NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 13 March, 2020

Update on any plans to reduce nursery and pre-school hours in special schools

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| AQO 322/17-22 | Mr Daniel McCrossan*(SDLP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education whether he plans to reduce nursery and pre-school hours for children in special schools.**There are no plans at present to reduce nursery and pre-school hours for children in special schools. If there was an unprecedented demand for pre-school places in Special Schools, revisions would be made on an individual school basis, in agreement with the Special School Principal and through targeted engagement with parents who are likely to be impacted by the decision. |

Update on addressing educational underachievement in Dickson Plan area

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| AQO 320/17-22 | Mr Doug Beattie MC*(UUP - Upper Bann)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what action he will take to address educational underachievement amongst children in the Dickson Plan area that do not attend selective post-primary education.**Educational underachievement is a persistent and challenging issue, which as a society we must continue to address, particularly given its strong link to poverty. The factors that contribute to educational underachievement can affect pupils in any sector irrespective of the admissions criteria applied.A range of interventions are currently in place to tackle underachievement across Northern Ireland and outcomes for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds continue to improve. For example, there was a significant improvement in the reading score of our most disadvantaged pupils between 2009 and 2018 in the PISA international study of the attainment of 15 year old pupils.**The commitment in “New Decade, New Approach” to establish an Expert Group to examine the link between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background will also provide a vital opportunity to further explore and address the long-standing issue of underachievement. I am currently considering options in respect of establishing the Expert Group. I want to move quickly on this work given its importance and I would wish to see the development of an action plan prioritised.** |

Update on teacher training and autism-specific training

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| AQO 318/17-22 | Mr Cathal Boylan*(SF - Newry and Armagh)* | **To ask the Minister of Education whether he will engage with teacher training institutions to introduce autism-specific training for teachers.**All BEd and PGCE programmes in NI, include compulsory modules covering Inclusion and the Special Educational Needs Framework (SEN), including autism.Following the passing of the Assembly Motion on 3 February, I committed to consider how best to take this forward, to ensure that we have sufficient autism training for our teachers and educational workforce. My officials have commenced this work and should Initial Teacher Education (ITE) SEN modules need strengthened in the area of autism; my officials will engage with the various institutions to do so; in discussion with the Minister for the Economy, who is responsible for funding ITE. |

Update on methods to identify and tackle poverty

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|  | AQO 290/17-22 | Ms Jemma Dolan*(SF - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister for Communities whether she is considering alternative or additional methods of identifying and tackling poverty.**In line with New Decade, New Approach, I will be publishing a timescale for the delivery of a new Anti-Poverty Strategy in the coming weeks. The principles and practice of citizen and community engagement, co-design and co-production will be a key part of the development and delivery of this strategy.Together with stakeholders and colleagues from other departments, steps will be taken to ensure that the Strategy targets and measures the things that will make a real difference in identifying and tackling poverty. I am committed to the delivery of an anti-poverty strategy that targets objective need and ensures that no one is penalised for being poor.Currently the main source of data used to measure poverty here is the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS collects information on the incomes and circumstances of around 2,000 private households. My department publishes Poverty Statistics annually using the FRS data. These statistics estimate the number and percentage of people living in low income households. |

Update on Access NI application process

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| AQW 3244/17-22 | Ms Joanne Bunting*(DUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice whether she will review the Access NI application process to investigate whether it would be possible to allow a single application and certificate to demonstrate an individual’s suitability for multiple roles, rather than requiring several separate applications for each organisation that the individual is involved in. *[Priority Written]***Addressing the issue of regular / repeat disclosure checks is something that AccessNI has been considering for some time. An effective NI standalone technical solution is complex to develop, and likely to be expensive. This could impact on the AccessNI charges to the public as they are based on a costs recovery model. AccessNI is currently exploring other options to deliver greater ‘portability’ for disclosure checks – this includes discussions with the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) in England and Wales to join with their Update Service, however a viable technical solution is likely to be some way off. |

Update on progress in publishing and implementing a childcare strategy

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| AQW 3137/17-22 | Mr Gerry Carroll*(PBPA - West Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what progress has been made to publish and implement a childcare strategy, as outlined in New Decade, New Approach.**The first phase of the Executive’s Childcare Strategy, ‘Bright Start – A Strategic Framework and Key First Actions’ was launched in 2013. Following extensive engagement, the former OFMDFM consulted on a draft Childcare Strategy in 2015. Policy responsibility for childcare transferred to my Department in May 2016 and a detailed analysis of the consultation responses was undertaken and published.The Strategy has been updated to reflect the current context for childcare, the analysis of responses to the 2015 consultation, the policy priorities aimed at supporting families reaffirmed in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement and developments in early education and care services for families in other jurisdictions.There are significant policy and resourcing issues to be decided in order to finalise the Strategy, including how we can deliver extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care for families with children aged 3 to 4.The Childcare Strategy is an Executive Strategy and therefore requires Executive consideration and approval to publish in final form. I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration in due course.Publication of the Strategy requires the Executive’s consideration of the budget and resources available to deliver all the actions, including an extended offer. Progressing to publication and implementation is predicated on securing the resources required. |

Update on number of children taking and cost of providing school transport

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| AQW 3064/17-22 | Mr Doug Beattie MC*(UUP - Upper Bann)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline (i) how many children in Northern Ireland are eligible for home to school transport in 2019/2020; and (ii) how much this costs the Department.**The Education Authority has advised that the figures for the number of children in Northern Ireland in receipt of home to school transport and the cost of this transport for 2019/2020 are not yet available.The number of pupils in receipt of home to school transport in the academic year 2018/2019 was 84,390 and the cost to the Education Authority was £86,102,581 |

Update on addressing educational underachievement and socio-economic background

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| AQW 3050/17-22 | Mr Gerry Carroll*(PBPA - West Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what progress has been made to establish an expert group to examine and propose an action plan to address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, as outlined in New Decade, New Approach. *[Priority Written]***My officials are progressing work regarding the establishment of an 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 perinatal mental health inpatient unit and community services

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| AQW 3034/17-22 | Ms Órlaithí Flynn*(SF - West Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1453/17-22, whether the revised business case for a perinatal mental health inpatient unit and community services has concluded, including an assessment of additional funding. *[Priority Written]***The revised business case for enhanced community perinatal mental health services for the region has recently been received by the Department and my officials are currently considering the detail of the business case. |

Update on progress on a parental alienation policy for NI

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|  | /17-22 | Mr Paul Givan*(DUP - Lagan Valley)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice to detail progress on a parental alienation policy for Northern Ireland in relation to family court proceedings.**Where alienation is suspected in family proceedings, it is for social workers to advise the court which will consider evidence of alienation alongside all other evidence when deciding what is in the best interests of the paramount consideration of the welfare of the child. I understand the Department of Health proposes to build on existing practice and will consider guidelines for social services on parental alienation as part of the new cross-departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy. The Strategy will also provide us with an opportunity to collectively consider how to better support relations between parents and parents and children more generally. Key to that work will be early intervention and my Department is already working with the Department of Health to consider actions which might be introduced to reduce acrimony and negative behaviours to improve outcomes for families and children.I also expect the Domestic Abuse Bill I will shortly bring forward will assist where alienation is evident. The Bill will make behaviour that is coercive or controlling or which amounts to psychological or emotional abuse a criminal offence. Abusive behaviour can be indirect and where the victim is under 18, a child sees, hears or is present during an incident of abusive behaviour or is used to abuse a victim, the Bill will provide for the offences to be treated as aggravated and increased sentencing may apply. |

Update on whether DE has engaged with schools on the Transfer

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| AQW 2911/17-22 | Mr Daniel McCrossan*(SDLP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline whether his Department has engaged with schools concerning transfer tests.**I have no plans to bring forward legislation in relation to transfer tests. Opinions on academic selection vary and until agreement is reached, post-primary schools are permitted to set their own admissions criteria and to decide whether to use the results of transfer tests as part of this process.My Department has had no engagement with schools concerning transfer tests but I understand that those schools that wish to use academic selection as part of their admissions criteria are currently working together to examine options for a single test. I will follow with interest the progress made in this area. |

Update on measures to educate teenagers about mental health in schools

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| AQW 2813/17-22 | Mr Doug Beattie MC*(UUP - Upper Bann)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what measures are being taken with regards educating teenagers about mental health in schools.**Mental health and wellbeing is included within the statutory ‘Learning for Life and Work’ area of learning at post-primary level. This provides pupils with the opportunity to develop an understanding of how to maximise and sustain their health, self-esteem and wellbeing including managing emotions and reactions to on-going life experiences. The curriculum encourages innovative and customised approaches to ensuring that young people are well informed about all the issues they face in modern society. The Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment provides curricular guidance and teaching support materials for use in schools and also signposts schools to a range of voluntary and community organisations should they need additional support.My Department is working collaboratively with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency, the Health and Social Care Board and the Education Authority to develop a Framework which will build on existing support structures and multi-disciplinary working to ensure that systems and pathways are in place to provide individualised support. The Framework will place an emphasis on promotion, prevention and early intervention with the aspiration that fewer children and young people will require specialist intervention from Mental Health Services. |

Update on speed limit outside schools

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| AQW 2810/17-22 | Ms Kellie Armstrong*(APNI - Strangford)* | **To ask the Minister for Infrastructure (i) when she will publish the report on the 20mph project outside rural schools; and (ii) whether the Schools (Part-Time 20mph Speed Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 will be extended to all 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 that reducing the maximum speed at which traffic can travel on some of our roads, particularly those near schools, can help.My Department is committed to introducing measures that reduce the speed of traffic on our roads. We are currently trialling an arrangement of signs that is intended to allow the introduction of more part-time 20mph speed limits at schools. I am expecting receipt of the findings of the trial in the next month or so, and plan to make them publicly available after I have given them due consideration.Further changes to legislation will be considered in due course. |

Update on what action DE can take to help schools tackle bullying

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| AQW 2781/17-22 | Mr Alex Easton*(DUP - North Down)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what action his Department can take to help schools tackle bullying.**My Department has provided a clear lead through the “Addressing Bullying In Schools Act (NI) 2016”, which will ensure greater consistency on how bullying is addressed by schools. I hope to be in a position to announce the commencement of this legislation in the near future.Guidance has been produced to support commencement; along with information for parents, carers and young people. This guidance will explain how complicated issues such as bullying between pupils from different schools can be addressed. It also includes case studies on how schools could tackle these situations.My Department funds the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) which is available to provide advice to parents around bullying concerns. Protocols are in place for sharing, with parental consent, information with the Education Authority so that appropriate support is put in place. |

Update on funding for autism support units and learning centres

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| AQW 2742/17-22 | Mr Daniel McCrossan*(SDLP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail the amount of money spent on (i) autism support units; and (ii) learning support centres in mainstream schools in each of the last five years.**It is not possible to disaggregate expenditure on Autism Support Units from Learning Support Centres (LSCs) as the Education Authority records all expenditure against the LSCs classification. The expenditure on LSCs in mainstream schools in the last 4 financial years is therefore reflected in the table below.

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|  | **2015-16****£m** | **2016-17****£m** | **2017-18****£m** | **2018-19****£m** | **2019-20****£m** |
| LSCs | N/A\* | 13.1 | 15.1 | 15.34 | 16.77\*\* |

\*Due to differences in reporting structures within the legacy Education & Library Boards this information is unavailable.\*\* The figure provided for 2019-20 is a forecast. |

Update on extended provision for youth groups after March 2020

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| AQW 2726/17-22 | Mr Fra McCann*(SF - West Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education for an update on the extended provision for youth groups, post 31 March 2020.**The Education Authority launched its new funding scheme for Regional and Local Voluntary Youth Organisations on 3 March. This is based on identified needs and expected outcomes in line with existing policy and to support local and regional services to address strategic, development and project work in line with the Priorities for Youth policy.The new funding scheme will ensure that essential youth work previously funded under the Extended Provision Scheme will continue to be supported from the 1 October – 31 March 2021 and up until March 2023; specifically through Local Area Funding and Local Project Funding.Transitional funding arrangements, including a full 6 months allocation of 2019-2020 funding from April to September 2020, will ensure continued extended provision in the interim period. Full details of transitional arrangements are provided on the youth funding website.Specifications detailing key outputs and outcomes required of the voluntary sector to meet the previous Extended Provision Scheme outcomes are available on the dedicated youth funding website in relation to the above funding streams (www.eanifunding.org.uk). The website also includes full details of transitional funding arrangements which will be in place up to March 2022.Statutory youth services in receipt of Extended Provision funding will be embedding essential work within their core delivery plans.Budgets for 2020-21 have not yet been confirmed and final decisions in relation to all funding applications will be dependent on the available budget. |

Update on funding of post-primary counselling in North Belfast

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| AQW 2683/17-22 | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín*(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education how many primary and post-primary schools in North Belfast are paying for counselling support from their school budgets.**Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements, schools receive fully delegated budgets which enables resources to be used in accordance with their individual needs and priorities. My Department does not hold information relating to these delegated budgets and the provision of counselling support.I can however confirm the position in relation to the funding provided for the Extended Schools (ES) programme - according to Action Plans submitted by schools for 2019/20, 15 primary and post primary schools and a further 4 cluster groups located in North Belfast are currently offering counselling with the aid of ES funding. In addition, the Belfast Boys’ Model School and the Belfast Model School for Girls both provide counselling with funding allocated through the Full Service Extended Schools programme. |

Update on number of primary school children with mental health issues

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| AQW 2641/17-22 | Mr Justin McNulty*(SDLP - Newry and Armagh)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of primary school children who have presented with mental health issues in each of the last three years; and (ii) outline the referral pathway for dealing with such cases.**The Education Authority has advised that it does not hold this information centrally, as the recording of these pupils is the responsibility of the school concerned.If a school had a concern about a primary age child and their mental health, the parent would be contacted and asked to seek a GP appointment for referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). |

Update on roll out of HPV vaccine for 12 and 13 year olds

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| AQW 2617/17-22 | Miss Rachel Woods*(GPNI - North Down)* | **To ask the Minister of Health for an update on the roll-out of the Human Papilloma Virus vaccine for boys and girls aged twelve to thirteen.**The HPV vaccine has been offered to all boys aged 12-13 years of age, while they are in school year 9, since September 2019.Data on vaccine uptake for boys will be published later this year.Girls aged 12 to 13 have been offered the HPV vaccine since 2008 and the most recent data available (August 2019) shows that for the academic year 2018/19, 76.6% of girls in Year 9 had received the two doses, while 82.8% of girls in year 10 had received the two doses. |