

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

End of Session Report 1 September 2014 – 31 August 2015

REMIT, POWERS AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee for Education is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and, under Standing Order 48.

Statutory Committees have been established to advise and assist the appropriate Minister on the formation of policy in relation to matters within his/her responsibilities. Specifically, the Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- consider relevant secondary legislation and take the committee stage of primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister for Education.

The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of 5. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

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Peter Weir (Chairperson)^{2,6}

Sandra Overend (Deputy Chairperson)⁷

Maeve McLaughlin

Jonathan Craig

Ross Hussey^{1,8}

Nelson McCausland³

Chris Hazzard

Trevor Lunn

Robin Newton

Pat Sheehan

Sean Rogers^{4, 5}

¹ With effect from 04 July 2014 Mrs Sandra Overend replaced Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson

² With effect from 23 September 2014 Ms Michelle McIlveen replaced Mr Mervyn Storey as Chairperson

³ With effect from 06 October 2014 Mr Nelson McCausland replaced Mr Stephen Moutray

⁴ With effect from 17 November 2014 Mr Colum Eastwood replaced Mr Seán Rogers

⁵ With effect from 08 December 2014 Mr Sean Rogers replaced Mr Colum Eastwood

⁶ With effect from 11 May 2015 Mr Peter Weir replaced Miss Michelle McIlveen as Chairperson

⁷ With effect from 15 June 2015 Mrs Sandra Overend replaced Mr Danny Kinahan as Deputy Chairperson

⁸ With effect from 23 June 2015 Mr Ross Hussey replaced Mrs Sandra Overend

KEY ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

During the fourth session of the mandate and in line with its strategic plan, the Committee:

- concluded its inquiry and agreed its report into Shared and Integrated Education;
- produced a position paper on the Area Planning process;
- reviewed in detail the Department's budget for 2015-16 and its plans for teachers' pensions;
- continued its consideration of the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in schools;
- reviewed access to the curriculum for children requiring Health service provision and began the Committee Stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill; and
- completed its report on employee absence in the Education sector.

The Committee also undertook study of other matters including:

- issues relating to the criteria for and funding of teacher redundancies;
- the establishment of the Education Authority;
- the Department's review of Home to School Transport;
- the iMatter policy and the Department's response to the Marshall Report on Child Sexual Exploitation;
- the progress of the Department's capital programme; and
- the Department's compliance with Programme for Government and other targets.

The Committee scrutinised a number of statutory rules relating to: teachers' pensions; the constitution of the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland and provisions relating to a legislative gap in respect of the de-registration of teachers.

The Committee held 39 meetings in total. 14 were completely in public session. 25 were partially in private session – these were associated with the consideration of inquiry findings and the receipt of legal advice. 6 meetings were held outside of Parliament Buildings in the following locations; Methodist College, Belfast; the Ryandale Inn (Moy) which involved a visit to Moy Regional Primary School and St John's Primary School, Moy; Drumragh Integrated College; Shimna Integrated College which informed the Committee's consideration of its Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education; W5, Belfast which included a visit

to Currie Primary School and informed the Committee's consideration of STEM issues; and Ceara Special School which informed the Committee's consideration of the Committee Stage of the SEND Bill.

INQUIRIES

The Committee undertook an Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education. The aim of the Inquiry was to:

- Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education across all educational phases – including consideration of the need for a formal statutory definition and an obligation in statute to facilitate and encourage Shared Education;
- Identify the key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education;
- Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of policy interventions and programmes;
- Consider what priorities and actions need to be taken to improve sharing and integration – including the effectiveness of the relevant parts of the CRED policy; the need to engage more effectively with parents/carers; and the role of Special Schools; and
- Report to the Assembly on its findings and recommendations by Spring 2015.



Education Committee Members during their visit to Shimna Integrated College

The Committee considered: 100+ written submissions; feedback from an informal evidence event; and 24 formal oral evidence sessions to the inquiry. The Committee undertook 5 visits to Integrated schools and Shared Education projects. The Committee commissioned Assembly Education Services to obtain feedback from a representative sample of school children and Assembly Research Services to review the findings of the 2012 Kids' Life and Times and Young Life and Times survey. The Committee also commissioned a number of research papers on relevant related matters.

The Committee reviewed a wide range of opinions, suggestions and assertions: from school children and young people; from parents; from teachers and their representative organisations; from academics; from stakeholder organisations and from the Department of Education. In July 2015, the Committee concluded its inquiry and agreed the final report.

The Committee was greatly impressed by examples of sharing and co-operation in many schools in different sectors and phases across Northern Ireland. The Committee agreed that in order to widen participation there should be a statutory obligation on the Department and its Arms Length Bodies, to encourage the participation of all schools in Shared Education. The Committee felt that Shared Education was best defined as a whole school educational improvement activity which could take place across all educational phases. The Committee believed that the societal objectives, though secondary to the educational objectives, were important and should extend beyond the reconciliation of the 2 largest communities in Northern Ireland in order to incorporate all relevant Section 75 groups.

The Committee felt that in order to better support Shared Education, the Department should study and disseminate the inclusive and welcoming ethos of successful Integrated; non-Integrated and Special Schools as well pre-school settings and nursery schools across Northern Ireland. The Committee also felt that in order to boost the confident participation of all schools in Shared Education, the Department should provide a programme of support for teachers and wider school communities.

Given the anticipated substantial financial investment in Shared Education, the Committee supported the development and publication of objective impact measures based on both educational and societal progress.

The Committee also supported a flexible approach to the inclusion of single schools in Shared Education programmes where these benefit the wider community and the adoption of shared management or other innovative Shared Education arrangements in rural areas where these are cost effective.

Given the relatively limited uptake of Integrated Education and the very different views expressed by sectoral bodies in respect of its facilitation, encouragement and definition, the Committee agreed that the Department should undertake a strategic review of its approach and relevant actions to-date relating to Integrated Education.

The Committee also felt that the Department should consider the promotion of so-called natural mixing of children from different backgrounds in non-Integrated schools. In order to support further natural mixing in schools, the Committee supported consideration of a revision to the Home to School Transport policy in order to support attendance at Jointly Managed Church schools.

During the session, the Committee also sought further feedback from the Department in respect of the recommendations from its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process.



Education Committee Members during their visit to Drumragh Integrated College

LEGISLATION

The Department of Education introduced two pieces of primary legislation during the 4th session of the mandate: the Education Bill 2014 and the SEND Bill 2015.

The Education Bill was subject to Accelerated Passage and thus no Committee report was produced. However the Committee considered in detail the business case for the establishment of the Education Authority.

The Committee began its scrutiny of the SEND Bill during this session, accepting over 30 written submissions and taking oral evidence from a number of key stakeholders at 9 formal oral evidence sessions. The Committee also undertook a joint Health and Education Committee informal evidence-taking session on access to the curriculum for children requiring Health services. To further inform its understanding on this issue, the Committee held a meeting and visited Ceara Special School.

The Committee will conclude the Committee Stage of the SEND Bill during the next session.



Education Committee Members during their visit to Ceara Special School

BUDGET / PFG SCRUTINY

During the session, significant changes to the Department's 2015-16 budget were proposed and scrutinised. The Committee received over 1700 individual items of correspondence relating to the draft 2015-16 budget. The Committee submitted its views – welcoming the small increase in the Aggregated Schools Budget but expressing concerns in respect of continuing financial pressures on schools coupled with possible high levels of redundancy.

The Committee also felt that Youth Services have traditionally been under-funded and under-recognised and were dismayed by further reductions to the relevant budget lines. The Committee were concerned that the reduction in funding for Youth Services coupled with decreases in support for: Special Educational Needs (SEN) budgets, Sure Start programmes and the complete removal of Community Education Initiative funding, would have a significant and unfavourable impact on the process of tackling educational inequality among children and young people.

The Committee was also disturbed to note the reduction in funding for Curriculum Development including support for the teaching of modern foreign languages in primary schools. Members felt that this change may have a most unwelcome impact on the educational development of children. The Committee also noted

with surprise the reduction in support for STEM Curriculum Development in primary schools and the significant cut to the budget for Sentinus which supports STEM in schools by securing a high level of matching funding.

The Committee scrutinised monitoring rounds and progress in respect of the Department's capital programmes suggesting increases to budget lines including Early Years; Booktrust; and STEM promotion.

The Committee continued to scrutinise the Department's progress in meeting PfG targets.



Education Committee Members meet with Members of the Youth Parliament

POLICY SCRUTINY

Area Planning

From 2012 until the present, schools, parents, school children and other stakeholders have contacted the Committee formally (and Members informally) expressing considerable concerns in respect of:

- the methodological robustness of the calculation of surplus places;
- the relevance of the Viability Audit/Area Profile information in determining the effectiveness or sustainability of schools;
- the apparent failure to consistently and reasonably address school contextual issues including rurality and educational and socio-economic need;
- the unsatisfactory nature of consultations relating to Area Plans; and
- the application of and variation to arbitrary limits on school size.

Given the concerns that were raised and the complex nature of the above and in order to inform its understanding of Area Planning and the Viability Audits for schools, the Committee agreed at its meeting on 6 June 2012, to appoint a Special Adviser – Professor Tony Gallagher. The Committee also agreed to undertake a series of informal evidence sessions with a wide-range of stakeholders. These were held on 26 September 2012; 19 June 2013 and 4 February 2015.

In order to inform its understanding of related practices in other jurisdictions, the Committee undertook a visit to shared campus schools in Edinburgh on 2 October 2013 and met informally with the chairperson and members of the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education in Scotland. The Committee also commissioned Assembly Research to produce relevant briefing papers.

The Committee undertook formal evidence sessions with the Department of Education and key stakeholders. At its meeting on 13 May 2015, the Committee agreed a position paper setting out its views and making recommendations in respect of the Area Planning process.

The Committee accepted the need for the planning of school provision on an area basis but contended that the Department had failed to recognise and resource the significant change management challenge which this presented. The Committee recommended that the Department should better align its capital programme with the Area Planning process and that it should also revise both its calculation process for determining surplus places and its use of the Needs Model to plan provision.

The Committee also called for a single timescale for Area Planning; the inclusion of all sectors; support for innovative cross-sectoral and other solutions and a change to its consultation practices.

The report was debated in plenary in June 2015.

STEM

In addition to briefings from: the Momentum Digital Strategy regarding its Action Plan; the Primary Science Teaching Trust on the “The World Around Us”; and a joint briefing from the Department and the Education and Training Inspectorate, the Committee hosted a STEM in Action event. This event was organised by Sentinus and provided Members with an opportunity to see practical examples of science experiments being carried out by school children. The Committee also attended the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition and held its meeting in W5 and visited Currie Primary School, Belfast in order to inform its understanding of STEM in schools.

A related Committee motion was debated in plenary in March 2015.



Education Committee Members during their visit to the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition

Staff Absence in the Education Sector

Following the publication of a Northern Ireland Audit Office report on staff absence in the public sector, the Committee took evidence and submitted a short report on staff absence in Education to the Committee for Finance and Personnel summary report.

In respect of teaching absence, the Committee highlighted concerns about growing levels of absence associated with stress – both job-related and non-job-related. The Committee felt that action was warranted in terms of both the growing financial (£12.9m in 2013-14 for all teacher sickness absence) and human costs of teacher absence.

The Committee welcomed the measures introduced following the Northern Ireland Teachers' Health and Wellbeing Survey (2001) but noted that employing authorities currently do not monitor their effectiveness. The Committee agreed that the Department should encourage all employing authorities to address this through a regular review of overall health and wellbeing for teachers. The Committee also felt that the curriculum for Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development for teachers should include health and well-being awareness training incorporating the RTU's recently developed iMatter whole school support materials.

The Committee welcomed the development of a regional strategy for teacher absence and commended the Department on the production and sharing of absence statistics. The Committee also welcomed the best practice forum and its focus on school culture; adherence to procedures and roles and responsibilities. The Committee hoped that this forum will help to successfully address the reported significant difference in teacher absence levels across the ELBs/CCMS and the reported variation in the application of absence procedures in CCMS schools. The Committee felt that good practice should be shared across all schools and therefore strongly urged the Department to ensure engagement by the forum with all schools regardless of their sector.

Additionally the Committee welcomed the Department's intention to develop an education-wide composite absence strategy and its increasing focus on benchmarking based on organisations within and outside of Northern Ireland. Members hoped that this would address NIAO's recommendations and ultimately lead to a reduction in the costs and disruption associated with staff absence.

In respect of non-teaching staff, the Committee was surprised to learn of the very high level of so-called multi-jobbers and appreciated the difficulty in devising an agreed absence measuring methodology. The Committee commended the Department for developing a non-teaching baseline figure and sought further information on the 2014-15 target for absence reduction and on the costs associated with non-teaching absence.



Education Committee Chairman Peter Weir MLA speaking at the Early Years Annual Conference 2015

Other

The Committee also undertook evidence sessions on a number of key issues including:

- the Signature Programme in support of Nurture Units. The Committee took evidence from the Department and visited Edenbrooke and St Patrick's Primary Schools, to view the units in action;
- the Marshall Report – The Committee considered the Department's response to the ETI recommendations in the Marshall Report on Child Sexual Exploitation;
- changes to arrangements for teachers' pensions. The Committee undertook formal and informal evidence sessions with the Department and the teaching unions.
- the DE review of Home to School Transport arrangements. The Committee called for the safety-related aspects of the report to be implemented where practicable. A consultation on the other aspects of the report is expected in the next session.
- School Starting Age flexibility. The Committee noted with disappointment that legislation was not to be brought forward in this regard in the current mandate.;
- the DE/DEL Careers Review;
- Anti-bullying legislation;
- the Education and Training Inspectorate, Chief Inspector's 2012-14 Report;
- access to the curriculum for children with vision issues; and
- arrangements and funding of teacher redundancies.



Education Committee Members during their visit to Edenbrook Primary School Nurture Unit

VISITS

During the session the Committee made a number of visits as previously indicated to:

- Edenbrooke and St Patricks' Primary Schools (December 2014) – to see Nurture Units in action;
- Methodist College (December 2014 – as part of Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education;
- BT Young Scientist (January 2015) – to support NI schools in the competition;
- Moy Regional and St Johns' Primary Schools (January 2015) – as part of the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education;
- W5 (January 2015) – as part of scrutiny of the promotion of STEM in schools;
- Currie Primary School (January 2015) – to consider the promotion of STEM in primary schools;
- Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh (February 2015) - as part of the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education;
- Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle (March 2015) - as part of the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education;
- Limavady High School and St Mary's College (March 2015) - as part of the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education; and
- Ceara Special School, Lurgan - to inform the scrutiny of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill.



Education Committee joint event with the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

INFORMAL MEETINGS, EVENTS AND OTHER OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Committee held 4 informal events:

- Sentinus – STEM in Action (October 2014);
- Area Planning (February 2015);
- Joint event with the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (March 2015) – to inform understanding of issues relating to the provision of health services in support of access to the school curriculum;
- Moneysense (March 2015) – highlighting money management aspects of the Revised Curriculum.



Education Committee Members attending the Moneysense Event

Committee Members also attended the following informal meetings with:

- Irish American Partnership (July 2014);
- Parents Education as Autism Therapists (PEAT) (September 2014);
- DE/DEL Careers Review Panel (September 2014);
- Members of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education in NI (September 2014);
- Education Training Inspectorate, Chief Inspector (November 2014) – re the Chief Inspector’s Report;
- Teachers and principals from Brazilian schools and officials from the Brazilian Board of Education (November 2014) – organised by Assembly Outreach;
- Representatives from teaching unions: ATL, INTO, NAHT, UTU, ASCL and NASUWT (November 2014) - to discuss changes to teachers pensions;
- Early Years Organisation (December 2014);
- Oireachtas Committee for Education and Social Protection (January 2015);
- Educate Together (January 2015) – to discuss shared education in other jurisdictions;
- The Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) (February 2015);
- Glenveagh Special School (March 2015);

- Youth Council Northern Ireland (April 2015);
- Home Education Northern Ireland (HEdNI) (April 2015) – to discuss elective home education;
- St Columbanus College (April 2015 – Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education);
- Northern Ireland Anti Bullying Forum (April 2015);
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) (June 2015);
- Women’s’ Aid Belfast and Lisburn (June 2015) – to discuss the Early Years Fund;
- Representatives from the Westminster Youth Parliament (June 2015); and
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (June 2015).

The Committee also launched its own Twitter account (@NIA_EduComm) during the session, gaining around 100 followers with whom it shared updates on Committee business. As indicated above, the Committee also made use of Assembly Education Services in the development of school children’s focus groups designed to provide feedback on key policy issues – to-date these have been used for the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education and to gain feedback on attitudes to school inspection. It is anticipated that the Committee may again make use of the focus groups as part of its deliberations on expected anti-bullying legislation.

Committee Expenditure

Details of Committee expenditure for the session are contained at Appendix A.

Contact Details

Anyone wishing to contact the Committee for Education should do so at the following address:

The Clerk to the Committee for Education
 Room 375
 Parliament Buildings
 Stormont
 Belfast
 BT4 3XX
 Email: committee.education@niassembly.gov.uk

ANNEX A

**Committee for Education
Expenditure for the period 1 September 2014 – 31 August 2015**

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	<p>Includes the cost of committee visits to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edenbrooke and St Patricks' Primary Schools – 2 December 2014 • Methodist College, Belfast – 10 December 2014 • 2014 BT Young Scientist Exhibition in Dublin - 6 January 2014 • W5 – 28 January 2015 • Moy Regional Primary and St John's Primary School, Moy– 14 January 2015 • Drumragh Integrated College – 25 February 2015 • Shimna Integrated College – 11 March 2015 • Limavady High school and St Mary's College- 25 March 2015 • Ceara Special School – 20 May 2015 	£2499.53
Printing of committee reports	<p>Includes the cost of committee reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education 	£ 2147.19
External consultancy	<p>Includes specialist advice for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area Planning report and • report on Free School Meal Entitlement & School funding 	£1820.00
Advertising	<p>Includes the cost of advertising relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call for Evidence regarding the Committee Stage for the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill 	£ 637.87
Refreshments & Hospitality	Includes the cost of all refreshments and hospitality provided by the committee; including meetings, working lunches, seminars and any other such expenditure.	£2694.94
General expenses	Includes the cost of seminars (excluding refreshments and hospitality); room hire; witness expenses; gifts provided by the committee during visits; and conference fees for members.	£46.62
Total Expenditure		£9,846.15