

Peter Weir (DUP), Chair for the Committee for Education

Hello, I'm Peter Weir, I'm the DUP MLA for North Down, but I'm also Chair of the Education Committee. And the Education Committee is drawn from all the main parties in the Assembly and we look at what the Department of Education is doing and what's happening in schools and for young people on a sort of a weekly basis.

Special Needs in Education

One of the issues that we've been looking at very closely is special needs education and that's for children in schools who need some additional help. That could be with a physical problem, or a mental problem-- mental health problem where they need maybe a classroom assistant or a statement. And we've been trying to ensure then that they get the appropriate help, and that where people do have problems, that it's diagnosed and treated very quickly.

One of the problems we've had in the past has been that there maybe hasn't been the strongest cooperation between Education and Health and that meant that whatever problems are there, aren't maybe dealt with as quickly, and the help and support that's needed for young people isn't always available. And so we've been putting through legislation to try to ensure that the help that is there through special needs education is then given to kids in as quick and appropriate a way as possible.

Shared Education

There's another issue which is coming up-- has been coming up in front of the committee is Shared Education. The committee did a report on that and we're now going to be facing laws in relation to the Shared Education.

That's-- I suppose, there's two main aspects. That's about cooperation so that schools... That pupils from different backgrounds can come together, and that's not just from the religious, across the religious divide, and helping that community, but also helping where maybe schools in some deprived areas and better off areas are able to work together so that we can enhance both sort of a community cooperation, but also then educational opportunities for all our children.

Educational Attainment

One of the issues which has been very much in the news for a long time has been educational attainment. It works with a lot of very successful schools and successful pupils. There's a concern that, particularly for a lot of pupils in more deprived backgrounds, haven't had the same level of educational achievement perhaps as we'd hoped for them. There's been a bit of under-achievement.

We've been looking at ways that we can intervene, and some of those things are about trying to actually address things at a very young age, so that that help is there. So that by the time that pupils get into the first few years at school that they're as much as possible on a level playing field with all their colleagues.