



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2016  
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**Present:**

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)  
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Jonathan Craig MLA  
Chris Hazzard MLA  
Trevor Lunn MLA  
Nelson McCausland 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)  
Caroline Perry (Assembly Research Services – item 6 only)

**Apologies:**

Danny Kennedy MLA

*The meeting commenced in public session at 10:02am.*

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

**2.1 Membership change**

The Committee expressed its appreciation to outgoing Member, Seán Rogers, for his valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

*Jonathan Craig joined the meeting at 10:03am.*

**2.2 Tragic Death of a Pupil**

The Chairperson referred Members to the tragic death of a pupil of St Martin's Primary School, Garrison.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to send a note of condolence to St Martin's Primary School.

### **2.3 Harmony Hill Primary School – Transfer Test Results**

The Chairperson noted recent press reports relating to Harmony Hill Primary School and its communication to its Primary 7s regarding their transfer test results.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the principal congratulating him on his school's sensitive approach to an important decision-making juncture for young pupils.

## **3. Minutes of previous meeting**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 27 January 2016.

## **4. Matters Arising**

### **4.1 Employers and Essential Skills Qualifications**

The Chairperson indicated that the Department of Education had been in informal contact to advise that the Committee's query in respect employer recognition of the equivalence between Essential Skills qualifications and the corresponding GCSE grade C, was outside its remit.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Employment and Learning, on this matter.

## **5. Addressing Bullying in Schools – Committee Stage – final clause by clause scrutiny**

*Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:06am.*

Caroline Gillan, Director of Access, Inclusion and Well-being; and Alan Boyd, Head of Pupil Management Team briefed the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

The Committee commenced its formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

### **Clause 1: Definition of “bullying”**

The Committee noted a Departmental assurance that forthcoming anti-bullying guidance would clarify the treatment of unrepeatable or one-off bullying events.

*Chris Hazzard joined the meeting at 10:12am.*

*Jonathan Craig left the meeting at 10:30am.*

Question: "That the Committee is content with the proposed amendment to Clause 1, which would clarify that acts or omissions which do not meet the specification in Clause 1(1) may also be classified as bullying, as indicated below, put and agreed to."

Clause 1, page 1, line 2

At end insert '(but is not limited to)'

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it would reconsider its position in respect of the above, in the event of an alternative Departmental approach or upon receipt of revised Departmental wording.

*Jonathan Craig rejoined the meeting at 10:33am*

The Committee considered the exclusion of Special Schools or Learning Support Units from the provisions of the Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek a Ministerial assurance, at Consideration Stage of the Bill, in respect of the development of appropriate guidance for Special Schools and Learning Support Units in relation to the identification and recording of bullying involving children with Special Educational Needs.

Question: "That the Committee is content with the proposed Departmental amendment, as indicated below, which makes a technical change to the wording in Clause 1, put and agreed to."

Definition of "bullying" [j1]

1.—(1) In this Act "bullying" includes the repeated use of—

(a) a verbal, written or electronic communication,

(b) a physical act, or

(c) a combination of those,

by a pupil or a group of pupils against another pupil or group of pupils, with the intention of causing physical or emotional harm to that pupil or group of pupils.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), "act" includes "omission".

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that in order to give effect to the specification amendment above, it would put down an amendment to the Departmental amendment to Clause 1.

Question: "That the Committee is content with Clause 1, subject to the proposed amendments, put and agreed to."

## **Clause 2: Duty of Board of Governors to secure measures to prevent bullying**

The Committee noted advice from the Department that the Minister was likely to support an amendment relating to a time period for the review of anti-bullying measures by schools.

Question: “That the Committee is content with the proposed amendment, as indicated below, which would require schools to review their anti-bullying measures within a period not exceeding 4 years, put and agreed to.”

Clause 2, page 1

Leave out line 22 and insert-

'(i) at intervals of no more than 4 years; and'

The Committee considered but did not pursue proposed amendments that would widen the scope of the responsibilities of Boards of Governors. These amendments sought to take into account unacceptable behaviour towards a pupil of a school by another pupil, or pupils, from that school, which occurred outside the formal school day but which impacts upon the pupil's participation in school.

The Committee considered amendments relating to tackling cyberbullying.

*Nelson McCausland joined the meeting at 10:46am.*

Question: “That the Committee is content with the proposed amendment, as indicated below, to indicate that Boards of Governors may consider measures to address bullying by means of electronic communication regardless of when it occurs where it is likely to have a negative impact on the pupil's education, put and agreed to – on a without prejudice basis, subject to consideration of revised wording.”

The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes	Abstained	Not voting
Peter Weir	Chris Hazzard	Sandra Overend	
Jonathan Craig	Maeve McLaughlin		
Trevor Lunn			
Robin Newton			
Nelson McCausland			
Seán Rogers			

Clause 2, page 2, line 16

At end insert –

‘(1A) The Board of Governors of a grant-aided school may, to such an extent as is reasonable, consider measures to be taken by the school (whether by the Board of Governors, the staff of the school or other persons) that may help reduce bullying by means of electronic communication, in circumstances other than those listed in section 2(1)(b), where that bullying is likely to have a detrimental effect on a pupil's education.’

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of its pastoral care guidance and any other related policies relating to the well-being and safeguarding of pupils.

Question: "That the Committee is content with Clause 2, subject to the proposed amendments, put and agreed to."

### **Clause 3: Duty to keep a record of incidents of bullying**

The Committee considered proposed amendments relating to Clause 3(3) which would clarify that the list of bullying motivations provided in the Bill was not exhaustive. Some Members highlighted concerns that the Bill did not explicitly refer to socio-economic background and physical appearance as motivations for bullying.

Question: "That the Committee is content with the proposed amendment, as indicated below, to replace the list of bullying motivation factors with a Departmental regulation-making power to generate a list of factors, put and not agreed to."

The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes	Abstained	Not voting
Peter Weir	Chris Hazzard	Sandra Overend	
Jonathan Craig	Maeve McLaughlin		
Robin Newton	Trevor Lunn		
Nelson McCausland	Seán Rogers		

Clause 3, page 2, line 37

Leave out from line 37 to line 4 on page 3 and insert - 'any one or more factors prescribed in regulations to be made by the Department, subject to the draft affirmative procedure.'

Question: "That the Committee is content with the proposed amendment, as indicated below, to provide a regulation-making power to the Department to amend the list of bullying motivation factors, put and agreed to."

The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes	Abstained	Not voting
Peter Weir	Chris Hazzard	Trevor Lunn	
Jonathan Craig	Maeve McLaughlin	Seán Rogers	
Robin Newton			
Nelson McCausland			
Sandra Overend			

Clause 3, page 3, line 4

At end insert '( ) The Department may by order subject to negative resolution amend subsection (3).'

Question: “That the Committee is content with the proposed Departmental amendment, as indicated below, which will add a reference to ‘dependents’ in the list of motivation factors in Clause 3(3), put and agreed to.”

Clause 3, page 3, line 4

At end insert ‘( ) having, or not having, dependants’

Question: “That the Committee is content with Clause 3, subject to the proposed amendments, put and agreed to.”

#### **Clause 4: Interpretation**

Question: “That the Committee is content with Clause 4, as drafted, put and agreed to.”

#### **Clause 5: Short title and commencement**

Question: “That the Committee is content with Clause 5, as drafted, put and agreed to.”

#### **Long Title**

Question: “That the Committee is content with the Long Title of the Bill as drafted, put and agreed to.”

The Committee concluded its formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

*The officials left the meeting at 11:35am*

### **6. Promoting STEM in Schools – Assembly Research briefing**

*A representative from Assembly Research Services joined the meeting at 11:36am.*

Caroline Perry, Assembly Research Services briefed the Committee on her paper entitled: Promoting STEM in schools.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 11:46am*

*The representative from Assembly Research Services left the meeting at 11:56am.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) seeking its assessment of the impact on schools of the withdrawal of 2 GCSE examining bodies in respect of the access for GCSE pupils to STEM subjects and modern languages.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to CCEA seeking an update on the planned introduction of a GCSE in Computing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a briefing on STEM related issues, including the relevant training for teachers as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

## **7. Correspondence**

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

**7.2** The Committee noted correspondence from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection following the informal meeting in Leinster House on 7 January 2016.

**7.3** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition 2016.

**7.4** The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly EU Manager enclosing a copy of the EU Matters – January 2016 newsletter.

**7.5** The Committee noted an invitation from Magherafelt High School to the Annual Professional Development and Training Conference 2016 entitled “Reimagining Remembrance; Dealing with the Legacy of a Violent Past in History and Heritage Education” in Belfast, on 19-24 March 2016.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the funding that will be made available to teachers to attend this event.

**7.6** The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Education announcing an independent panel to review the planning, growth and development of Integrated Education.

**7.7** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the transferability of A-Levels.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department of Education seeking further details on the uptake of Applied A-levels.

**7.8** The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Brenda Hale MLA to the Minister regarding the supply and suitability of the whiteboards to be installed in Dromore Central Primary School.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking information on its policy in respect of schools seeking to replace equipment such as whiteboards which do not meet current specifications and assurance that costs to the taxpayer will be minimised.

**7.9** The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson to attend the NASUWT Annual Conference at the ICC Birmingham from Friday 25 March to Monday 28 March 2016.

**7.10** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister enclosing a copy of the Transfer of Functions Order

**7.11** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme.

**7.12** The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee to the Department of Education in respect of the cost of precautionary suspensions in schools.

**7.13** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister enclosing a copy of its report into its inquiry into Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) and seeking feedback as to whether the Committee has reviewed good relations progress in T:BUC.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

**7.14** The Committee noted a request from Booktrust seeking a meeting to discuss funding issues.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an informal briefing event at a suitably convenient date.

**7.15** The Committee noted correspondence advising Members of the launch of the Early Years Pathway Fund.

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it will meet on Monday 8 February 2016 at 3:45pm in Room 21 in order to consider its report on the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reschedule its Ministerial budget briefing to 9 March 2016.

The Committee noted that BT Young Scientist will not be available to brief the Committee until the next mandate commences.

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



## **9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The Committee will meet again on Monday 8 February 2016, at 3.45pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:05pm.*

**Peter Weir**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**10 February 2016**