



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 15 JUNE 2016
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Barry McElduff MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Lyttle MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Rosemary Barton MLA
Carla Lockhart MLA
Philip Logan MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Lord Morrow MLA
Caitriona Ruane MLA
Catherine Seeley MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)
Bronagh Irwin (Clerical Supervisor)
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)

Apologies:

David Hilditch MLA
Sandra Overend MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:06am.

1. Apologies

Apologies are as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 5th periodic report on the UK.

The Committee noted the UNCRC 5th periodic report on the UK.

Ms Caitriona Ruane joined the meeting at 10:08am.

Mr Chris Lyttle joined the meeting at 10.09am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its commentary on the status of the UNCRC report and its views on the report's findings relating to:

- children in Northern Ireland not having the right to withdraw from collective worship at school, without parental permission;
- the need to teach human rights and anti-bullying strategies in schools;
- the need to teach meaningful sexual and reproductive health education in schools;
- the need to ensure that shared education in Northern Ireland promotes full social integration; and
- the need to ensure the inclusion of children in educational opportunities and the elimination of unregulated transfer tests in Northern Ireland.

2.2 Informal meetings

The Chairperson advised Members that he had met informally with the Transferors' Representative Council on 14 June 2016 and that he will be meeting informally with Department of Education officials on 29 June 2016

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Transferors' Representative Council to brief alongside the Controlled Schools Support Council, following summer recess.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 8 June 2016.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. June Monitoring Round – Departmental briefing

The briefing was deferred as, following a Ministerial direction, officials were not present and briefing papers were not provided.

Ms Carla Lockhart joined the meeting at 10:17am

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister:

- welcoming the additional funding for education in the June Monitoring Round;
- expressing its disappointment that officials had not been present and papers had not been provided, as requested;
- reiterating its request for an oral briefing and related papers;
- seeking clarity in respect of:
 - additional funding for the Early Years Pathway;
 - the extent of funding sought and received for Children's Services;
 - an explanation of the Schools Drawdown allocation;
 - a breakdown of the Special Educational Needs allocation;
 - the timing of the redundancies associated with the £8m allocation for the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme;
 - the progress of other teacher redundancies in the present academic year; and
 - the Spending Areas in education and the budget movements in excess of £1m that are not set out in the June Monitoring Round submission.

6. Education Authority – Introductory briefing and Special Schools Early Years provision.

Witnesses joined the meeting at 10:35am.

Gavin Boyd, Interim Chief Executive, Education Authority; Sharon O'Connor, Chairperson, Education Authority; and Dr Clare Mangan, Director, Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority briefed the Committee.

Ms Caitríona Ruane recorded her dismay that the Education Authority had not taken a position on unregulated transfer tests.

Mr Barry McElduff left the meeting and Mr Chris Lyttle assumed the chairpersonship at 11.33am.

Mr Barry McElduff rejoined the meeting and resumed the chairpersonship at 11.38am.

A member declared the following interest:

Mr Colin McGrath is a full time youth worker in a voluntary youth centre that receives its funding from the Education Authority.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 1:01pm.

Witnesses left the meeting at 1:14pm.

Ms Caitríona Ruane left the meeting at 1:15pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister:

- indicating its disappointment and dismay in respect of the Education Authority's poor communication and inappropriate consultation arrangements relating to changes to and the review of pre-school Special School provision;
- setting out its expectation that there would be a substantial improvement in the Education Authority's future consultation arrangements; and
- seeking the Minister's assurance that there would be a strategic approach to Special Educational Needs pressures including particularly enhanced co-operation between the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in order to address the consultation deficiencies to-date, the Education Authority should ensure that the consultation process involving the Professional Practitioners group and the Parent / Stakeholder group be undertaken with some urgency.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking:

- the Terms of Reference, Rural-proofing considerations; Revised Action Plan, Communication strategy, and Section 75 screening associated with its review of pre-school provision in Special Schools;
- confirmation of the timing of the meetings with the Professional Practitioners group and the Parent / Stakeholder group;
- a breakdown of the additional demand for pre-school Special School places;
- information on the number of applications and allocations for pre-school Special School places;
- information on geographical gaps in pre-school Special School provision;
- clarification as to the need for Development Proposals in respect of pre-school Special School places; and
- a written update on plans to develop pre-school provision at Fleming Fulton school.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking:

- an update on its review of Home to School Transport and the implementation of the gate-to-gate policy;
- details of the “App” for school governors;
- sight of the Area Plans to be published in July 2016; and
- an up-to-date organisational chart.

7. Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment – Introductory Briefing

The briefing was deferred

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee considered an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Local Government Association to a conference entitled “Growing Enterprise, Strengthening Communities – Local Councils delivering in the Digital Age” on 6 October 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for Members to attend, diaries permitting.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council (NITC) seeking an informal briefing with the Committee Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet with the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council, diary permitting.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from St Mary’s University College, Belfast seeking an informal briefing with the Committee Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet with St Mary’s University College, Belfast, diary permitting.

8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office enclosing relevant extracts from the Annual Report on Public Bodies and Public Appointments 2014-15.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from Courtney Consulting regarding a consultation about the development of Hillsborough Castle as an education resource.

8.7 The Committee noted an invitation to meet the Dutch Ambassador informally along with Members of the Committee for the Executive Office on Thursday 16 June 2016.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 29 June 2016, at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:23 pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
29 June 2016