



Northern Ireland
Assembly
Committee for Education
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
WEDNESDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2016
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present:

Barry McElduff MLA (Chairperson)
Chris Lyttle MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Rosemary Barton MLA
Carla Lockhart MLA
Phillip Logan MLA
Jennifer McCann MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Lord Morrow MLA
Sandra Overend MLA
Catherine Seeley MLA

In Attendance:

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

Apologies:

None

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:04am.

1. Committee inquiry into educational underachievement

The Committee discussed the terms of reference for its inquiry into educational underachievement.

Ms Carla Lockhart joined the meeting at 10:08am.

Mr Philip Logan joined the meeting at 10:15am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the terms of reference for its inquiry into educational underachievement as follows.

“The Committee will:

- Review the nature of educational underachievement by school pupils in primary and post-primary schools including a focus on the experience and progress of marginalised groups;*
- Identify the key barriers to, and enablers for, educational achievement by school pupils including a focus on: early years interventions, literacy and numeracy programmes and the impact of academic selection and post-primary transfer;*
- 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 in order to improve educational achievement by school pupils – particularly for marginalised groups including e.g. Looked After Children - and including the effectiveness of the Departmental policies such as Count, Read, Succeed and relevant interventions; and*
- Report to the Assembly on its findings and recommendations by Christmas 2017.”*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for evidence which would close in February 2017. The Committee also agreed to seek inquiry evidence from the Children’s Law Centre youth panel.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to publicise the terms of reference: on its webpage, through social media and using newspaper advertisements, as appropriate. The Committee also agreed to give further consideration to publicising the inquiry in order to enhance stakeholder engagement.

The Committee moved to open session at 10:23am.

2. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake training in effective questioning expected to be scheduled in January 2017 at a venue outside of Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: As Members are unable to attend a PTA-NI event on 30 November 2016, the Committee agreed to invite PTA-NI to brief the Committee informally.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to attend a coding in schools event at Stranmillis University College on Wednesday 7 December 2016, subject to further consideration of the relevant timings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule its Children's and Young People's Strategy stakeholder event from Wednesday 7 December 2016 to a later date in the new year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its press plan for Anti-Bullying Week including the agreement by email of a related Committee press release.

Further to its consideration of Anti-Bullying Week, the Committee noted an invitation from (Supporting Acceptance Information and Learning) SAIL NI and GenderJam NI to the launch, on Tuesday 15th November 2016 in Parliament Buildings, of a new guideline resource for schools, youth workers and educators working with "trans & non-binary young people".

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members could attend the event, diaries permitting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Forward Work Programme, as amended.

3. Apologies

No apologies were received.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Committee Special Educational Needs event.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's Special Educational Needs (SEN) Health and Education co-operation event on 9 November 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to attend the event.

4.2 Recent Committee Visits and Events

The Chairperson reminded Members of recent Committee visits to St Dominic's Grammar School for Girls and the Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to St Dominic's Grammar School for Girls and the Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre thanking them for hosting the Committee visits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the timing of the complete transfer of responsibilities to the Education Authority in respect of the Woodlands Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) setting.

The Chairperson briefed Members on his attendance at a youth engagement event organised by the Children's Law Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Children's Law Centre Youth Panel to attend its Children's and Young People's Strategy stakeholder event.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 26 October 2016.

6. Matters Arising

The Committee discussed reported industrial action by teachers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating its concerns and requesting an oral Ministerial explanation of the present situation and likely resolution.

7. VAT on Childcare – Evidence session with Employers For Childcare

Representatives from Employers For Childcare joined the meeting at 10:45am.

Marie Marin, Chief Executive; Zara Duffy, Finance Director; and Rachel McMenemy, Research Officer provided oral evidence to the Committee.

Ms Jennifer McCann joined the meeting at 10:55am.

Mr Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 11:17am

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:34am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its support for the provision of interim DE financing for the home childcare scheme.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department of Health seeking an update on measures to support the home childcare scheme and clarification:

- as to the ineligibility of the scheme for VAT exemption;
- in respect of the suggested legislative timescales; and
- as to the impact of the introduction of the new tax free childcare scheme.

8. Suspension - Anti-Bullying Week

Proceedings were suspended at 11:40am in order to allow Members to take part in publicity activities in support of Anti-Bullying Week.

Proceedings recommenced at 11.59am with the following Members in attendance: Mr Barry McElduff, Mr Chris Lyttle, Mrs Rosemary Barton, Ms Carla Lockhart, Mr Phillip Logan, Ms Jennifer McCann, Mr Colin McGrath, Lord Morrow and Ms Catherine Seeley.

9. Department of Education - 2016-21 Programme for Government (PfG) Departmental Draft Delivery Plans - Consultation

Departmental witnesses joined the meeting at 11:59am.

David Hughes, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards and Cathy Galway, Acting Director of Youth, Early Years and Childcare provided oral evidence to the Committee.

Mrs Sandra Overend rejoined the meeting at 12:01pm.

Mr Barry McElduff left the meeting at 12:11pm

Mr Chris Lyttle assumed the chairpersonship of the meeting at 12:11pm.

Mr Barry McElduff rejoined the meeting and resumed the chairpersonship at 12.50pm.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 12:55pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 1:05pm.

Ms Carla Lockhart left the meeting at 1:08pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a summary table of the educational aspects of the PfG Delivery Plans to stakeholders who are to attend its PfG event on 16 November 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department a summary table of the educational aspects of the PfG Delivery Plans and seek confirmation in respect of relevant targets etc.. The Committee also agreed write to the Department seeking:

- an update on the participation in shared education by schools;
- clarification in respect of rural proofing of Area Planning proposals
- clarification as to whether the new “dashboard of measures”, agreed statement on what is valued in education and methodology relating to the evaluation of education/school quality will involve changes to the Every School a Good School policy;

- an explanation as to why the PfG Indicator 9 refers to sharing in e.g. leisure centres and libraries but does not refer to schools; and
- an explanation as to why the PfG draft Delivery Plans do not include an Indicator in respect of the promotion of shared and integrated education.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek an oral evidence session from the Education Authority (and Department, if appropriate) on the reported rationalisation of Outdoor Activity Education Centres.

Ms Catherine Seeley left the meeting at 1:09pm.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted a list of correspondence received.

10.2 The Committee noted a briefing paper on Special Educational Needs demand and existing services in Irish Medium schools provided by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking commentary on Special Educational Needs provision in Irish Medium Education schools.

10.3 The Committee noted a response from the Minister regarding recent changes to Post-Primary Transfer Guidance and the publication of the IliAD report.

10.4 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding alternative approaches to securing savings in 2016-17.

10.5 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority in respect of educational support for Looked After Children.

10.6 The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Executive Office Brussels Director's Report for October 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on support that is provided in order to encourage entrepreneurship among school pupils.

10.7 The Committee noted an invitation from the Shared Education Learning Forum to a shared education conference on Thursday, 24 November 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members could attend the event, diaries permitting.

10.8 The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education for October 2016.

10.9 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister announcing funding to help mitigate pressures on school budgets for 2016-17.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information as to how the funding will be distributed among school and seeking also a breakdown of the sources of the extra funding.

10.10 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority in relation to the review of pre-school provision in Special Schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarification in respect of the number of pre-school Special School places required and confirmation that all Special School principals (including those from schools whose pre-school hours had been reduced) had been invited to participate in the Education Professional Practitioners Consultative Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a related stakeholder event in February 2017.

10.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department in relation to arrangements for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development for teachers.

10.12 The Committee noted a response from the Education and Training Inspectorate regarding a recent inspection at Coláiste Feirste.

10.13 The Committee noted a request from an individual to brief the Committee on educational underachievement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to decline the request and to refer the correspondent to the upcoming Committee inquiry into educational underachievement.

10.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department providing the terms of reference for the Education and Health SEN Co-operation Working Group.

10.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department in relation to Major Works in a Voluntary School.

10.16 The Committee noted a response from the Fostering Network regarding its links with other fostering agencies.

10.17 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding support for the Fostering Network

10.18 The Committee noted a reminder of a seminar entitled “Developments in Integrated Education” on Friday 11 November 2016, at Lagan College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members could attend the event, diaries permitting.

10.19 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Middletown Centre for Autism and providing a copy of the autism training audit and clarification on the abandoned residential plans.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time, Place of next meeting

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 16 November 2016, at 10.00am in Ashfield Boys High School, Belfast.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:19pm.

Barry McElduff
Chairperson, Committee for Education
16 November 2016