation to maintenance spending is to be disbursed in 2015-16.

**10.9** The Committee noted a publication entitled ‘Fleming Fulton today’, which is published in co-operation with the staff and parents of Fleming Fulton School.

## **11. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to meet on Monday 8 February 2016 in order to consider its report on the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to send a letter of condolence to the principal of Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch, following the recent tragic death of a pupil.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to clarify the action it is taking in order to ensure that employers recognise the equivalence between Essential Skills qualifications and the corresponding GCSE grade C.

## **13. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting**

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 27 January 2016, at 10.00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 1:16pm.*

**Peter Weir**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**27 January 2016**