

## Department of Education and Children

### Education Council Meeting Held On 7<sup>th</sup> March at 10.00am At the Professional Development Centre, Santon

**Present:** Minister for Education & Children, the Hon Mr P Karran, MHK, (Chairperson);  
Mr R Bankes-Jones; Mrs H Bradley; Mrs E Godby; Mrs G Skinner; Mr S Bevan; Mrs M Frankwick; Mrs S Kissack; Mrs T Martin; Mr D Parnell; Mr R Turton; Mr K Woodford; Mrs J Pendree; Mrs B Brereton

**Apologies:** Mrs L Strickett; Mr R Smith

**In**

**Attendance:** Mr S Dobson, Chief Executive Officer; Mr M Barrow, Director of Education; Mr J Gill, Head of Legal and Administrative Services; Mr J Swindlehurst, Manager Legal and Administration; Mrs J Buss – Secretary (acting)

Item	Business	Action
1.	<p><b>Minutes of Previous Meeting</b> The Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011 were confirmed. These were agreed and accepted by those present as a true record.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Matters arising from the Minutes not shown elsewhere on the Agenda.</b> KW raised the point that at the previous meeting, the Minister had given an assurance that communication would improve. However, KW had experienced yet another such problem, which had caused embarrassment. KW said he would write privately to the Minister regarding the issue.</p> <p>GS asked for confirmation that the installation of the canopy at Ballacloan school, for which permission had been sought and granted, would actually go ahead. JG confirmed that the canopy was to be installed during TT week.</p>	<b>KW</b>
3.	<p><b>Budget Up-date – Minister</b> The Minister began by stating that CoMin had set the Agenda for the Education budget. Rather than cutting staffing numbers, the Department had looked at other areas where savings could be made, for example the closure of Bride School and although the Rural Library cutback was a tragedy, this was not considered a function of education in economic terms. A similar view was taken in respect of the pre-schools.</p> <p>The Minister apologised to Members for the fact that they had not been informed in advance, but staff directly involved with the cuts, needed to be told by the Department, rather than hearing the news over the airwaves. Several Members said they had experienced 'a very difficult fortnight' and that some had felt 'bullied' by members of the public, who thought they had been part of the decision making process. A Member asked if Members' personal details could be removed from the website? JG said that this was a requirement of the Appointments Commission. The Minister said that this suggestion should be put in writing, for consideration.</p>	<b>Members</b>

SD explained that four visits to Treasury had been required, before budget improvements were achieved. The Department's key officers had been embargoed by the Chief Minister's Office not to say anything until after Budget Day. As this occurred during Half Term week, permission was given to release the information on the Thursday. However it was leaked on the Wednesday evening, thus providing no opportunity to advise the Council Members. SD stated that although the cuts had been unpopular - and the Department accepted this - 35 teaching posts had in fact been secured. However, he pointed out that the budget cuts could be doubled next year.

Several questions were asked with regard to the future of pre-school provision. The Minister stated that existing and some purpose built facilities may be transferred to the private sector to run, with an element of funding. MB confirmed that schools had already been advised of this in writing. The issue would be looked at and decided by CoMin and the Minister would report the outcome to Members in due course. A Member asked if there would be checks to ensure that any future nursery provision met standards. MB stated that they would be working in liaison with Social Care to try and provide a joint inspection framework.

Minister

The Minister summed up by stating the he could understand the frustrations felt by Council Members, but he would work to discourage further attacks on education as he didn't want to lose any other members of staff.

#### 4. **Questions from the Education Council Members**

The Minister then proceeded to run through the questions, raised by the members.

*Question (i a) raised by Mrs B Brereton - 'Can the Minister please state his views, and those of his officers, on the provision of a Sixth Form College in the foreseeable future?' -* in response, SD said that in the past, secondary schools had difficulties in recruiting staff. However candidates from the UK had been attracted to the Island because of the Sixth Form Facility, as part of a traditional big school ethos. He also stated that the HR section had assisted greatly in respect of any required Work Permits. SD advised that A level classes cannot be held with less than 10 pupils, although some students may drop out in the second year, thus reducing class size. It was suggested that smaller classes could be 'merged', perhaps using a suitable neutral venue, which was equipped for the purpose. It was felt that the Isle of Man College of Further and Higher Education would also be willing to provide learning slots in the early evening. MB stated that with advances in technology and independent learning, this may be how education develops in the future. iPads were being introduced into schools, in order to replace expensive banks of fixed computer equipment and in some cases students were being permitted to use their own devices.

*Question (ii) raised by Mrs B Brereton - 'Can the Minister please state the rationale behind the savings required to be made by the Department of Education and Children, bearing in mind that the Education Council are aware of the state of the Isle of Man economy. Would the Minister further state the amount of savings anticipated by the closure of nursery provision and the Rural Library?' -* This question was retracted.

*Question (iii) raised by Mr S Bevan - 'Can the Minister please state if it is now clear what the budget allocation will be for individual primary and secondary schools, following the DEC press release dated 17<sup>th</sup> February which outlines that cost saving measures being introduced effective September 2012 would largely affect non-statutory provision' -* In response, Members were advised that the budget allocations had been calculated and schools would be advised later in the month, once the

budgets had been fully reviewed and agreed. No significant changes over the previous year were planned, other than those driven by fluctuations in the schools' rolls and the impact of any changes arising from decisions over the pre-school nursery provision. MB stated that a meeting had taken place with the Secondary Heads last week and in most cases, their demands would be met. No money would be taken out of the primary pot, but would be distributed in accordance with pupil numbers. MB also stated that primary schools would receive additional funding to enable them to give release time to SENCOs and therefore better manage SEN provision.

*Question (iv) raised by Mr S Bevan – 'Whilst recognising the financial benefit to Government as a whole of a centralised purchasing policy, can the Minister please state if any budgetary allowance is to be given to schools which are now facing increased costs?'* – In response, Members were advised that the impact of the various procurement measures which were in place and planned, would be identified and evaluated. Any actions taken by the Department would be based upon such an evaluation. Both Primary and Secondary Heads had made their feelings known on this issue. The matter was however on-going and had been introduced to achieve economies of scale. The Minister asked if SB could write a letter, which would be presented to Co-Min.

**SB**

*Question (v) raised by Mrs G Skinner – 'As the replacement school for Ballacloan Infants and Fairfield Junior has funds allocated in the Pink Book for planning etc, can the Minister please state if there are plans to consult with the schools and local community for their comments/ideas/input and can the Minister confirm if the predicted date for the opening of the school is still September 2015?'* Members were advised that consultation was taking place with both the schools and the local community. An initial briefing meeting had just taken place which involved Ian Walmsley (Headteacher, Fairfield); Ken Callister (Youth) and Sue Marriott (Special Needs). Once developed further, proposals would be communicated to both schools and the Governors, who can then jointly decide on how to engage the community in the project. SD further advised that funds had been allocated, but due to delays in the clearance of the site, the predicted opening date was now September 2016. SD also warned that loan charges this year were extremely high and this fact needed to be taken into account, currently in respect of Bemahague.

*Question (vi) raised by Mrs G Skinner – 'Can the Minister please state what succession planning is in place in Special Needs, particularly in relation to the Educational Psychologists employed by the Department'* – MB advised that Sally Brookes had looked at her budgets and would be in a position to advertise a post for September 2012, as one member of staff was due to retire in January 2013. It was also hoped to recruit a trainee EP, possibly a graduate from within the current teaching force. The training process would take three years, at which time two other members of staff would be approaching retirement. SD stated that succession planning issues were huge and that the Department needed investment in order to grow.

*Question (vii) raised by Mrs T Martin – 'Can the Minister please comment upon the lack of notification and lack of discussion prior to the pre-school closure announcement.'* – The Minister stated that this point had already been extensively covered but it was important that staff had not been told over the airwaves. Ideally he would have liked the matter to have been dealt with in a better managed and proper way, but the information could only be released to those whose employment was directly affected.

<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Any other matters of urgent importance</b></p> <p>A Member raised the issue of pupil numbers affecting staffing levels. JG responded that the Department had tightened up the use of the Catchment Area Order and decisions regarding out of catchment area requests were now being made by the Department. A pragmatic approach had been adopted in the decision making process and providing the request would not cost any more in terms of staffing, certain out of catchment placements had been allowed. These would not however pass down to siblings. Each application was being acknowledged and there were a dozen more for consideration. A Member requested if the significance of the Catchment Area Order could be reiterated to parents. It was felt that in most instances, school Newsletters and information to parents did clarify the situation. Murray's Road School pupils had been those mostly affected, but meetings were to take place between both Headteachers to resolve matters satisfactorily. JG also stated that the Order was also being enforced in respect of the church schools.</p> <p>A Member asked if there would be any further 'doubling' of schools, with one Headteacher. SD responded that other areas were being looked at as a matter of urgency, in terms of practicalities and not just for cost savings measures.</p> <p>A Member asked if there was an efficient way of dealing with money which schools owed for staff who cover long term sickness. MB replied that it was difficult to deal with contingency funding and he would be arranging a meeting with Finance to look at ways of mitigating this. If it was possible to carry forward monies saved in one year, to the next accounting year, this would certainly help.</p> <p>JG advised that the Term of Office for the present Members would be coming to an end. He said that he would be meeting with the Appointments Commission on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and would appreciate any comments in writing by 19<sup>th</sup> March. JG also stated that expenses claims needed to be submitted by 4<sup>th</sup> April, as these could not be carried forward to the next year.</p> <p>A Member asked if a presentation could be held on the future of technology in schools. This was confirmed and details would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p>A Member made an enquiry regarding the provision of the database. SD replied that one was due to be rolled out soon at the Department, but funding for this had come from Government.</p> <p>A Member enquired about the future of DASH. The Minister responded that this matter did need to be addressed, but the Department could not take this matter on. He would be writing to Mr Robertshaw in this regard.</p> <p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p>The Minister asked if there were any reasons why the Department's Minutes and Agenda could not be made public. Members confirmed that this could be done and would show their involvement with regard to decision making.</p> <p>The Minister also aired his concerns with regard to the future of Tuition Fees. In the UK, this had become a political football, through which to 'massage' the youth unemployment figures. He would like this item included on the Agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>He asked Members to meet and talk with Headteachers and come back with points for</p>	<p><b>Members</b></p> <p><b>Minister</b></p>
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	<p>the next meeting, as to where education is going and to think about a strategy for a Manx Education Policy.</p> <p>The Minister stated that in terms of vocational training, he would like the Department (rather than DED) to provide courses that would benefit the Island's economy, but in the present economic climate, this was difficult. A Member stated that the Job Centre had funding available, but did not have the staffing levels required, to assist with this. In the past, it had been felt that vocational courses were for 'less able' children, but these now need to be seen as a viable alternative to 'A' levels. In future, instead of students going off the Island to attend university, we should provide meaningful, higher education which will keep them on the Island.</p> <p>A Member stated that students are currently trained to become employees and not entrepreneurs and this is something which should be addressed. It was felt that the resources at the Isle of Man College of Further and Higher Education could be utilised a lot more and that careers advice should not always be targeted towards attendance at university.</p>	<b>Members</b>
	<p>The meeting ended at 11.50 am.</p> <p>The date of the next meeting is 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012 at Santon PDC.</p>	

Signed .....  
Minister for Education and Children

Date .....