NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 21st February, 2020

Update on the implementation of the Gillen Review

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| [AQO 133/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl18$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mrs Dolores Kelly *(SDLP - Upper Bann)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the Gillen Review.**  Implementation of the Gillen Review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences is included in New Decade, New Approach and is a key priority for my Department in the year ahead.  The Department is working with multi-agency partners to develop a phased implementation plan for the current mandate and beyond. The Criminal Justice Board has agreed that recommendations which will have the greatest impact on complainants going through the system should be prioritised.  The detailed implementation plan, highlighting relevant dates and deliverables will be presented to the Criminal Justice Board at its next meeting and we will share this with the Justice Committee once available.  This is a complex and important piece of work, which requires engagement beyond the criminal justice system and I am determined that significant progress is made within the current mandate. |

Update on the Online Harm White Paper

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| [AQO 131/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl19$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Sinead McLaughlin *(SDLP - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice to outline what actions her Department has taken to ensure the UK Government's White Paper on Online Harm meets the needs of people in Northern Ireland.**  The UK Government’s White Paper seeks to address a wide range of online harms including child sexual exploitation and abuse, terrorist content or activity, organised immigration crime, modern slavery, extreme and revenge pornography, harassment, cyber-stalking and hate crime; as well as harms that are less clearly defined, like cyberbullying and trolling, coercive behaviour, intimidation, disinformation and advocacy of self harm.  Telecommunications is a reserved matter and so implementation falls predominantly to UK Government Departments. However many of these harms relate to devolved matters. As such, my officials engaged fully to inform the UK Government’s response and to ensure that the best interests of people in Northern Ireland are fully met.  DOJ collaborated with Home Office and DCMS to host a series of workshops with relevant NI Departments, law enforcement and with civil society and industry stakeholders in this jurisdiction.  The UK Government published its response to the consultation on the White Paper last week and intends to bring forward legislation to protect children and vulnerable adults from digital threats as well as the development of a government media literary strategy. My Department will continue to engage with the UK Government and other relevant Executive Departments as work on these issues progresses.  These new measures will complement the existing work of DOJ, PSNI, the Organised Crime Task Force and other partners to keep people safe from cybercrime and cyber enabled crime. This includes empowering people to be safer through partnerships such as Get Safe Online.  In addition, the scope of the independent Judge-led review of hate crime legislation has been extended to include consideration of online hate crime and abuse. The intention is that the review’s work will not duplicate any of the issues covered by the White Paper but will assist in contributing to further debate on this issue |

Update on plans to pilot a Mental Health Court

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| [AQO 132/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl21$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Pat Sheehan *(SF - West Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice to outline her plans for a pilot of a Mental Health Court.**  Problem Solving Justice is a new approach in Northern Ireland aimed at tackling the root causes of offending behaviour, reducing harm and addressing vulnerabilities within families and the community.  The Department, in partnership with other government departments, agencies and the voluntary and community sector, has developed a portfolio of Problem Solving Justice projects which are at various stages of development.  A Project Board has been established and plans for the development of a Mental Health Court are due to be scoped this year, in conjunction with other stakeholders including the Department of Health. |

Update on a review of the Universal Credit complaints process

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| Mr Andy Allen *(UUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister for Communities whether she intends to initiate a review of the Universal Credit complaints process.**  Can I thank the Member for his question and his ongoing interest in Universal Credit.  The purpose of any complaints process is to give people the chance to complain about any aspect of a service they feel has let them down. I want to ensure that people who bring forward a complaint can trust the process and the outcome.  Before a case is treated as a formal complaint we encourage the person to contact the office managing their case and raise their concern directly there. This is often the quickest way to resolve any issues and, if necessary, put things right. If the person is unhappy after this, their complaint will be passed to the Universal Credit Customer Service team. This is Stage One of the complaints process and a reply will be provided within ten working days. If the person remains unhappy they can escalate their complaint to the next stage (Stage Two) where a senior official will further investigate their case and reply, again within ten working days. The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and the Independent Case Examiner provide further avenues of complaint if someone remains dissatisfied.  Since the introduction of Universal Credit in September 2017 we have received seventy-five (75) complaints. This is 0.12% of the Universal Credit caseload.  I am very conscious of the importance of having an effective complaints handling process, and am committed to keeping this under continuous review.  I have already raised my own complaint directly with the British Prime Minister, and would urge all Members to do likewise, about the impact Welfare Reform and Universal Credit are having on our people, often the most vulnerable in our society. |

Update on action to address period poverty

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| [AQW 1974/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl09$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Paula Bradshaw *(APNI - South Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail the timescale in which consideration will be given to the issues, potential costs and options to ensure similar action is taken on period poverty among young people, as was pledged in England in March 2019.**  DE is the policy lead in this area in respect of schools however “period-poverty” is a cross-cutting issue therefore decisions regarding funding are for the NI Executive to consider. I am aware of developments in England, Wales and Scotland to provide sanitary products free of charge through a range of bodies and approaches.  Provision for all schools in Northern Ireland would be dependent on funding and my officials are considering potential options and costs in this regard. I will consider the issues as soon as practicable. |

Update on independent audits of children’s attendance records

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| [AQW 1972/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl10$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Paula Bradshaw *(APNI - South Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education whether independent audits of children’s attendance records are carried out.**  The Principal has overall responsibility for school attendance. The Board of Governors should provide support to the school by reviewing schools attendance reports and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to encourage good attendance. Teaching staff should regularly monitor attendance.  School Inspectors and officers of the Department of Education and the Education Authority are entitled to inspect both pupil attendance records and pupil registration records and to make extracts from them. The Principal is required to make such periodical or other returns from the registers to the Department of Education and the Education Authority as they may require. |

Update on plans to rural proof small rural schools

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| [AQW 1934/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl14$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Thomas Buchanan *(DUP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what plans his Department has for the rural proofing of small rural schools.**  My Department’s Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) is the framework, used by schools and school managing authorities, for assessing the viability and long- term sustainability of schools and it is a key driver for the Area Planning process.  The SSP, which has been rural proofed, recognises the needs of rural communities and this is reflected in a lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools, an accessibility criterion which provides guidance on home to school travel times and a ‘strong links with the community’ criterion which recognises the central place a school has for many communities.  Development Proposals are assessed against the criteria and indicators set out in the SSP and the proposer is required to confirm that the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (where applicable) have been considered.  My Department examines any rural considerations using available evidence as part of the advice provided to inform a decision, balancing rural considerations against any other statutory duties which may apply.  My Department will continue to meet its obligations to give due regard to rural proofing requirement |

Update on funding per pupil in different education sectors

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| [2](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl18$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Jim Allister *(TUV - North Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding per pupil in the (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; and (iii) irish-medium sectors. *[Priority Written]***  The levels of funding per pupil in 2019-20, distributed through the Common Funding Formula (CFF) only, in the (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; and (iii) Irish-medium sectors, are reflected in the table below.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Sector** | **2019-20 Per Pupil Funding through the CFF\***  **£** | | Controlled | 3,531 | | Maintained | 3,611 | | Irish-medium(1) | 3,821 |   *\* Data source: CFF 2019-20, which* *included funding to mitigate the increase in Teachers’ Employer’s Superannuation costs effective from 1 April 2019.*  (1) *Controlled and maintained Irish-medium schools are included in the Irish-medium sector above.*  This excludes special schools, as these schools are not funded through the CFF, and voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools, as these schools are designated as separate sectors.  The Department is unable to disaggregate all funding on a per pupil basis. |

Update on statementing in East Belfast

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| [AQW 1771/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl16$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Joanne Bunting *(DUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline (i) how many children have received a statement of special educational needs for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in East Belfast, over the last three years; and (ii) the average time for the statementing process to be completed.**  The answer to (i) is contained in the table below.  Number of pupils residing in the Belfast East constituency with a statement of special education needs for ADHD and ASD 2016/17 to 2018/19   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | ADHD | ASD | | 2018/19 | 27 | 293 | | 2017/18 | 32 | 262 | | 2016/17 | 31 | 247 |   Source: Annual school census  Note: Information refers to the primary SEN of the pupil  Autism Spectrum Disorder includes Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome  (ii) the average time for the statementing process to be completed.  The average length of time for statements to be completed was 41.5 weeks. This relates specifically to those pupils living in the East Belfast constituency a |

Update on school counselling provision

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| [AQW 1769/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl17$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Joanne Bunting *(DUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many schools provide counselling services; (ii) the allocation of such provision; (iii) the criteria for such provision; and (iv) whether there is a waiting list for such provision.**  How many schools provide counselling services  The Education Authority (EA) manages counselling delivery through a procured Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS). This service provides counselling for pupils in all post primary mainstream schools and post primary aged pupils in all Special Schools. In total 233 schools access this support.  ICSS is not available for primary school pupils. Schools can however independently arrange for counselling and use their existing delegated budget to absorb any associated costs. The Department does not hold information on the numbers of schools who independently arrange for counselling. The allocation of such provision   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Pupil Enrolment Numbers** | **Days Per Week** | **Counselling Sessions per week** | **‘Drop Ins’ per week (1 Hour)** | | 1-499 | 0.5 | 3 | 1 | | 500-999 | 1 | 5 | 1 | | 1000-1499 | 1.5 | 8 | 1 | | 1500+ | 2 | 10 | 1 |   The criteria for such provision  Referrals for counselling sessions can only be made by the following people:  The young person,  A parent or carer;  School staff.  (iv) Whether there is a waiting list for such provision.  Waiting lists are retained by the school’s Key Contact and are the responsibility of the school at all times.  Waiting lists are discussed at Contract Management Meetings at which the EA ICSS Contract Manager and the ICSS Provider attends.  As of 31 December 2019, there are 767 young people on the waiting list in post primary schools and 31 young people on the waiting list in special schools. Subsequent to this the school counsellors have assessed most of these young people with counselling planned to start for most young people during January 2020. |

Update on statements

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| [AQW 1768/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl18$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Joanne Bunting *(DUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education, with regard to a statement of special educational needs, to outline the number of (i) applications; (ii) requests; and (iii) rejections, in the last three years.**  Applications and (ii) requests:  This has been interpreted as the number of referrals/requests received from a range of sources, including school, parent, Educational Psychologist and Medical Officer, for consideration of a Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN).  10,631 requests/referrals were received within the Education Authority (EA) in the years 2017 to 2019. Of these requests, 1,326 were repeat applications.  Rejections:  This has been interpreted as the number of referrals/requests for Statutory Assessment received which did not proceed to initiation of the Statutory Assessment process.  2,521 referrals/requests received in the years 2017 to 2019 did not proceed to a Statutory Assessment of SEN. |

Update on education welfare staff

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| [AQW 1738/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl09$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Doug Beattie MC *(UUP - Upper Bann)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline (i) the terms and conditions for education welfare staff in the Education Authority, with regard to term time and annual leave; and (ii) what service operates to assist children in need of support during school closure periods.**   1. Operational Education Welfare staff in the Education Authority are employed under National Joint Council (NJC) Terms and Conditions of Employment and have an annual leave entitlement based on their grade/continuous service.   Annual Leave entitlements based on full-time working of 36 hours per week are set out in the table below. Staff with alternative work patterns have leave awarded on a pro rata basis.   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  |  | <5 Yrs Service | >5 Yrs Service | | Regional Education Welfare Officer | Pts 19-29 | 23 | 30 | | Senior Regional Education Welfare Officer | Pts 36-39 | 25 | 31 | | Deputy Chief Education Welfare Officer | Pts 40-43 | 25 | 31 | | Chief Education Welfare Officer | Pts 43-46 | 27 | 33 | | Head of Education Welfare | Pts 52-55 | 27 | 33 |   The leave year begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March each year. Annual leave can be requested throughout the period and leave requests are subject to line manager approval. Education welfare staff in the Education Authority may avail of Flexible Working/Family Friendly/Term Time working arrangements etc. on application and subject to approval by Line Management.  (ii) The Education Welfare Service is available throughout the year excluding weekends and statutory holiday periods. Schools are provided with the name and contact details of an Education Welfare Officer who is their key point of contact. Further details about the Education Welfare Service are available on the Education Authority webpage at https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/education-welfare-service |

Update on waiting lists for autism diagnosis in the Western Health Trust

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| [AQW 1528/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl08$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Karen Mullan *(SF - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister of Health what action he is taking to reduce the autism diagnosis waiting lists for children in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.**  Within the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT) the current demand for autism diagnostic assessment significantly exceeds the capacity of existing staff resources. A review of Children’s Autism Services is being undertaken by the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board in which the Trust is actively involved.  In the interim, the WHSCT are taking the following steps to reduce assessment times:  Slippage funding is being used for Overtime Clinics;  Recruitment is ongoing for an additional Occupational Therapist;  Recent investment will enable the Trust to develop an early intervention service, which will focus on the needs of children and young people presenting with emotional health and wellbeing difficulties. This service will be available to families awaiting diagnostic assessment and will provide family support to address any additional needs they may have. |

Update on support for young people about to leave Hydebank

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| [AQW 1506/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl19$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín *(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice to detail the support available to young people about to leave Hydebank Wood, in order to help them cope outside on their own.**  The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) recognises that a key element of any sentence must be the focus on enabling offenders to reform and to desist from future offending behaviour.  To that end NIPS works with a number of statutory and voluntary and community sector partners, to prepare young people for release from Hydebank Wood College and to prepare them for resettlement in the community. Activity focusses on nine resettlement pathways and a comprehensive list of the programmes available to Hydebank Wood College students under these pathways is as follows:  [See list here](http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/weeklywrittenresults.aspx?&fd=21/02/2020&s=22&m=01/02/2020%2000:00:00) |

Update on travel to and from school by pupils

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| [AQW 1394/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl02$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Claire Sugden *(IND - East Londonderry)* | **To ask the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for her assessment of the Travel to and from school by pupils in Northern Ireland 2018/19; (ii) to outline her plans to address the issues raised in the report; (iii) how she is working with other Departments to address the issues raised in the report; and (iv) to outline an expected timeframe for her actions.**  I am very disappointed that there has been a reduction in the proportion of primary school pupils walking or cycling to school from 32% to 23% since 2013/14. This highlights the challenge that we face in changing our travel habits to more sustainable behaviours.  In terms of addressing the issues raised in the ‘Travel to and from school by pupils’ 2018/19 report, I want to take some time to carefully consider how best to address the barriers to walking and cycling – including the journey to and from school. In doing so, I am keen to work with other Departments and stakeholders to address the key issues.  Currently, my Department jointly funds (with the Public Health Agency) the Active School Travel Programme. This programme is operated in sixty new schools each year with the aim of encouraging children to travel to school by walking, cycling, scooting or other sustainable means. In addition, every primary school is invited to participate in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme. In 2019/20, almost 350 primary schools and over six thousand children participated. Thirdly, the Practical Child Pedestrians Safety Training programme is offered to selected schools in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland. In 2019/20, 40 primary schools and almost 1,500 children participated in the scheme. My Department also provides schools with free road safety teaching resources.  Developing active travel policies is something that I am keen to progress within the budget that is made available to me. However, it is too early for me to be in a position to provide a timeframe for further actions. |

Update on legislation to strengthen law on CSE

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| [AQW 1361/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl13$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Paul Givan *(DUP - Lagan Valley)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice to outline when legislation will be brought forward to strengthen the criminal law on child sexual exploitation.**  I expect to publish shortly a report on the summary of responses to the consultation on the Review of the Law on Child Sexual Exploitation. Details of next steps, including proposals for legislative change, will form part of the Report. |