NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 20 March, 2020

Update on pedestrian safety outside schools

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| [AQO 350/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl02$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Karen Mullan *(SF - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's role in working with the Education Authority in relation to pedestrian safety outside schools.**  As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. I believe the targeted provision of infrastructure at and near schools can go a long way to making our roads and communities safer.  My Department does not however deal with the Education Authority when providing such infrastructure as it deals directly with the school. To promote and instil good road user behaviours in children, my Department has developed and provides free of charge, a range of road safety teaching resources to schools. These resources are designed to be used by teachers to highlight and embed good road safety behaviours, including pedestrian safety.  My Department has worked with the Education Authority to ensure teachers have access to these resources through its C2K system, the teachers ICT network. My officials have access to C2K and frequently update or upload new resources. My Department has also worked with the Education Authority to produce a road safety lesson on the Green Cross Code, which was broadcast to schools on the Education Authority’s TV broadcast system. |

Update on State of Child Health 2020 Report

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| [AQO 365/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl14$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Sinéad Bradley *(SDLP - South Down)* | **To ask the Minister of Health for his assessment of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's State of Child Health 2020 Report, particularly the high levels of suicide among children.**  The Department will consider the report’s recommendations in line with existing policy priorities and ongoing work.  Promoting and improving the physical and mental health of children and young people is a priority not only for my Department but across the Executive as evidenced in the New Decade, New Approach agreement.  The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's State of Child Health 2020 report draws out a number of key themes from its findings. My Department is already investing in a number of programmes and strategies which seek to address child health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of our children.  The Protect life 2 Strategy for Preventing Suicide and Self Harm was published on 10 September 2019 and sets out a clear action plan for addressing suicide. The strategy makes specific reference to children, the fact that some of the risk factors are specific to them, and that children experiencing suicidal ideation/behaviour require specific intervention as do children bereaved by suicide.  A number of actions within the Protect Life 2 Strategy are targeted at younger age groups including: suicide prevention training for teachers, youth workers and sports coaches; emotional resilience building and responding to critical incidents in schools; the schools counselling service; and child focused bereavement services. |

Update on high rate of hospital admissions for children’s tooth extractions

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| [AQO 363/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl15$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Catherine Kelly *(SF - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Health how his Department is addressing the high rate of hospital admissions in children for tooth extraction.**  The extraction of teeth under general anaesthetic should be the last option for a child who needs to have a tooth removed. Dental decay levels in Northern Ireland have reduced significantly over the last 16 years and there has been a similar reduction in children requiring a general anaesthetic for dental extractions. However, further reductions are needed.  Children’s registration figures with General Dental Practitioners are at their highest ever level in Northern Ireland. While decay levels have fallen overall, children who come from an area of deprivation have higher levels than the population average.  Preventative interventions by general dental practitioners are important, as is the work of the Community Dental Service in targeting the most vulnerable sections of the population. Early diagnosis and intervention can slow the progression of decay and reduce the probability of a child needing a general anaesthetic.  The Health and Social Care system alone cannot solve this problem; there needs to be continued collaboration with the Department of Education in relation to school meals, school snack policies, school-based tooth brushing programmes and dental health messages. The introduction of campaigns addressing high levels of sugar consumption will have a positive impact on dental health, as will the recent dental workforce review in looking at the increased role in prevention by all members of the dental team, not just dentists.  Finally, in recent weeks the Chief Dental Officer has established Oral Health Options Groups to allow for the consideration and development of further interventions for the two most urgent groups at present, namely children and the elderly. These groups will help identify important service improvements and I will then be able to consider any options developed alongside any financial implications that may arise. |

Update on tackling educational underachievement

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|  | [AQW 3379/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl03$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mrs Pam Cameron *(DUP - South Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Education for an update on progress since New Decade, New Approach to establish an expert group to examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, particularly due to the identified underachievement amongst working class Protestant boys.**  I am currently considering options in respect of establishing the Expert Group to examine and propose an action plan to address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys.  Tackling educational underachievement is critical to improving the life chances of children and young people and it is important that we progress this work swiftly. Proposals regarding how the Expert Group is to be established and the timescales involved will come before the Executive as soon as possible. |

Update on teaching time spend on prep for the Transfer tests

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| [AQW 3365/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl04$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Chris Lyttle *(APNI - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of core primary teaching hours are spent preparing pupils for AQE Common Entrance Assessment (CEA) and PPTC Entrance Assessment (GL) tests.**  My Department does not regulate or administer the transfer tests used by selective post-primary schools. It does not endorse either test and makes no assessment about their robustness or reliability as assessments of literacy and numeracy skills. Language and Literacy and Mathematics and Numeracy are core Areas of Learning of the statutory curriculum in primary schools and across Key Stages 1 and 2, teachers enable pupils to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in topics such as reading and writing and in a range of mathematical processes including number and number notation, measures and handling data.  My Department issued guidance in 2016 setting out how primary schools may supply support materials, carry out preparations for tests during core teaching hours, coach in exam technique and familiarise pupils with the test environment. However, that guidance was not prescriptive and it is a matter for individual schools to judge how much core teaching time they devote to preparing pupils for the tests. |

Update on improvement to Tier 2 and 3 CAMHS

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| [AQW 3162/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl09$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mrs Pam Cameron *(DUP - South Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Health what steps he will take to improve Tier 2 and Tier 3 Child and Adolescent Mental Health services to ensure that patients are treated effectively by appropriately trained mental health professionals.**  My Department leads on a draft Inter-Departmental Action Plan in response to the Children’s Commissioner’s ‘Still Waiting’ report. The Action Plan outlines a range of actions to improve CAMHS. Both the draft Action Plan and a Progress Update Report are available on my Department’s website.  Responding to the Commissioner’s recommendations, and strengthening CAMHS, will require additional investment which will have to be considered against other priorities and in the context of my Department’s budget settlement. |

Update on school transport for children with SEN

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| [AQW 3151/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl13$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Doug Beattie MC *(UUP - Upper Bann)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of times children with special needs were unable to be brought to school due to the unavailability of regular school transport buses in the 2016-17 and 2018-19 academic years; and (ii) whether compensation was paid to parents to cover the alternative transport arrangements they had to make.**  The Education Authority has advised that it does not hold the data requested. It has confirmed that while it is unusual for a travel arrangement not to operate for a sustained period, in such circumstances it will liaise with parents to explore alternative arrangements and if necessary provide financial assistance. |

Update on emotional and physical wellbeing in the curriculum

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| [AQW 3143/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl16$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Justin McNulty *(SDLP - Newry and Armagh)* | **To ask the Minister of Education (i) whether he will consider including emotional and physical wellbeing into the curriculum in primary schools; and (ii) in considering the move, will he take into consideration best practice from the Republic of Ireland who have already introduced such a measure.**  Emotional and physical wellbeing are already an integral part of the Northern Ireland curriculum. At Key Stage 1, as a minimum, pupils have opportunities to learn about keeping themselves healthy and safe as well as developing a knowledge and understanding of self-esteem, self-confidence and their own feelings and emotions. At Key Stage 2 pupils are given the opportunity to further their knowledge in sustaining health and in developing effective strategies to manage their feelings and emotions and the feelings and emotions of others.  In physical education (PE) young people are provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge, understanding and skill in a range of activities. Young people should experience a sense of fun, enjoyment and achievement though progressively challenging and innovative activities and appreciate the benefits of physical activity and its relationship with good health.  I acknowledge the positive impact on mental health and emotional wellbeing that physical exercise can have and through investing in the Sports Programme, am ensuring that pupils are learning about mental health, resilience and emotional wellbeing.  There is no evidence that prescribing detailed lists of compulsory subject content produces better outcomes for young people. Schools have the flexibility to adapt their approach and use a variety of circular resources which best suit the needs of their pupils and to use customised approaches to ensure that children and young people are both safe and well informed about the range of issues that they face in a modern society. |

Update on support for schools mark NI centenary

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| [AQW 3135/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl18$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Gordon Dunne *(DUP - North Down)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline any measures his Department is taking to support schools who may wish to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021.**  The UK Government has made a commitment in the New Decade, New Approach document to work with the Executive to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021; and to make available funding for related projects. I intend to participate in Executive discussions with the Secretary of State about the implementation of the UK Government's commitment to support and fund projects. The quantum and method of allocation of these funds have not yet been determined. |

Update on number of surplus school places

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| [AQW 3119/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl19$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Sinead McLaughlin *(SDLP - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline the number of surplus places in Northern Ireland schools and the estimated annual cost of maintaining these surplus places.**  In the 2018-19 academic year, which is the most recent year for which data are available there were 41,606 available places in Primary schools, 19,362 in Post Primary schools and 194 in Nursery schools and units. The methodology for calculating available places can be accessed through the Department’s website at the link provided (Available Places documents).  https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/37331  In terms of calculating the cost of available places, under the extant Common Funding Scheme grant-aided schools do not receive funding for available places or spare capacity. They are funded based on actual pupil numbers and the characteristics of those pupils. There are certain fixed costs which will always be inescapable irrespective of school size and the number of available places a school may have. |

Update on respite care for under 18s in Derry city

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| [AQW 3114/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl20$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Karen Mullan *(SF - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister of Health why the Western Health and Social Care Trust hold no waiting lists for short-term breaks or respite for under 18 year olds in the Derry city area when a number of families have had their respite stopped over 6 months ago.**  Londonderry’s short break facility, Rosebud Cottage, has recently been relocated to Racecourse Road with an anticipated opening date of 30 April 2020. The Western Health and Social Care Trust is aware of the impact on families over recent months due to the unavailability of services. In lieu of the availability of short break facilities in Rosebud, families have been offered alternatives such as access to services in Avalon (a short break service in Omagh) or Self Directed Support. This again is based on on-going assessed need.  Once the service in Rosebud Cottage is operational, a waiting list will be re-established in order to assist managers to prioritise services for those most in need. |

Update on Operation Encompass in NI

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| [AQW 3098/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl02$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Mervyn Storey *(DUP - North Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to confirm whether he will introduce an equivalent system to England’s Operation Encompass in Northern Ireland, to promote information sharing between the PSNI and schools in relation to children who witness domestic abuse incidents.**  The Department is working collaboratively with the Safeguarding Board for NI, the Police Service for NI and the Departments of Health and Justice through the *“Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy”* to consider the introduction of a pilot scheme to notify schools of domestic abuse incidents, based on the principles of Operation Encompass’. However, at this stage no conclusions have been reached.  In terms of current initiatives to combat domestic abuse, the Department supports the Women’s Aid Helping Hands programme which offers training to teachers to teach sensitive subjects, in this case domestic abuse, and respond appropriately to issues and concerns raised by pupils.  The Department has also published ‘Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools, a Guide for Schools” which includes, at section 8.2, advice regarding their responsibilities in this area.  The Guide can be accessed via the following link:  https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/safeguarding-and-child-protection-in-schools-guide-pdf-for-website-%28september-2019%29.pdf |

Update on guidance concerning racism in schools

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| [AQW 3077/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl08$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Daniel McCrossan *(SDLP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline (i) the guidance concerning racism provided to schools; and (ii) what checks and balances are conducted to ensure schools investigate racism properly.**  (i) The Education Authority (EA) Intercultural Education Service provides general advice and guidance to schools to help them welcome children and young people of different races and ethnicities. (ii) The EA can provide anti-racist advice to schools when requested however the EA has no investigatory role or powers. |

Update on impact of Universal Credit two child limit

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| [AQW 2661/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl14$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Mark Durkan *(SDLP - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister for Communities how many households, in each constituency, have been impacted by the Universal Credit two child limit in the last financial year; and how much worse off these families are as a consequence.**  The information requested regarding the number of households impacted by the Universal Credit two child limit and its financial consequences is not currently available.  As with other social security benefits, a single system, developed and managed by the Department for Work and Pensions, is used to collect and store Universal Credit data. My Department is working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to improve the range of data available to us.  The latest official statistics for Universal Credit here were published on 26 February 2020 providing detail up to November 2019. That report along with previous reports, is available at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/universal-credit-statistics |

Update on mitigation underspends to help address poverty

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| [QW 2374/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl19$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Andy Allen *(UUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister for Communities what discussion she or her departmental officials have had with the Minister of Finance or his departmental officials to ring-fence any mitigation underspends to help address poverty.**  My Department’s funding for Fresh Start Welfare Mitigation is ring-fenced. Underspends arising in ring-fenced budget allocations cannot be used by the Department for any other purpose and must be surrendered to Department of Finance.  Departmental officials continue to liaise with Department of Finance officials as we seek to secure funding for 2020-21 to continue to provide financial support for claimants who have been impacted by welfare reforms. |

Update on engagement with Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships

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| [AQW 2160/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl05$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Karen Mullan *(SF - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister for Communities how she plans to engage with Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships in the design and implementation of an anti-poverty strategy.**  The experience and expertise of Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships will be instrumental in the development of an anti-poverty strategy. My officials have been running a programme of engagement workshops with Partnerships, and I am attending the next event on 18th March 2020. I look forward to hearing directly from the Partnerships and Areas at Risk representatives on the design and implementation of an anti-poverty strategy. |

Update on proposed role of Office of Identity and Cultural Expression

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| [AQO 8/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl11$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr William Humphrey *(DUP - North Belfast)* | **To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the proposed role of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.**  The New Decade, New Approach agreement sets out the strategic aims of the new Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.  These include the promotion of:-  cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, including Northern Ireland’s ethnic, national, linguistic and faith communities;  building social cohesion and reconciliation so that everyone has a sense of belonging;  building capacity and resilience on how we address our unresolved cultural identity issues; and  celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland’s rich cultural and linguistic heritage, recognising the equal validity and importance of all identities and traditions.  Consideration is currently being given to the arrangements to bring forward the Rights, Language and Identity proposals in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement, including the creation of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.  Further details will be made available to Members in due course. |

Update on GFS

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| [AQW 1613/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl13$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Miss Rachel Woods *(GPNI - North Down)* | **To ask the Minister for the Economy (i) whether she has any plans to introduce an age, goods and facilities and services bill as mentioned in New Decade, New Approach; and (ii) what measures she is considering to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged in remuneration, when employed in the same role as older colleagues.**  We will consider the development of an Age, Goods and Facilities and Services Bill in due course. At present responsibility for setting the National Minimum wage is within the remit of the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy |