

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 10.00 AM (by zoom)

1. PRESENT Rev R Herron (Chair)

Rev A Adams	Sir Gerry Loughran
Miss F Boyd	Mr G Lundy
Mr D Cargo	Mr N McCausland
Mr J Craig	Dr A McMorrán
Mrs M Culbert	Mr B Mulholland
Mr G Doran	Mr K Mulvenna
Mr M Johnston	Miss R Rainey
Mrs S Kelly	

Mr F Maskey, Mrs G McGrath, and Mrs A Mervyn were in attendance.

The Chair welcomed the three new Board Members to their first meeting of the Committee.

2. IN ATTENDANCE

Ms S Long, Mrs M Corkey, Mrs P Cooney, and Ms L McCall.

3. PROTOCOL FOR EA BLENDED AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE MEETINGS

All present were observing the protocol.

4. APOLOGY

An apology had been received from Mr L Ó Flannagáin.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were reminded of the requirement to declare interests, as appropriate, during the course of the meeting.

6. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2021

The Committee agreed the minutes* (E/2/21/4) of the meeting held on 11 February 2021 on the proposal of Mr Lundy and seconded by Miss Rainey.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

7.1 ENGAGE PROGRAMME (11)

Mr Maskey declared an interest in this item.

Mrs Cooney referred to the DE funding that had been provided directly to all primary and post primary schools to deliver the statutory curriculum to support the implementation of the Engage Programme. She said that the programme was working well in a number of schools. Cross organisational link officers were currently monitoring and supporting schools around the programme's expenditure by March. Committed expenditure within time frames was proving challenging however. She advised that the Engage Programme had been extended to include Special Schools and EOTAS provisions and a Programme Management Board had been established to oversee this work.

A list of areas where the Engage Programme had been rolled out was requested. A Member also sought clarity on whether programme funding would be given to schools in term 3.

Mrs Cooney said that the Engage Programme was a DE led programme and this matter, along with a longer term strategy for supporting learning, was being considered.

Discussion ensued on the increased number of children and young people attending school during the current lockdown. It was noted that pupil attendance was published on DE's website. Mrs Corkey referred to the staffing considerations for schools in line with increased pupils numbers, and equity issues concerning the teaching and learning of children whether at home or at school. She said that intelligence gathering was showing clear evidence that the management of blended and remote learning was much more effective during the current lockdown.

Members welcomed the improvements made in respect of blended and remote learning and that pupil engagement had significantly improved. They also welcomed the approach being considered around longer term planning.

Mrs Cooney said that a paper on the Engage Programme would be provided to the Committee at its March meeting. She also said that a situation report on blended and remote learning would be shared with the Committee in due course. She drew attention to arrangements for a conference for school leaders, to be held in February/March, which would aim to support the sharing of learning from blended and remote learning among school leaders and to support them through monitoring.

***Action:** Committee to receive an update on the Engage programme to include areas of effective provision.*

7.2 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT - REMOTE LEARNING AND CONNECTIVITY (11)

Mrs Corkey said that schools were effectively monitoring their engagement with pupils. A checklist had been provided to schools on remote learning and one of the items on the checklist included how pupils would notify individual teachers of the loss of internet at home.

8. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

8.1 POST PRIMARY ADMISSIONS - LETTER TO PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Chair referred to concerns raised by a number of primary school principals regarding requests from a small number of post primary schools for academic and other evidence to be used within the admissions process. He said that officers had drafted a letter to primary schools which set out advice around sharing progress and attainment information with post primary schools. Mrs Corkey said that the content of the letter had been discussed with cross organisation colleagues and had been approved by the Corporate Leadership Team for issue to primary schools. A copy of the letter would be circulated to all Board Members for information.

***Action:** A copy of the letter to primary schools to be circulated to all Board Members.*

8.2 ADDENDUM TO DE CIRCULAR NO 2021/02 - APPROVAL OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR USE IN POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NI

The Chair said that the Addendum issued by DE on 9 February 2021 provided further information on the decision that, from September 2022, WJEC qualifications would no longer be approved for first teaching in schools in NI.

A Member said, given the extremely challenging year for teaching and learning, controlled grammar school principals considered that the removal of WJEC qualifications was calamitous for their students. He said that most post primary schools were likely to have a

Welsh examination in their suite of examinations. In the previous year, approximately 2,000 students had entered AS level qualifications and approximately 1,500 students had entered full A level qualifications through the Welsh Board. This position meant that some schools could be hindered from enacting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework, it limited the opportunities available for post 16 students, and schools would be required to research new qualifications.

Mrs Corkey said that the Addendum provided clarity on a number of issues, specifically that schools which currently had pupils undertaking WJEC AS level qualifications would still be able to offer approved WJEC A2 qualifications in September 2021 to enable those learners to complete the full A level qualification in June 2022. Schools would also be able to offer approved WJEC AS level qualifications to a further cohort, for first teaching from September 2021, with these pupils progressing to A2 in September 2022 to complete the full A level qualification for award in summer 2023.

Mrs Corkey said that the qualifications offered under WJEC Eduqas were regulated by Ofqual and met its regulatory conditions. She advised that Eduqas qualifications at GCSE, AS and A level remained available to schools in NI and were not affected by the Minister's decision.

Members queried the rationale for the decision that WJEC qualifications would no longer be approved for first teaching in schools in NI from September 2022. Mrs Corkey referred to the findings of an independent review carried out by the Welsh Government on awarding arrangements. This report had recommended using the cancellation of examinations in 2020 and 2021 as an opportunity to implement the recommendations of the review in a more timely manner. She said that DE was working with Welsh colleagues to get clarity on the direction of travel and the timing of any potential changes to qualifications in Wales which would align with changes in Welsh curriculum policy. She said that further information would be shared with Members on this matter when it was made available.

Actions: *A copy of the Addendum to DE Circular No 2021/02 to be circulated to all Board Members. Further information to be shared with Members on changes to qualifications in Wales when it is made available.*

Mr Doran entered the meeting at 10.38 am.

9. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

ENABLING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In a presentation* (E/2/21/7.1), Mrs Cooney outlined the guiding principles to inform work around curriculum development. This work had also been informed by DE policy, EA strategy, and international studies. She referred to the results of international studies which showed disparity in performance between pupils in primary schools and pupils in post primary schools in NI and this apparent dip in performance had given a focus to teaching and learning at KS3. She referred to the four flagship areas which were being developed, in conjunction with other education partners, to take forward curriculum development and teacher professional learning, namely:

- enabling the professional growth of early career teachers
- developing primary area learning
- supporting teaching and learning in subject specialisms
- supporting connected learning at KS3

Mr Craig left the meeting at 10.43 am.

Members discussed a number of areas highlighted within the presentation. These related to the importance of improved training opportunities for Heads of Department, the complexities for host schools in undertaking responsibilities relating to the support of early career teachers in their professional learning, incentivising schools to undertake this responsibility, and quality assurance issues around the programme for early career teachers.

Mrs Cooney said that a paper was being developed on enabling the professional growth of middle leadership in schools. Work was also taking place within EA on a cross-directorate basis on the various issues that could impact host schools in the mentoring of early career teachers. She referred to EA's responsibilities around beginning teachers and said that EA was working with ETI on a programme which would support these teachers in their professional learning. Early conversations had also taken place with schools on hosting beginning teachers and schools had been receptive of the proposals. She also said that a paper would be presented to the Committee in due course on the flagship project relating to the development of primary area learning communities which entailed close collaborative working between the education partners.

Members welcomed the strategy to engage with education partners to develop processes going forward. It was suggested that EA should further engage with CCEA as well as ETI with regard to curriculum development. A query was raised on whether post primary schools were fully aware of the primary school curriculum and whether there was a gap in understanding of baseline information. Mrs Cooney said that EA was working with the education partners on intelligence gathering and this information would help inform areas of development within the flagship projects.

As set out in the presentation, Mrs Cooney outlined the strategy to support remote learning in schools. This was facilitated through innovative approaches to remote learning and teaching, high quality feedback and assessment, the provision of pastoral care, guidance and support, and guidance and supports for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils as well as for parents. She referred to the substantial work that had been carried out to develop new resources for schools to support remote learning. This included collaborative work by the education partners through the Cross Organisation Oversight Network. She drew attention to a checklist which had been developed by CCMS and EA to monitor remote learning and she undertook to share this checklist with Board Members for information.

The Chair invited Members to submit any further comments on the presentation to Mrs Cooney by email.

Action: *Checklist to monitor remote learning by schools to be shared with Board Members.*

10. AREA PLANNING

10.1 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL OUTCOMES

The Committee noted the paper* (E/2/21/8.1) outlining the Minister's decisions concerning DP No 610 - Barnish Primary School and DP No 616 - Drumrane Primary School.

10.2 PUBLICATION OF ANNUAL AREA PROFILES 2019/20

Mrs Corkey presented the 2019/20 Annual Area Profiles* (E/21/8.2) for primary and post primary schools. The profiles for primary schools detailed statistical information on enrolments and finance and the profiles for post primary schools detailed information on enrolments, finance and educational achievements in line with the Entitlement Framework. She said that EA was obliged to publish the Annual Area Profiles as part of its area planning responsibilities. Normally, publication took place in the summer term. However, the delay

in publishing the 2019/20 profiles had arisen due Covid-19 and the decision taken by DE to stand down area planning for part of the year.

Members noted that while key information for schools was contained within one document, much of the information was out of date by the time of publication. Discussion ensued on the bureaucracy of the document and its value in being able to inform an effective area planning process. Attention was drawn to the financial data which showed an apparent funding inequity across schools which could result in misinterpretation of data. Members considered that financial information for all post primary schools should be detailed in the profiles, specifically that, as EA was the funding authority for all schools, VG/GMI schools should not be exempt from publishing their budgetary position. The Chair sought clarification around a particular comment around VG/GMI schools in the Annual Area Profiles for post primary schools. Ms Long said that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, at its meeting on 18 January 2021, had discussed the issue of assurances around financial controls within VG/GMI schools and officers were seeking further clarity on this issue with DE.

Members discussed the need to improve the area planning process by giving focus to areas (by Council area) where schools were not sustainable in terms of enrolment numbers and finance. This process would require a full understanding of the rationale for schools being unsustainable taking account of the Sustainable Schools' Policy. It would also require the development of a strategy which would be based on an improved method of engagement with communities on the future provision for those communities. The role of the area planning groups was referenced. The Chair indicated that this approach could be developed within the area planning action plan which would be presented to the Committee in due course.

The Committee noted the arrangements for publishing the Annual Area Profiles for 2019-2020.

Action: Improved processes around area planning to be considered.

10.3 EXTENSION TO EA CONSULTATIONS ON THE DRAFT SPECIAL SCHOOLS' AREA PLANNING FRAMEWORK AND DRAFT FRAMEWORK FOR SPECIALIST PROVISION IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Mrs Corkey said that, given the current pressures placed on school leaders resulting from the pandemic and following representation from the Special Schools' Strategic Leadership Group and other education partners, the deadline for EA's two consultations had been extended to 12 April 2021.

The Committee noted the extended timeframe for responding to EA's two consultations and other information contained in the paper* (E/2/21/8.3) including that the deadline for responding to DE's consultations on the draft SEN Code of Practice and the draft SEN Regulations had been extended to 2 March 2021.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on 11 March 2021.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am.

CHAIRPERSON

DATE

* Paper issued with agenda