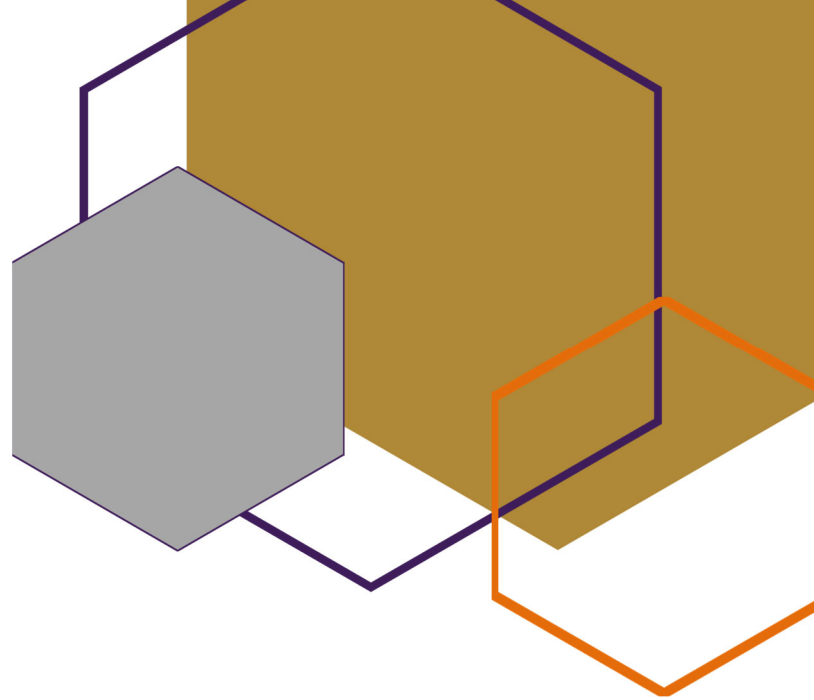


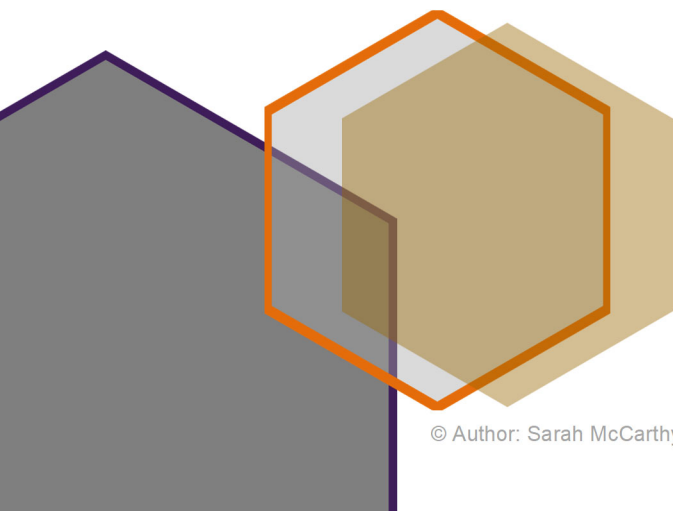


Special EU Programmes Body  
Comhlacht na gClár Speisialta AE  
Special EU Skemes Boadie



# Shared Education (Year 5) Impact Evaluation

PEACE IV Programme – Specific Objective 1



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## 1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

The EU PEACE IV Programme aims ‘To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society through the promotion of reconciliation amongst all communities across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland’. Shared Education is one of four Specific Objectives of PEACE IV, and its success is based on the achievement of the defined result and output indicators.

**Specific Objective 1 Shared Education, Action 1:** *The provision of direct, sustained, curriculum-based contact between pupils and teachers from all backgrounds through collaboration between schools and early years/pre-school settings from different sectors in order to promote good relations and enhance children's skills and attitudes to contribute to a cohesive society.*

**Result Indicator:** *The percentage of schools in the last academic year that have been involved in Shared Education with another school. The baseline value for 2013 is 76% [later revised to 58%]. The target value for 2023 is 88% [later revised to 69%]. This baseline is derived from the School Omnibus Survey 2013 figure. For the Border Region of Ireland, the baseline value is 0% and the 2023 target value is 7.5%.*

**Output Indicators:**

- *The number of schools involved in Shared Education (350 schools by 2023).*
- *The number of trained teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (2,100 persons by 2023).*
- *The number of participants in Shared Education classrooms (144,000 children by 2023).*

Shared Education aims to:

- Meet the needs of, and provide for the education together of, learners from all backgrounds and socio-economic status.
- Involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.
- Deliver educational benefits to learners, promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and promote equality of opportunity, good relations, respect for identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

To deliver upon these aims, the SEUPB awarded €33.14m to two separate projects, ‘Sharing from the Start’ (SFTS) involving pre-schools (€4.2m), and ‘Collaboration and Sharing in Education’ (CASE) involving mostly primary and some post-primary schools (€28.9m). Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2022 (SFTS) and 2023 (CASE) as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018: September 2017 to June 2018.
  - September 2017: Funding awarded by the SEUPB.
  - September 2017 to December 2017: preparation and recruitment of first cohort of pre-schools/schools.
  - January 2018: commencement of project activity in pre-schools/schools.
- **Year 2** – 2018 to 2019: project activity from September 2018 to June 2019.
- **Year 3** – 2019 to 2020: project activity from September 2019 to June 2020 – impacted by Covid-19 (March 2020 onwards).
- **Year 4** – 2020 to 2021: project activity from September 2020 to June 2021 – impacted by Covid-19.
- **Year 5** – 2021 to 2022: project activity from September 2021 to June 2022 – Academic Term 1 and Term 2 impacted by Covid-19. By Term 3 many of the partnerships were able to resume face-to face activities i.e., pre-pandemic format.



- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity from September 2022 to June 2023 – SFTS to complete by 30 September 2023<sup>1</sup> and CASE to complete by 31 October 2023<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2 Research Approach & Outputs

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children’s Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to conduct a three-year evaluation to assess the impact of Shared Education (PEACE IV Specific Objective 1).

There are several research outputs over the last three-years, which collectively provide a robust Impact Evaluation of Shared Education, to include:

**Table 1.1: Research Outputs & Resources**

Research Output	Description
<b>Phase 1 (Year 3)</b>	
1. Overall Programme Report (2019/2020)	The first phase of research and report provided the background to the Impact Evaluation to include: Terms of Reference; methodology; strategic and operating context; summary of monitoring information; summary of survey results (at a combined programme level); comparison between the SFTS and CASE Shared Education models (where relevant); conclusions against Terms of Reference requirements, detailing the contribution made to peace and reconciliation objectives of the PEACE IV Programme.
2. SFTS - survey results	A standalone report for SFTS - quantitative and qualitative research findings based on survey administered in June 2020.
3. CASE - survey results	A standalone report for CASE - quantitative and qualitative research findings based on surveys administered in January and June 2020.
4. Case studies	For the academic year 2019/2020 a total of 7 standalone case studies were developed, along with a summary paper of key findings emerging across the case studies <a href="#">[click here]</a>
5. Animation & Infographic	To aid the dissemination of learning, the evaluators also created a short video animation <a href="#">[click here]</a> to summarise the 2019/2020 report findings, an infographic, and a video showcasing SFTS/CASE shared class activities <a href="#">[click here]</a> .
6. SFTS and CASE Videos	
<b>Phase 2 (Year 4)</b>	
7. Overall Programme Report (2020/2021)	The interim Impact Evaluation for project activity from September 2020 to June 2021 involved an online survey of partnerships. However, this was a smaller scale evaluation as an interim between Year 3 and Year 5.
<b>Phase 3 (Year 5)</b>	
8. Overall Programme Report (2021/2022)	This final report reflects the Impact Evaluation for project activity from September 2021 to June 2022. It also reflects on the five years of PEACE IV funding and the associated outcomes achieved and the contribution made to peace and reconciliation objectives of the PEACE IV Programme <a href="#">[click here]</a> for a link to all resources].
9. Case studies	For the academic year 2021/2022, a total of 11 standalone case studies were developed, along with a summary paper of key findings emerging across the case studies <a href="#">[click here]</a> .
10. Animation & Infographic	To aid the dissemination of learning, the evaluators also created a short video animation <a href="#">[click here]</a> to summarise the 2020/2021 report findings, an infographic <a href="#">[click here]</a> , and various video compilation to showcase and celebrate Shared Education activities <a href="#">[click here]</a> .
11. SFTS and CASE Videos	

This report reflects ‘research output 8’.

<sup>1</sup> SFTS was originally contracted to run until December 2021 and project closure by March 2022. In August 2021, the SEUPB granted an extension for project delivery to continue to June 2022 and project closure to take place by September 2022. A further extension was recently granted to allow project activity to continue until June 2023 and project closure by 30 September 2023.

<sup>2</sup> In December 2021, the SEUPB also granted permission for an extension to CASE for project activity in schools until March 2023 and project closure to take place by June 2023. A further extension was recently granted to allow project activity to continue until June 2023 and project closure by 31 October 2023.

In addition to the above research outputs, the SEUPB required that two major conferences on Shared Education be held in 2020/21 and the second in November 2022 to launch the findings of the evaluation and as a means of celebration and dissemination of key lessons for the future.

For the first conference in 2020/21, the evaluation team had initiated conference planning, however due to Covid-19 restrictions, a large-scale face-to-face conference was not feasible. The Impact Evaluation findings were subsequently intended to be launched at a virtual conference (scheduled for January 2021), with input from keynote speakers, participating case study pre-schools/schools, as well as reflections from Project Partners. However, this approach was also met with difficulty given Covid-19 related challenges facing the education sector at that time, therefore the virtual conference was cancelled.

In its place, a **week of focused social media activity** was agreed (which took place in April 2021). This proved to be a success, with wide range engagement evident. It provided an opportunity to share the evaluation resources (report, infographic, videos) and share a range of short, creative inputs from the funder and Project Partners, as well as reflections from an international speaker, to highlight key messages emanating from Shared Education. For the second, and final conference, the evaluators will repeat the success of the social media event, rather than a formal face-to-face or virtual conference, this is due to take place from **7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022**.

### 1.2.1 Phase 3 Research Approach

For this final phase of research, a mixed-method approach was adopted to deliver the Impact Evaluation for 2021/2022 period, to include the following quantitative and qualitative research:

An online survey of SFTS early years practitioners and CASE principals/teachers was carried out between May and July 2022. In total 226 responses, representing 134 unique partnerships, were received as part of the Phase 3 research. This is an excellent **response rate of 86%**, based on those partnerships ‘active’ in Year 5. It is reflective of the partnerships desire to provide feedback to inform the Year 5 evaluation. It is a significant uplift from last year (2020-2021), where partnerships were hampered by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenging times in which settings and schools were working.

**Table 1.2:** Online survey response rate

	2019-2020 Phase 1 - Year 3 survey (pre-Covid-19)			2020-2021 Phase 2 - Year 4 survey (during Covid-19)			2021-2022 Phase 3 - Year 5 (emerging from Covid-19)		
	SFTS	CASE	Total	SFTS	CASE	Total	SFTS	CASE	Total
No. of individual survey responses	83	133	216	24	45	69	40	186	226
No. of partnerships represented	40	86	126	20	45	65	27	107	134
<i>TOTAL number of partnerships ‘Active’</i>	46	168	214	32	146	178	33	122	155
Response rate (based on no. of partnerships)	87%	51%	<b>59%</b>	63%	31%	<b>37%</b>	<b>82%</b> <sup>3</sup>	<b>88%</b> <sup>4</sup>	<b>86%</b>

Please note that the online survey findings in this report are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., SFTS and CASE combined) to include quantitative data illustrated in graphs, and a summary of key themes emerging from qualitative feedback with illustrative quotes presented for each project.

<sup>3</sup> This is based on 33 partnerships (72 settings) ‘active’ in 2021/2022.

<sup>4</sup> This is based on 122 partnerships being ‘active’ in 2021/2022 (NB. There are 189 partnerships (379 schools) in total).

In addition to the online survey, the following research was also undertaken:

- Review of Project Partner monitoring data and partnership progress reports.
- Discussions with SFTS and CASE Project Partners.
- Interviews with senior early years specialists (SEYS) and CASE Development Officers (DOs).
- Development of 11 case studies (8 CASE and 3 SFTS), involving the following research:
  - A review of existing partnership documentation including action plans, monitoring information and photographs of a range of shared class activity.
  - 12 in-depth group / one-to-one interviews with the principal/manager of each partnership school or setting, and where available, Shared Education coordinator. In total, 39 individuals took part in interviews between March and May 2022.
  - Two parent focus groups - one for parents of preschool and one for primary/post primary children. A total of 12 parents attended these focus groups between March and May 2022.
  - A creative engagement exercise with children was carried out to capture the voice of children about their experience of shared classes. A total of 44 children (age 9 to 11 years old) took part in these exercises, representing four separate Shared Education partnerships.
- A summary report of all 11 case studies was also completed and is one document in a wide suite of resources created for the Impact Evaluation (as per Table 1.1).

### **1.3 Report Structure**

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** Shared Education – An Overview
- **Section 3:** Supporting Frameworks and Quality Standards
- **Section 4:** Achievement of PEACE IV Objectives and Indicators
- **Section 5:** Benefits for Children – Learner Centred
- **Section 6:** Benefits for Teachers – High Quality Teaching and Learning
- **Section 7:** Community Connections
- **Section 8:** Implementation Challenges and Key Success Factors
- **Section 9:** Sustainability of Projects
- **Section 10:** Conclusions and Recommendations

## 2 SHARED EDUCATION – AN OVERVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a brief overview of the need/demand for Shared Education and how this is being met by various legislation, policy documents and by funding provided by programmes such as PEACE IV.

### 2.2 Context underpinning need/demand for Shared Education

It is well documented that the current educational structures have resulted in a large proportion of children being educated among children of a similar background in Northern Ireland (NI) where only 7% of children attend integrated schools. Based on analysis of the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) school census figures (2020-2021)<sup>5</sup>, there are either no Catholic or no Protestant pupils in 287 schools - about 30%.

In Ireland, 88.6% of primary schools are reporting as having a Catholic ethos<sup>6</sup>, also with few opportunities for interaction with others from a different community background. However, education data for 2021 shows raising enrolments in multi-denominational schools<sup>7</sup>. It is also evident from census data that demographics are changing, with an increase in migrant families, refugees, and asylum seekers, many of whom experience prejudice and racism.

The CCEA Curriculum (NI)<sup>8</sup> and NCCA Curriculum (RoI)<sup>9</sup> support children's right to the development of positive individual and group identity in education, with specific focus on 'identity and belonging' and curricular areas that aim to increase understanding of diversity and to value and respect difference within our communities. There is also a range of policies and initiatives to support Newcomer and Traveller children and disadvantaged pupils.

Since 2007 Shared Education has come to the fore, starting as a pilot initiation to one that is now mainstreamed in Northern Ireland. At its core, Shared Education facilitates and promotes cross-community interaction, with children benefiting from sustained and normalised contact with other children from a different community background through curricular-based subjects. The societal and educational successes gained from various Shared Education projects have provided strong evidence to embed Shared Education into policy (i.e., Sharing Works – A Policy for Shared Education, 2015) and importantly, resulted in the formation of key legislation i.e., the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 which places a duty on the Department of Education (DE) (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education<sup>10</sup>.

The definition of Shared Education set out in the Act is as follows:

*Shared Education means the education together of (1) those of **different religious belief**, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and (2) those who are **experiencing socio-economic deprivation** and those who are not, which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers<sup>11</sup>.*

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<sup>5</sup> Analysis of Department of Education school census figures [Online] available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-59242226>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education Statistical Bulletin July 2022: Overview of Education 2002 - 2021 [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>7</sup> The total enrolments in Catholic schools fell by 8,458 between 2020 and 2021 (from 495,476 to 487,018), while enrolments in multi-denominational schools rose by 1,844 (from 39,658 to 41,502) [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>8</sup> CCEA – The Northern Ireland Curriculum [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>9</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) - Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework; Primary Curriculum, Junior and Senior Cycle [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>10</sup> Advancing Shared Education: 2<sup>nd</sup> Report to the NI Assembly for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2020. (June 2020). [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>11</sup> A 'relevant provider' means a person providing education at a grant-aided school, or services of any kind (including youth services) which provide educational benefit to children or young persons.

At the time of writing, the new [Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy](#) for Northern Ireland was just launched (September 2022<sup>12</sup>) with the vision:

*An education system where Shared Education is embedded in partnership working across religious and socio-economic divides, that delivers educational benefits, and promotes a culture of inclusivity, respect and mutual understanding, contributing to community cohesion and good relations.*

The objectives to support implementation of the Strategy are formulated around six key areas: (1) Participation and Collaboration, (2) Capacity Building, (3) Support and Resources, (4) Communication, (5) Monitoring and Evaluation and (6) Governance and Accountability. The strategy posits that it seeks to recognise the importance of Shared Education and the role it plays in supporting the education of children and young people, helping to realise a range of wider societal benefits through promoting respect for good relations, identity, diversity, and community cohesion. Both SFTS and CASE Project Partners provided insights as to their respective projects to inform the Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy, demonstrating how the collective learning from PEACE IV has helped to influence policy development.

The inclusion of Shared Education in the PEACE IV Programme has provided a significant uplift in the number of pre-schools and schools having the opportunity to experience Shared Education. By targeting pre-schools/schools with no prior experience of Shared Education, PEACE IV contributes to meeting the aims outlined in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – therefore positively contributing to the legislative and policy focus in Northern Ireland to encourage, facilitate, and promote Shared Education. Whilst there is no similar legislative or policy focus specifically on Shared Education in Ireland, there is increasing recognition by Government officials of the benefits of Shared Education in meeting a range of relevant policy objectives, contributing to enhancing learning and achievement, well-being, identity and belonging and the wider diversity and inclusion agenda particularly given changing demographics.

### 2.3 PEACE IV Shared Education Projects

In September 2017, a total of €33.14m was awarded to two separate consortia – one focused on early years and the second on the primary/post-primary sector. Over the course of the PEACE IV Programme, the budget has been modified and as of September 2022 the final funding award total is €29.23m. This represents an uplift for SFTS (+13%) and a decrease for CASE (16%) to take account of changes in delivery emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic and project extensions granted, facilitated by underspends.

**Table 2.1:** Overview of PEACE IV Funded Projects, Partners, and Funding Award

Project Name	Lead Partner (LP) and Project Partners (PP)	Funding awarded	Funding (revised Sept 2022)	Difference
Sharing from the Start	Early Years – the organisation for young children (LP) The National Childhood Network (PP) The Fermanagh Trust (PP)	€4,256,007 (13%)	€4,827,084 (17%)	+€571,077
CASE	Education Authority (LP) Léargas (PP)	€28,890,790 (87%)	€24,411,446 (83%)	-€3,908,267
<b>2 projects</b>	<b>5 delivery agents</b>	<b>€33,146,797</b>	<b>€29,238,530</b>	<b>-€3,908,267</b>
*Note: since publishing the Impact Evaluation in November 2022, the budget figure for CASE has changed – the most recent figure, as of December 2022, is €23,973,086 (reflecting a variance of €4,917,704). The total award for Shared Education is now €28.8m.				

<sup>12</sup> Department of Education: 'New strategy will embed Shared Education in Northern Ireland. [Online] available at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/new-strategy-will-embed-shared-education-northern-ireland-mcilveen>

85% of funding is provided through the PEACE IV Programme European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and 15% is match-funded by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. The PEACE IV Accountable Departments for Shared Education are the Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education (DE) in Ireland.

PEACE IV Shared Education outputs:

- The number of schools involved in Shared Education (350 schools by 2023).
- The number of trained teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (2,100 persons by 2023).
- The number of participants in Shared Education classrooms (144,000 children by 2023).

PEACE IV actions for delivering these outputs include:

- Partnerships between schools to create opportunities for contact between children.
- The bringing together of school children at early years, primary and post primary level.
- Direct and sustained contact between children of different backgrounds.
- Development and delivery of related teacher training/professional learning initiatives.
- A whole school approach involving teachers, classroom assistants, non-teaching staff, governors, pupils, families, wider communities, curriculum development, school policies and collaboration with local community.
- Increased opportunities for cross-border co-operation.

PEACE IV targets pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland<sup>13</sup> ('Border Regions') with no or limited previous experience of Shared Education<sup>14</sup>, thus increasing the overall number of schools and children that participate in Shared Education. SFTS and CASE Project Partners carried out respective needs analyses to identify and recruit pre-schools and schools with a baseline of no/limited prior experience of Shared Education. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background collaborating to deliver shared classes.

## 2.4 Sharing from the Start



Early Years – the organisation for young children, The National Childhood Network, and The Fermanagh Trust have been working in partnership since September 2017 to set-up and deliver the SFTS project, which was officially launched on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018, and was originally intended to run until December 2021 and project closure by March 2022. Project delivery was extended to June 2022 and project closure by September 2022. As of September 2022, the SEUPB granted funding for another full academic year (September 2022 to June 2023) and a few months after to allow for project closure activities i.e.: SFTS revised end date is now 30 September 2023. The extensions were provided for from the underspend arising from the impact of Covid-19 (for example, reduced shared hours due to closures and restrictions, reduction in mileage costs, reduction in expenditure for meetings and events).

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<sup>13</sup> Counties: Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo.

<sup>14</sup> Schools in Northern Ireland may have been involved in various pilot Shared Education Programmes, and/or involved in the current Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC ESP) delivered by the Education Authority. Details available at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>. PEACE IV specifically targets schools which have had **no experience** of these interventions. At the launch of PEACE IV there were approximately 530 schools (Border Region and Northern Ireland) that fell into this category. The PEACE IV target of 350 schools, represents 66% of eligible schools.

SFTS offers pre-school settings the opportunities to engage in Shared Education, aiming to improve educational outcomes for young children and build good relations between children and adults from different backgrounds in early years settings in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

PEACE IV outputs for SFTS:

- 99 educational settings in pre-school sectors in Northern Ireland and the Border Regions not previously involved in Shared Education.
- 9,914 pre-school children will participate in Shared Education classrooms.
- 157 teachers trained in an evidence-based programme with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education and participate in Shared Education classrooms.

Intended outcomes for children and pre-school educational practitioners:

- Children from different community backgrounds have direct, sustained, curriculum-based shared classes.
- Pre-school partnerships identify specific educational outcomes through shared development and action plans that meet their needs.
- Positive change in attitudes and behaviours of children to inclusion and exclusion.
- Practitioners have the confidence, skills, attitudes, and behaviours to facilitate and support respect for diversity and Shared Education.

Intended outcomes for parents/carers:

- Parents/carers participate in shared workshops and activities.
- Improved relationships with other parents/carers across the community divisions.
- Increased engagement with shared curricular activity in the home learning environment.

SFTS combines a focus on educational outcomes with a community development approach to ensure that involvement in Shared Education is both sustainable and connected through home, school, and community. As such, SFTS Project Partners designed the project to include additional outputs to enhance the wider societal outcomes, to include:

- 93 Boards of Governors/Management supported to develop/implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution.
- 1,100 parents will participate in shared workshops and activities aimed at building a supportive home-based culture for Shared Education activity.
- Build and develop SFTS Shared Education Pre-school Clusters.

#### **2.4.1 Implementation Support**

A team of five Senior Early Years Specialists (SEYS) provide ongoing support to each of the SFTS partnerships, with each having responsibility for approximately 20 settings. Key activities include:

- Providing initial training and follow-up mentoring support to all settings.
- Supporting partnerships to develop shared action plans for their SFTS activities. These action plans are aligned to settings pre-school development plans, therefore target agreed areas of the pre-school curriculum aimed at improving educational outcomes for pre-school children.



- Supporting and overseeing the development of curriculum content, training, mentoring support and materials for SFTS in line with the curricular and inspection requirements in both jurisdictions.
- Supporting partnerships at all stages – from planning, delivery and evaluation of Shared Education activity.
- Carrying out baseline and follow-up reviews of Shared Education in each setting to assess extent of progression.
- Supporting settings in the development of their respective inclusion and Shared Education policies and procedures.
- Informing the content and providing curricular and learning resources to settings (such as: baseline template, shared session development plans, information sessions templates for management and parents, information leaflets templates for parents and practitioners, newsletter templates to support the dissemination of information about Shared Education activities, online IT support resources).
- Facilitating peer cluster training – contributing to practitioners’ knowledge, skills and confidence in delivering Shared Education.

Based on feedback from settings, the SEYS tailored support has been instrumental in helping to sustain partnerships during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Section 8.4.1 for further details). In addition to the support to partnerships, SEYS play a key role in providing progress reports and updates to the SFTS Programme Manager and the wider Project Partners and Steering Group, as well as contributing to the SFTS communications and advocacy strategy to aid the development and sustainability of the SFTS partnerships.

#### 2.4.2 Training

SFTS offers wide-ranging training, mentoring and professional development for staff, as well as access to additional curriculum resources and professional expertise via a dedicated SEYS who help settings progress quality standards set by the Inspectorate. The project also facilitates peer support and opportunities for learning and networking via pre-school clusters to aid wider collaborative working and sharing of good practice.

During Year 4, SFTS made an investment of £100,000 towards technology equipment (webcams, TV/Stand, Data Projector, Broadband), as well as facilitating online training to upskill early years practitioners in the latest resources and equipment, which has allowed staff to become more efficient in the use of technology to facilitate collaborative work. In Year 5, there were also ongoing training and mentoring for practitioners, as per the below table:

**Table 2.2: SFTS Training in Year 5**

Training Title	Date of training	Training content	No. of attendees
SFTS Implementation Review	6 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	A workshop on the reflection of the blended approach from Year 4 – what worked well, what were the challenges and how challenges were overcome. An opportunity to ascertain the needs of settings going into Year 5.	21
Information Session for new practitioners	19 <sup>th</sup> October 2021	Introduction to the Sharing from the Start initiative to include background, and implementation / delivery considerations.	10
Parental Engagement	11 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	To identify the importance of parents’ engagement in their child’s learning at home, at school, and in the wider community.	9
Evaluating the Impact	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	To look at evidence which can be used to monitor and evaluate the quality, impact, and advancement of Shared Education to bring about continual improvement within an Early Years setting.	3
Sharing of Good Practice Celebration Event	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	To highlight the achievements of the settings as well as the sharing of good practice.	70+



General attendance is quite low for the various training sessions, which is due to individuals attending training in previous years and did not require subsequent refresher as they were confident in delivery approach, based on assessment by SEYS. In the last five years a total of **228 early years practitioners were trained** with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education. Refer to Section 6 for further details and feedback on training provided.

#### 2.4.3 Awareness Raising & Advocacy work

The SFTS Project Partners team has been proactive in its approach to raising awareness and promoting SFTS to a wide range of stakeholders and local government officials, with the goal of embedding Shared Education in current settings and promoting mainstreaming of this work across the pre-school sector. As a result, there is increased visibility and recognition of the contribution that Shared Education can have amongst young children and their families.

There is strong evidence of utilising the SFTS website (<https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/>) for ongoing updates, along with using social media channels such as Twitter to share key learning from partnerships, with local newspapers also taking an interest in promoting activities – keeping the project visible in the wider community. Also, there is good use of video format to showcase case studies of good practice.

Furthermore, content created for seasonal newsletters (<https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/publications/>) is an effective means of sharing learning, showcasing shared class activity and practitioner training events, and as a general communication tool to help build a strong SFTS project base. SFTS Project Partners continued to be proactive during the pandemic and as settings now emerge from restrictions by providing ongoing support and guidance to reassure them and to help nurture partnerships developed over the last five years. The Project Partners have effectively communicated to the school and wider community about how settings have been resilient and innovative in their approach to mitigate the challenges encountered by the pandemic, it has helped to advocate further the need for such partnership work and collaboration in the future.

The Sharing of Good Practice Celebration Event (June 2022) was a great success, with a range of keynote speakers outlining their support for Shared Education activities. The event was well attended by the SEUPB, Senior Education Officials, and importantly the partnership themselves were given the opportunity to showcase and celebrate their work. Further details can be found [here](#).

## 2.5 Collaboration and Sharing in Education



The Education Authority (EA) has been working with its partner Léargas since September 2017 to deliver the Collaboration and Sharing in Education (CASE) project.

It was officially launched on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 and was intended to run until November 2022. Project delivery was extended to March 2023 and project closure to take place by June 2023. As of September 2022, the SEUPB granted a further extension where it is expected that CASE will now complete by 31 October 2023.

CASE operates across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, targeting schools with no or limited prior experience of delivering Shared Education. As such it complements the Delivering Social Change Shared Education (DSC SESP)<sup>15</sup> project. Delivery is through the provision of direct, sustained, curricular-based contact between children and teachers from all backgrounds.

PEACE IV outputs for CASE:

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<sup>15</sup> Details available at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>

- 280 schools in Northern Ireland and the Border Regions not previously involved in Shared Education.
- 135,000 school children will participate in Shared Education classrooms.
- 2,000 teachers will be trained in an evidence-based programme with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education and participate in Shared Education classrooms.

Intended outcomes

- To build a culture of good relations amongst children and young people in a primary and post-primary school-based setting and equip them with the skills and attitudes needed to contribute to society, where collaboration and co-operation are the norm.
- Through working in partnership, the participating schools will promote community cohesion, enhance educational opportunities for all pupils and provide shared professional development.

### 2.5.1 Implementation Support

A team of eight Development Officers (DOs) provide a support to CASE schools in the development, co-ordination, management and implementation of Shared Education, with each DO having responsibility for approximately 50 schools. Key roles and responsibilities of DOs include:

- Developing effective working relationships with participating schools.
- Supporting schools to develop effective partnerships.
- Supporting leadership in the development of Shared Education.
- Providing advice and guidance on the use of resources to support the delivery of Shared Education.
- Working with school leaders, teachers and the CASE team to develop curriculum materials and relevant programmes.
- Promoting curriculum innovation in Shared Education.
- Assisting in the development of approaches to the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Shared Education in schools.
- Working with project team in identifying, planning and implementing a programme of Continual Professional Development (CPD).
- Supporting the establishment of professional learning communities for teachers and other professionals participating in the project to embed experience of sharing and best practice.
- Assisting partnerships to implement effective methods of self- evaluation.
- Liaising with other organisations who provide support to participating schools in Shared Education.
- During Covid-19, additional support was provided and tailored, as well as a helpline and the development of shared learning packs that partnerships could implement in a remote learning context.

Feedback from schools has been very positive, with the DOs ongoing support helping to sustain partnerships during and post the Covid-19 pandemic (see section 8.4.1 for further details).

### 2.5.2 Training

In the last five years a total of **2,132 teachers** have been **trained** with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education – this means that qualified teachers have gained a minimum of one term within a single academic year of teaching in a shared classroom.

CASE also delivers Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) modules which are offered to all CASE schools to build further the capacity of teachers and school leaders to deliver Shared Education. These modules cover strategic

operational and curricular based topics and support teachers and leaders at all levels, for example: managing a Shared Education project; developing a shared vision for partnership; and delivering Shared Education in the classroom. In Year 5, a total of 504 teachers took part in various TPL modules (17 sessions, with an average attendance of 30 teachers per module).

CASE supports TPL at both a partnership and cluster level. Additional funding (known as ‘Stage 2 funding’) has also been made available through the project for teacher led **Joint Practice Development (JPD)**, which uses an action-research/co-construction approach to achieve transformation of practice. It supports schools to develop their collaborative practice to address school improvement areas through partnerships. 31% of partnerships (52 out of 168 partnerships) have been successful in applications for this funding. Section 6 for further details and feedback on training provided.

### 2.5.3 Awareness Raising & Advocacy work

In addition to the support provided to schools, DOs play a key role in the strategic development of CASE by assisting in the evaluation of CASE and the promotion and advocacy of Shared Education activities under the PEACE IV Programme.

Over the past five years, CASE Project Partners have organised several ‘Dissemination events’ with the aim of partnerships coming together to share in their successes and to learn from each other. This has proven to be a valuable exercise, and one which offers great benefit to attendees. The evaluators attended some of these events and observed the interactions made on both a cross-community and cross-border basis, with the support and enthusiasm for Shared Education evident. Closure events are scheduled to take place in February to March 2023 to give partnerships an opportunity to reflect on their Shared Education journey and celebrate their progression.

CASE Project Partners also disseminate impact data and key learning via the CASE website (<https://www.sharededucation.org.uk/>) and social media channels. There is good evidence of communicating with schools with various news updates and content within the quarterly newsletters (<https://www.sharededucation.org.uk/newsletters>) and ongoing updates via Twitter.

## 2.1 Horizontal Principles

**Terms of Reference:** Comment on the contribution made by the projects to delivering the horizontal principles of sustainable development and equality.

In all aspect of the design and implementation of both SFTS and CASE, Project Partners considered the PEACE IV horizontal principles of sustainable development and equality, as follows:

### Sustainable Development

The Shared Education projects support the PEACE IV horizontal principle of sustainable development and comply with the following strategies:

- European Council Sustainable Development Strategy (June 2006) - comply with Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by 97/11/EEC.
- Ireland’s framework for sustainable development.
- Northern Ireland’s sustainable development strategy.

Project Partners have considered environmental, economic, and social issues in the design and delivery of the respective SFTS and CASE projects.

- **Environmental sustainability:** The project has a limited adverse environmental impact, as capital development is not eligible under the funding. The main source of pollution is transport (of children) and the development of materials and resources. This negative impact is limited as most of the project activities happen locally i.e., pre-school/school partners are within close proximity to each other, therefore limited long-distance travel will be required.
- **Social sustainability:** The project has a clear positive impact on social sustainability, with the promotion of parental engagement, the use of community facilities and wider community involvement (where feasible). Shared class activities include curricular focus on ‘world around us’ and ‘personal development’ which help to raise children’s understanding of the environment, awareness of environmental issues, and the need to be active citizens in terms of reducing environmental impact, and as positive contributors to society.
- **Economic sustainability:** Shared Education also promoted the efficient and effective use of resources. SFTS and CASE have a positive economic impact as a result of cost savings derived from sharing of resources, transport, practitioner/teacher training, promote use of technology (more apparent in the current Covid-19 era).

### **Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination**

The Shared Education projects (SFTS and CASE) support the PEACE IV horizontal principle of equality and comply with the following strategies:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998.
- Equal Status Acts (2000).

The PEACE IV Strategic Objective for Shared Education is based on the premise of providing equality. This is achieved by: *“The provision of direct, **sustained**, curriculum-based contact between pupils and teachers **from all backgrounds** through **collaboration** between schools and early years/pre-school settings from **different sectors** in order to **promote good relations** and enhance children's skills and attitudes to **contribute to a cohesive society**”*.

Project Partners considered equal opportunity and non-discrimination in all aspects of the design and implementation of the respective SFTS and CASE projects.

SFTS and CASE target pre-schools/schools of differing ownership, sectoral identity, and ethos. They are inclusive and focused on promoting good relations, respect for diversity, mutual understanding, and the promotion of community cohesion.

Shared Education also aims to enhance the capacity of children and practitioners/teachers to understand and deal with difference in whatever form it occurs and is premised on equality, human rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular the right of the child to education (UNCRC article 28) and the right of the child to an education that is directed towards *‘the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin’* (article 29 (d)).

Project Partners are committed to equal opportunity in their respective organisations. Guidance and training have also been provided to pre-schools/schools as part of the application, implementation, development of Shared Education policies, and monitoring and evaluation process – this will ensure that the principle of equality is embedded.

### 3 SUPPORTING FRAMEWORKS & QUALITY STANDARDS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Both the SFTS and CASE models adopt key national frameworks and quality standards to support the implementation and self-assessment of Shared Education. These include the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Shared Education Framework for Schools<sup>16</sup> and Early Years Settings<sup>17</sup>, Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) for Pre-school Management Groups<sup>18</sup> (Northern Ireland); The Department of Education (Ireland) Inspectorate’s Quality Framework for Schools<sup>19</sup>, and School Self-Evaluation (SSE)<sup>20</sup>, the Inspectorate’s ‘Looking at Our School, A Quality Framework for Schools’<sup>21</sup> (Ireland); and The Síolta Standards<sup>22</sup> for early childhood care and education services (Ireland).

#### 3.2 ETI Shared Education Framework (NI)

The ETI Shared Education Framework supports SFTS and CASE partnerships in self-evaluating the quality of their Shared Education provision and setting targets for development and progression along the sharing continuum. The Framework is aligned to the four pillars of the Department of Education’s (Northern Ireland) Every School a Good School policy: (1) learner-centred (2) high quality learning and teaching (3) leadership and management and (4) community connections. Each partnership is required, through a collaborative and reflective process of internal self-assessment, to identify its baseline position across the four development stages of the Framework: ‘Defining, Developing, Expanding, or Embedding’.

**Table 3.1:** Shared Education Framework – stages of progression

4 Pillars of the Framework	Defining →	Developing →	Expanding →	Embedding
<b>I Learner Centred</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in Shared Education.</li> <li>• Surmounting Barriers.</li> <li>• Educational &amp; Reconciliation Outcomes.</li> </ul>				
<b>II High Quality Learning &amp; Teaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for Shared Education.</li> <li>• Quality of Learning Experiences.</li> <li>• Assessment for, and of, Shared Education.</li> </ul>				
<b>III Leadership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Leadership for Shared Education.</li> <li>• Action to Promote Improvement in Shared Education.</li> <li>• Empowering and Supporting Staff in Shared Education.</li> <li>• Resources/Accommodation.</li> </ul>				
<b>IV Community Connections</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents/Carers.</li> <li>• External Partners.</li> <li>• Community Access and Engagement.</li> </ul>				
	Existing Provision	→		In-depth and high quality Shared Education

Source: ETI Framework

<sup>16</sup> Department of Education (NI): ETI Shared Education Framework for School Partnerships (2014): [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>17</sup> Department of Education (NI): ETI Shared Education Framework in Early Years Settings: [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>18</sup> ETI Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) for pre-school education [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>19</sup> Department of Education (Ireland) Looking at our School (2006) Quality Framework [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>20</sup> Department of Education (Ireland) School Self Evaluation [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>21</sup> Department of Education (Ireland) Looking at our School 2022: A Quality Framework [Online] available [here](#)

<sup>22</sup> The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education [Online] available [here](#)

Lead early years practitioners and teachers plan, implement, and evaluate Shared Education activities using a template to document what they currently do (baseline) and to identify areas for further development which are then transferred onto an annual Shared Education Action Plan. Using the self-evaluation frameworks and standards, pre-school and school leaders engaged in reflective practice to assess educational and shared outcomes achieved against the Action Plan. This process is closely supported by EYS and DOs. As a result, the capacity of pre-school and school leaders has developed through Shared Education, with increased confidence in the use of quality frameworks to self-evaluate teaching and learning.

The ETI inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework includes questions focused on Shared Education under outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management so that schools and inspectors using the document consider Shared Education as an integral part of the process.

Whilst there is no specific ‘Shared Education’ Framework in Ireland, CASE primary and post-primary schools in the Border Counties of Ireland consider the Inspectorate’s ‘Looking at Our School, A Quality Framework for Schools’, specifically the teaching and learning dimension which supports schools as they engage in the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process. SSE is a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review<sup>23</sup>. It provides teachers with a means of looking at how they teach and how pupils learn to improve outcomes for learners – therefore complementing the pillars of the ETI Shared Education Framework.

Therefore, both SFTS and CASE adopt a self-evaluation approach to map progression along the ETI Shared Education Framework continuum of sharing.

As the PEACE IV Programme targets pre-schools and schools that have not yet engaged in Shared Education, the Year 1 (Sept 2017) baseline position was at the ‘Defining’ stage and subsequent monitoring by SFTS Early Years Specialists (EYS) or CASE Development Officers evidenced year-on-year progress across ETI’s four pillars. By June 2018, partnerships continued to ‘Define’ and move towards ‘Developing’; and by June 2022 progress had been made with more pre-schools and schools reporting ‘Developing’ and ‘Expanding’ – with a few progressing to the ‘Embedding’ stage for some pillars of the Framework. However, the ‘Embedding’ stage has been hampered by Covid-19, in particular the Community Connections pillar, where contact outside the immediate school setting was limited due to lockdowns and associated restrictions. Reassuringly, pre-schools and schools have demonstrated their desire for progression and improving standards. Many practitioners/teachers will retain the capacity and expertise to advance Shared Education in the future, where progression along the continuum will continue (with the support of resourcing).

### 3.3 Síolta Standards

For SFTS pre-schools in Ireland, SFTS Project Partners and the DES explored how the Síolta Standards for early childhood education could be used and aligned to the ETI Shared Education Framework. This is a good example of cross-border collaboration at a strategic level.

Síolta outlines 12 principles and 16 standards of quality. Síolta focuses on a three-stage assessment process associated with the national quality assurance system i.e., Stage 1: Registration; Stage 2: Baseline Assessment and Evidence Collection<sup>24</sup>; and Stage 3: Validation. The focus on baselining and self-assessment is also an important part of Shared Education in terms of identifying and evidencing progress in achieving educational outcomes and delivering social change.

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<sup>23</sup> SSE 2016 – 2021 [Online] available at <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/sse-2016-2020/>

<sup>24</sup> Baseline assessment - a specially designed self-assessment tool asks staff in early years settings to critically reflect on their practice against each of the 75 Components of Quality in the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, as part of the Síolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP).

Importantly, Síolta key standards are now used by SFTS pre-school settings as a means of baselining and assessing Shared Education progression against five related standards (Table 3.1) using four levels of practice to define stage of progression i.e., Level 1: No evidence of quality; Level 2: Some evidence of quality; Level 3: Significant evidence of quality but some issues outstanding; and Level 4: Comprehensive evidence of quality. Level 4 is akin to ETI’s ‘Embedding’ stage defined as in-depth and high-quality Shared Education. Pre-school and SEYS monitoring data show year-on-year progress across each of the Síolta five standards.

**Table 3.2:** Síolta Standards and Components for SFTS Baseline and Review

Standard (5 out of 16)	Components
(1) Rights of the Child	1.1. Each child has opportunities to make choices, is enabled to make decisions, and has his/her choices and decisions respected. 1.2. Each child has opportunities and is enabled to take the lead, initiate activity, be appropriately independent and is supported to solve problems. 1.3. Each child is enabled to participate actively in the daily routine, in activities, in conversations and in all other appropriate situations, and is considered as a partner by the adult.
(3) Parents and Families	3.2 There are a variety of opportunities for parents to be involved in activities within the setting, taking into account the range of parents’ interests and time constraints.
(11) Professional Practice	11.3. The setting supports and promotes regular opportunity for practitioners to reflect upon and review their practice and contribute positively to the development of quality practice within the setting.
(14) Identity and Belonging	14.1. The setting has written records of all policies, procedures, and practice regarding the promotion of positive identities and a strong sense of belonging within the setting and makes them available to all. 14.2. The setting promotes a confident self- and group-identity through the provision of an appropriate environment, experiences, and interactions within the setting. 14.3. The setting promotes positive understanding and regard for the identity and rights of others through the provision of an appropriate environment, experiences, and interactions within the setting.
(16) Community Involvement	16.1. The setting has gathered and made available a comprehensive range of information on resources at local, regional, and national levels. 16.2. The setting has established links which have the potential to extend and develop its involvement in the wider community. 16.3. The setting is connected and integrated with the local, regional, and national community. 16.4. The setting actively promotes children’s citizenship in their local, regional, and national community.

### 3.4 Chapter Summary

PEACE IV Shared Education has helped to build capacity in cross-border working, to include between Department of Education (Northern Ireland) and Department of Education (Ireland); and between cross-border SFTS/CASE Project Partners. The experience has facilitated relationship building between education authorities and key interested parties, which can be sustained and developed in the future. There is also evidence that Shared Education is being translated into quality standard frameworks that enable its values to be embedded into practice in pre-schools and schools. The capacity of pre-school and school leaders has also developed through Shared Education, with increased confidence in the use of quality frameworks to self-evaluate teaching and learning.

As SFTS/CASE partnerships have completed five years of shared activity, they have progressed along the continuum of sharing (as per ETI’s Shared Education Framework) from a baseline position of ‘Defining’ to subsequent stages of ‘Developing’, ‘Expanding’, and in some cases ‘Embedding’ where ‘in-depth and high-quality Shared Education’ has been achieved. There is also evidence of year-on-year progress across each of the Síolta five standards for early years settings.



## 4 ACHIEVEMENT OF PEACE IV OBJECTIVE & INDICATORS

### 4.1 Introduction

The PEACE IV Co-operation Programme and corresponding Performance Framework outlines the ‘Specific Objective’ for each ‘Investment Priority’ and expected results. Shared Education is one of four PEACE IV Investment Priorities and success is based on the achievement of the defined Specific Objective, output indicators and result indicator.

This chapter presents key findings against the Terms of Reference for the extent to which the overall Specific Objective and Output Indicators of Shared Education have been achieved. Key Achievements

#### 4.1.1 Specific Objective

##### Terms of Reference:

Comment on whether, how, and to what extent the actions funded have contributed to the achievement of the Specific Objective and Output Indicators.

The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as SFTS and CASE partnerships have completed five years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing (as per ETI’s Shared Education Framework).

School/pupil participation began in January 2018 and by June 2022 there were:

- 494 pre-schools/schools taking part in Shared Education, exceeding targets (141% of 2023 target achieved).
- 2,360 early years practitioners and teachers having completed training and now have the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (112% of 2023 target achieved).
- 115,261 children have participated in shared class activity (80% of 2023 target achieved).

**Table 4.1:** PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (up to June 2022)

CASE/SFTS combined Output Indicators	SFTS			CASE			TOTAL		
	SFTS Output Target	Total	% achieved	CASE Output Target	Total	% achieved	PEACE IV output (2023)	Achieved (up to June 2022)	% achieved
Number of pre-schools/schools involved	99	106	107%	280	388	139%	350	494	141%
Number of trained teachers/ practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	157	228	145%	2,000	2,132	107%	2,100	2,360	112%
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	9,914	11,381	115%	135,000	103,880	77%	144,000	115,261	80%

Source: Participation figures are self-reported by SFTS and CASE Project Partners. Year 5 participation figures are pending verification by the SEUPB’s Joint Secretariat. NB. The combined CASE/SFTS outputs are slightly greater than the overall PEACE IV outputs for 2023 to allow for non-achievement. For example, the SFTS output target for pre-schools involved is 99 plus the CASE output target for schools is 280 which is equal to 379, however the overall PEACE IV output target is less at set as 350 pre-schools/schools overall.

The output indicators for the number of pre-schools and schools and the number of practitioners/teachers trained have been achieved, which is a testament to the commitment of SFTS and CASE Project Partners, as well as participating pre-schools and schools. Participation levels for children is has been met and exceeded for SFTS, and for CASE the target is on schedule to be met by the end of the programming period (2023). The meeting of PEACE IV output indicators is particular significant given the challenging circumstances in which Project Partners have had to work during the pandemic. There is strong evidence of innovation and resilience shown by all stakeholders involved in Shared Education to ensure PEACE IV achievements were met.



Whilst there are currently 458 pre-schools/schools involved in the projects (as of June 2022), there have been a total of **494** participating over the last five years, since the beginning of funding. The geographic spread reflects a split of 74% within Northern Ireland and 26% in the Border Region of Ireland. The majority (71%) of partnerships are comprised of a North-North collaboration; 20% of partnerships are comprised of a South-South collaboration; and 9% relate to cross-border partnerships. Partnerships are determined by factors such as those with no/limited experience of Shared Education, and those pre-schools/schools within close proximity to one another to make sharing between children feasible and practical. A breakdown of SFTS and CASE participation level is provided in the following tables:

### **SFTS**

A number of settings who withdrew in Year 4 (due to Covid-19) re-engaged in Year 5, which is a positive affirmation to the ongoing support by the SEYS to encourage and support settings in challenging times, as well as settings desire to continue their Shared Education projects.

**Table 4.2: SFTS - PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (up to June 2022)**

Output Indicators	SFTS Output Target	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 <sup>a</sup>	Year 5	Total	% achieved
Number of pre-schools involved	99	67	82	99	68	72	106 <sup>b</sup> Over 5 years	107%
Number of trained practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	157	119	41	46	10	12	228 <sup>c</sup>	138%
Number of participants/children in Shared Education classes	9,914	1,863	2,521	3,167	1,670	2,160	11,381	115%

- a. In Year 4, a total of 31 settings withdrew from SFTS from the Year 3 peak of 99 settings (i.e., 13 NI partnerships and 1 Border County partnership) due to ongoing pressures and uncertainty linked to Covid-19. Four of these partnerships re-joined in Year 5.  
b. This is the unique number of pre-schools involved since the beginning of the SFTS project.  
c. This is the unique number of eligible early years practitioners trained that have delivered 20+ hours of Shared Education.

### **CASE**

The number of CASE schools engaged in Year 5 remained on par with the previous year, although not all partnerships were in a position to continue shared classes due to uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 in Term 1 and Term 2. School leaders have worked in difficult circumstances to sustain contact, albeit by virtual means, and have provided positive feedback about collaboration between their partners schools, as well as noting the valuable support provided by DOs to help schools sustain activities. In Term 3, face-to-face shared classes resumed, as schools emerged from the impact of the pandemic.

**Table 4.3: CASE - PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (up to June 20221)**

Output Indicators	CASE Output Target	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 <sup>a</sup>	Total	% achieved
Number of schools involved	280	211	376	384	386	386	388 <sup>b</sup> over 5 years	139%
Number of trained teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	2,000	514	719	436	211	253	2,132 <sup>c</sup>	107%
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	135,000	10,754	24,646	28,348	19,319	20,813	103,880	77%

- a. Year 5 figures pending verification from the SEUPB.  
b. This is the unique number of schools involved since the beginning of the CASE project.  
c. This is the total number of teachers that have delivered 20+ hours of Shared Education.  
d. Figure for Year 4 not yet complete – as data from 8 partnerships is still pending, therefore the total will likely increase.

#### 4.1.2 Result Indicators

**Result Indicators:** *The percentage of schools in the last academic year that have been involved in Shared Education with another school. The baseline value for 2013 is 76% [later revised to 58%]. The target value for 2023 is 88% [later revised to 69%]. This baseline is derived from the School Omnibus Survey 2013 figure. For the Border Region of Ireland, the baseline value is 0% and the 2023 target value is 7.5%.*

At the start of the programming period, there were estimated to be **526\*** eligible schools that could apply for PEACE IV funding. The Programme has a target of 350 schools, which represents 66% of potentially eligible schools.

*\*As per the PEACE IV Co-operation Programme, it was estimated that 425 schools had little or no cross-community collaboration and were not participating in Shared Education initiatives. In the Border Region, there are 646 schools, with few having had the opportunity for regular sustained classes on a cross-community basis. PEACE IV focused on those schools closest to the border (101 schools within 5 miles), as they offer the greatest opportunity for cross-border co-operation. Based on the above 526 schools fell into eligible target group category.*

The data for the PEACE IV result indicators is collected by the biennial Omnibus Survey of Schools in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education (Ireland) intend to conduct a similar survey in the Border Region.

It is important to note that PEACE IV used the 2013 School Omnibus Survey baseline figure of 76% for Northern Ireland, but this seemed high when compared to subsequent years (as per Table 4.4). The differences in these figures are suggested as being due to the 2013 School Omnibus Survey adopting a wider definition of Shared Education to include curricular and extra-curricular activities; compared to 2015 and 2016 which focused on Shared Education between the children and young people from different community backgrounds learning together in a shared class focused on curricular activities.

**Table 4.4:** Proportion of schools involved in Shared Education based on NI School Omnibus Survey

	% involved in Shared Education	Base/no. of respondents (c37%-52% of total no. of NI schools)
Omnibus Survey 2013	76%	568
Omnibus Survey 2015	59%	450
Omnibus Survey 2016	58%	418

In May 2018, SEUPB made a formal request to the European Commission to modify the baseline and target for Shared Education, as follows:

- **Norther Ireland:**
  - Baseline – amended from 76% to 58% (to align to the 2016 Omnibus Survey figure).
  - Target – amended from 88% to 69% (an uplift of 11% from 58% to 69%).

SEUPB also requested that an additional indicator be set for the Border Region i.e.

- **Border Region of Ireland:**
  - Baseline – 0%
  - Target – 7.5%

These modifications were accepted by the European Commission, summarised as follows:

**Table 4.5** PEACE IV Shared Education – revised result indicators

	Baseline	Baseline year	Target (2023)	Source of Data (biennial)
Northern Ireland	58%	2016	69%	School Omnibus Survey (NI)
Border Region of Ireland	0%	2018	7.5%	DES School Survey (Ireland)

There is evidence that the result indicators are on schedule to be met. From a baseline of 58%, there is now at least 63% of schools in Northern Ireland involved in Shared Education (against a target of 69%), as per the most recent Omnibus Survey which took place in September 2018. This percentage increase can be attributed to the PEACE IV Shared Education on-the-ground activity commencing from January 2018 and may also reflect other factors such as increased uptake of non-PEACE IV funded Shared Education activities such as the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC SESP). Whilst the 2018 figure of 63% is now dated, it is considered that there is a positive direction towards the final target of 69% - as the overall proportion of schools involved within the Shared Education theme will increase further, i.e., as of June 2022, a total of 494 schools have participated in PEACE IV Shared Education.

The result indicators will be validated upon completion of subsequent School Omnibus Surveys in Northern Ireland and the Border Region i.e., the 2020 School Omnibus Survey was delayed, but is due to take place in October 2022 (results available from January 2023), and the School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, whilst it has not taken place yet will be available prior to the end of the programming period.

## 4.2 Chapter Summary

The PEACE IV Programme has demonstrated excellent progress against the PEACE IV aims and indicators set for 2023, with SFTS and CASE having already exceeded targets for the respective number of pre-schools and schools participating. With a starting/baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact, a total of **494 pre-schools/schools** have been involved in the PEACE IV Shared Education projects over the last five years (141% of 2023 target), with **115,261 children** having participated in shared classes (80% of 2023 target achieved), and **2,360 practitioners/teachers** trained with the capacity to deliver and lead Shared Education activities (112% of 2023 target achieved).

There is also evidence that the result indicators are on schedule to be met. From a baseline of 58%, there is now at least 63% of schools in Northern Ireland involved in Shared Education (against a target of 69%), as per the most recent Omnibus Survey in 2018. Whilst this is now dated, it is considered that the overall proportion of schools involved in Shared Education will increase further – this will be validated upon results being available in 2023 for subsequent School Omnibus Surveys in Northern Ireland and the Border Region.

## 5 BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN – LEARNER-CENTRED

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, highlighting the shared/reconciliation impact for children in terms of the extent of cross-community friendships formed and ability to deal with differences, as well as the positive impact on educational outcomes. Key findings are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., SFTS and CASE) to include quantitative data illustrated in graphs, and a summary of key themes emerging from qualitative feedback with illustrative quotes.

### 5.2 Model of Sharing

**Terms of Reference:** Comment on the extent to which sharing in education becomes a central part of every child’s educational experience by providing opportunities for the sustained interaction of children from different backgrounds through their participation in curriculum-based common classes.

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with **115,261 children having participated in curriculum-based shared classes** (80% of 2023 target achieved). In general, the model of Shared Education focuses on two main aspects: firstly, the emphasis is on creating contact between children from different community backgrounds. Secondly, and equally important is that this takes place as part of curricular-led shared classes, therein normalising this contact.

Prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, all partnerships were expected to provide 30 hours of shared sessions per child. As a result of the pandemic, the number of hours expected to be delivered by some of the partnerships was reduced (to between 10.5 to 19.5 hours) given the significant disruption they experienced.

On average, children participating in SFTS and CASE projects have gained 23-26 hours each per year of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes, as per the table below. Overall, the net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers.

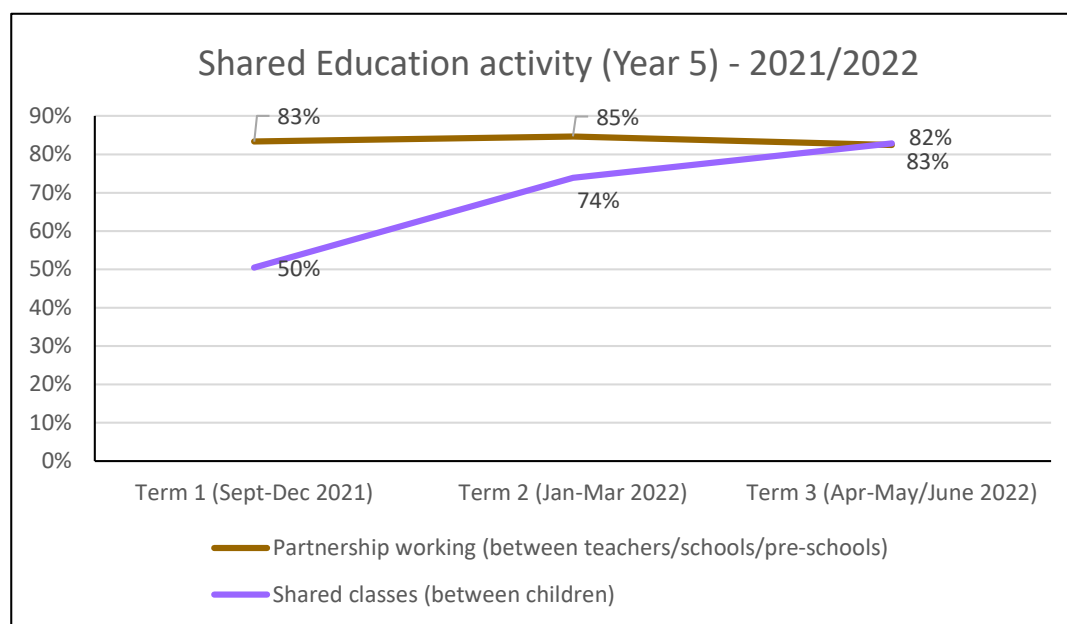
**Table 5.1:** Shared hours (between children) achieved (up to June 2022)

Year	Period	Shared hours achieved per child (average)	Notes
Year 1 – 2017/18	6 months activity from January 2018 to June 2018	20 hours	Delayed project approval resulted in Year 1 output target being reduced by the SEUPB to 20 hours to accommodate the reduced time for project implementation.
Year 2 – 2018/19	10 months activity from September 2018 to June 2019	30 hours	Normal project activity. Year 2 was the only year the 30-hour target was met, with subsequent years negatively impacted by the pandemic.
Year 3 – 2019/20	5 months activity from September 2019 to February 2020	18 hours	The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures resulted in pre-school /school closures for the final term (from early March to June 2020), greatly inhibiting Shared Education activities.
Year 4 – 2020/21	6 months activity between September 2020 to June 2021	12 hours (SFTS) 17 hours (CASE)	The effects of the pandemic persisted in Year 4, resulting in shared classes being implemented via virtual means.
Year 5 – 2021/2022	10 months activity from September 2021 to June 2022	13.5 hours (SFTS) 20 hours (CASE)	The effects of the pandemic began to ease in Year 5, however virtual classes remained for Term 1 and Term 2. It was not until Term 3 until activities resumed to that experienced pre pandemic.
Average		23-26 hours	

Source: Project Partner Monitoring Data

In Year 5 (2021/22) the Covid-19 pandemic was easing, and pre-schools/schools returned to in-house learning for the whole academic year. In terms of Shared Education, online survey respondents reported ongoing partnership working between teachers/practitioners (82-85% of respondents) throughout each school term. For shared classes, an incremental increase can be seen from Term 1 to Term 3, increasing from 50% to 83% of all respondents reporting that shared classes took place (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 5.1:** Shared Education activity in Year 5 – by Term



Base: 222

### 5.2.1 Types of Shared Class Activities

In Year 5, the format of shared classes was reported, on average, as being 60% online and 40% face-to-face, with face-to-face contact mainly occurring in Term 3. Partnerships endeavoured to be creative and showed innovation when transitioning to online activities during the pandemic, and now as they re-engage face-to-face.

Children participated in a range of activities, such as:

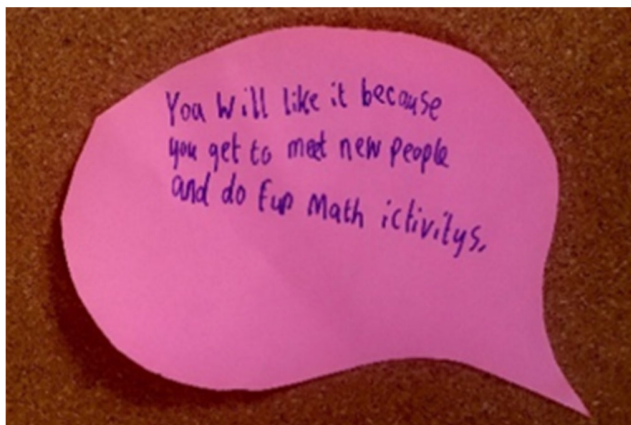
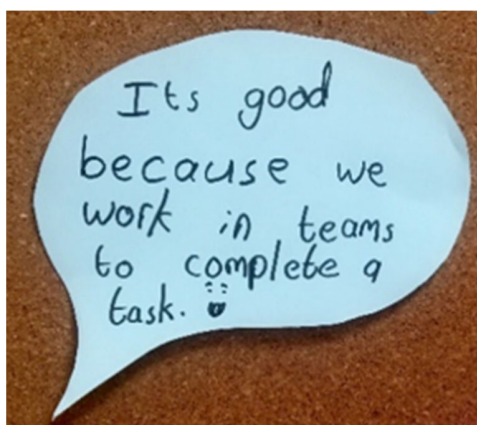
- Practical based subjects, such as Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM), Physical Education (PE) and Outdoor Learning/Play, Digital Literacy – all of which provided opportunities for children to interact to problem solve in groups. Subjects such as Art/Music/Drama provided a vehicle for children to work creatively together. Other subjects such as Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Learning for Life and Work (LLW) allow teachers to be flexible in the design of activities and for children to explore health and well-being, their own identity and the wider community as contributors to society – which lends itself well to Shared Education/shared class activities to support children in developing skills to live in a diverse society, with a focus on mutual respect and inclusion.
- Trips and outings, such as: W5 at the Odyssey in Belfast (contributing to science and technology); The Forest School, Crawfordsburn Scout Centre, the Ark Farm and Streamvale Farm (the outdoor environment / literacy); Beach trips, for example, to Culdaff beach (to learn about the sea and wildlife and climate change); and visits to community gardens to learn about plants and how they grow (linking to science, nature, and the environment).
- Celebration event, for example, concerts, sporting events, celebration event/showcasing children’s work.



Some examples of online formats include:

- Live 'virtual' and 'pre-recorded' tours of settings/schools as an introduction for children prior to shared sessions – this provided an opportunity to introduce teaching staff, help to familiarise the physical environment of the partner setting/school and as an opportunity for children to meet each other.
- Live 'virtual' shared sessions: covering a wide range of activities, such as music, dance, storytelling, show and tell, arts and crafts, yoga/well-being sessions, circle time discussions.
- Combination of pre-recorded and live 'virtual' shared sessions: Each partner worked in parallel on the same activities in their respective class, with the results shared with partner setting/school via an online shared class session and/or recording of each class that was shared with the partner setting/school.
- Seasonal events: pre-recorded and live 'virtual' Christmas activities including songs, nativity plays, crafts. Christmas card exchanges. Other seasonal events were used as a focus to deliver 'live' online sessions, such as St Patrick's Day, Mother's Day and Easter.
- General exchange of work such as photographs, videos and cards/pen-pal letters between children in partner schools.

**Photos: Various indoor and outdoor activities enjoyed by children**



**CASE sample comments from teachers (shared class activities)**

*The pupils were able to explore a range of play based activities related to our topic of Under the Sea. Photos and videos were taken and then shared with the relevant schools where the pupils got to comment, compare and contrast what they have learnt/made/played with.*

*Through sharing pictures, photos and videos of completed work really engaged the children, keeping them motivated and engaged in the online sessions.*

*Schools completed the same workshops separately and then linked up virtually to reflect and share their digital stories about their learning experiences.*

*The online sessions allowed children to develop and enhance oral language skills and ICT skills.*

*Children loved sharing topic projects with our partner school and they participated in peer evaluation. They benefited from a shared World Around Us topic.*

*Given the children hadn't met face-to-face for two years, it was really important to get them working collaboratively, communicating together and allow them to work together in areas where there were opportunities for discussion in a relaxed setting. To this end working in groups for art activities and outdoor play activities lent themselves to developing relationships and achieving educational outcomes.*

*Pupils were engaged in talking about their locality. Being positive about their place and sharing their experiences of growing up in a place confidently with the other school.*

*This year the sharing of making castles and stories along with Minecraft worlds has helped cement online friendships, which is very much part of their daily lives.*

*Communication skills improved through writing letters, talking online etc.*

*Junior pupils discussed two picture books in depth. Discussions took place over weekly Zoom calls. We presented our shared art, literacy work (book review, character profiles, posters, writing in different genre), assessment and evaluation through Kahoot. Senior pupils focused on one novel and completed art and literacy activities based on the book. They also completed shared assessment on Kahoot.*

*We found that open-ended activities were much better at facilitating interactions rather than very structured 'ice-breakers', particularly in the lower key stages.*

*Every pupil designed and created a jigsaw piece about themselves. They all got to discuss and describe their jigsaw, before combining them together with pupils from other classes and the other school, to create one large project which is now on display.*

*The Music workshop worked really well as both schools were working towards their Biodiversity Green Flag School and they composed and wrote a song based on nature. They regularly shared their recordings through videos and photos and the children loved seeing the other school's progress.*

*In terms 1 and 2 teachers met and planned together lessons related to the PATHS/PDMU curriculum and these were delivered separately but shared with the children, allowing for a great sense of connectiveness in the aftermath of Covid-19. This helped both schools achieve PDMU outcomes which were paramount at this time.*

**SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (shared class activities)**

*The boys and girls all got a lot of enjoyment exploring the other service's outdoor area. They worked together in the sand pit fixing and building houses. Some the children played in the dolls' house cooking dinner for their peers. The climbing frames and swings were a lot of fun and something we are looking into for our service. The physical skills course was great the children learnt new skills while some improved on their throwing, kicking and catching.*

*They really enjoyed listening to the violin music and were very skilled at identifying the emotion. In the development activity, the children enjoyed trying to create mood music to represent different emotions.*

*Circle time provided an excellent opportunity to discuss shared learning with the children and encouraged them to brainstorm ideas on how to connect with their peers in the other services.*

*On a trip to the local forest we focused around the story of the Gruffalo, we were split into different groups and there were discussions about the story, the characters and at different points we had an extract from the story with linked exercises too. We also used magnifying glasses and binoculars to explore trees and leaves in the forest as well as used our senses to explore what we could see, hear, feel etc.*

*It offered the opportunities for more external activities to promote physical skills as we have a limited outdoor area.*

*Last year was all online and disjointed with Covid-19, this year able to meet in person which presented with better opportunities for outcomes to be developed.*

*The impact of Shared Education is very much dependent on the time spent on it, particularly in the virtual sessions. In order to ensure the children remained engaged, it was very important to plan a good variety of activities and to keep the session moving. It was also important to include activities where the children were very actively involved as opposed to passive participants.*

*Last year our Zoom sessions were successful, but we were unable to meet in person. This year we were able to bring the children together for a celebration day which allowed the children to meet and consolidate the relationships that had been formed in the virtual sessions. Likewise, the children were very trusting of staff from the other setting and were able to engage very confidently with the adults.*

## 5.3 Shared/Reconciliation Benefits for Children

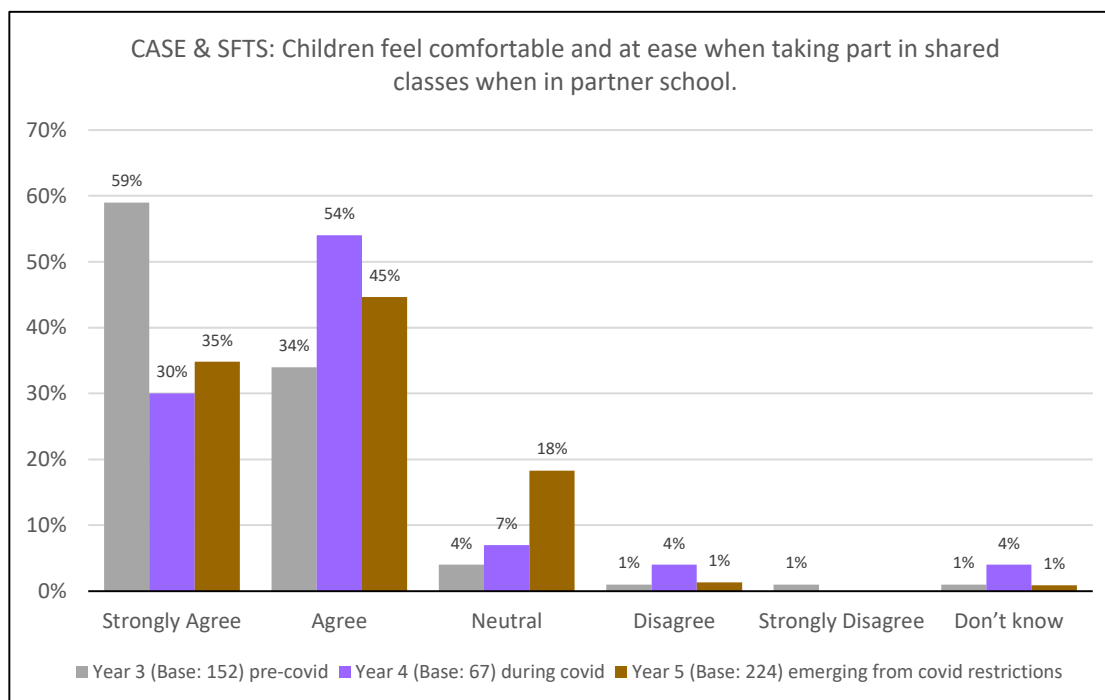
### 5.3.1 Dealing with Differences

**Terms of Reference:** Comment on the impact of Shared Education on pupils’ and teachers’ ability to understand and deal with difference in whatever form it occurs.

The contact facilitated by Shared Education aims to have positive impacts on intergroup attitudes and behaviours, including a reduction in prejudice and promotion of more harmonious intergroup relations by being able to understand and deal with difference in whatever form it occurs. The shared sessions have nurtured equality and diversity, allowing all children the opportunity to participate and learn from one another.

Based on the online survey results for Year 5, 79% of respondents agreed that children feel comfortable and at ease when taking part in shared classes (virtual and/or face-to-face). Whilst this is a positive verification of the level of ease which children feel in each other’s company, it does show a reduction from previous years (Year 4: 84% and Year 3: 93%) which may be explained by the uncertainty emanating from the pandemic and transition to virtual contact (Year 4) and now to the adoption of a bended approach (Year 5). In Year 3 research was conducted prior to the first Covid-19 lockdown when shared classes were conducted face-to-face providing enhanced opportunities for children to interact and mix within a shared class environment.

**Figure 5.2:** Benefits for Children – Societal Outcomes (level of comfort)



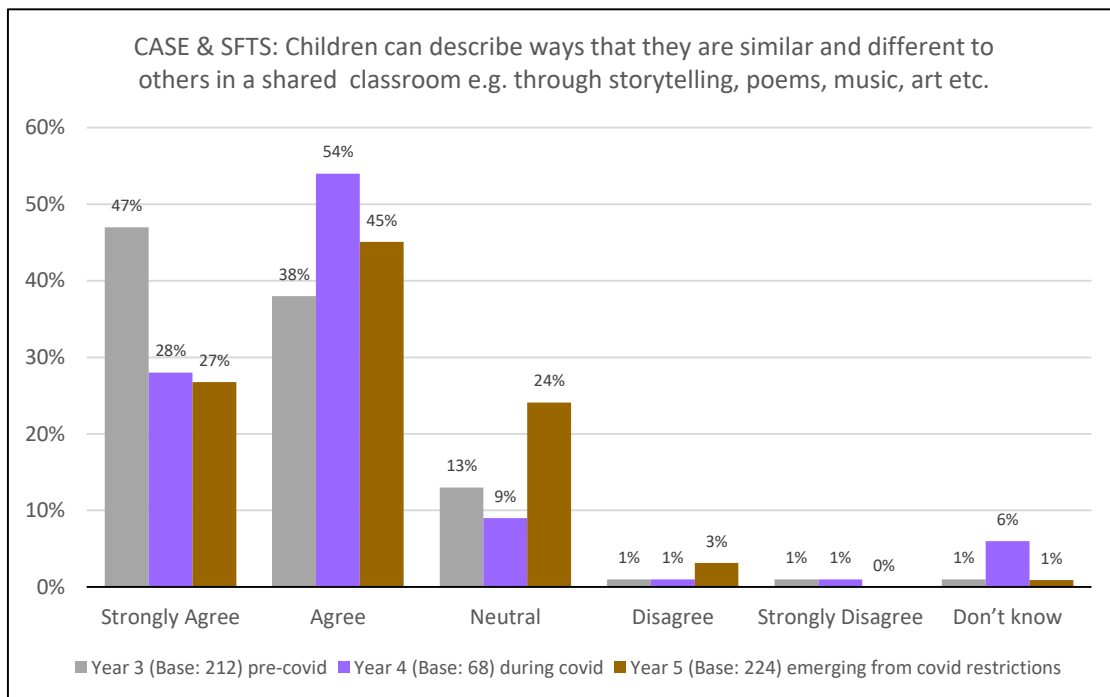
CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)



Shared Education has normalised relations by preparing and allowing children from different backgrounds to work together. Practitioners/teachers adopted activities such as ‘circle time’, group work, and curricular subjects such as Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), Aistear, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Music and World Around Us (WAU) to explore similarities and differences, as well as informal exchanges.

In Year 5, 72% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that **children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others** demonstrating that children are comfortable in each other’s company. Again, this is a positive finding, however it does represent a decrease from results in Year 4 and Year 3 (82% and 85% respectively).

**Figure 5.3:** Benefits for Children – Societal Outcomes (acceptance of differences)



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

There was not a requirement for schools to explicitly talk about differences in subject matters as subjects focused on working together via art, music, STEM, IT subjects i.e., Shared Education led to natural connections and friendships via curriculum led contact.

Many partnership models avoided specifically talking about ‘differences’ in terms of religion. However, there are examples of where children had an opportunity to explore similarities/differences during circle time discussions. Differences mainly focused on uniform, routines within school, with conversations encouraged during group work activities. Seasonal events (Christmas, Easter, St Patrick’s Day, and the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee) and sporting activities provided opportunities to further explore and raise awareness of other cultures and traditions around celebrations, providing opportunities to examine differences and similarities, with the outcome being a greater level of self-awareness and understanding of others.

The exception to the above, is that SFTS through delivery of the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC)<sup>25</sup> were able to provide opportunities for young children to specifically explore wider culture and diversity. The MIFC proved popular and offered techniques for practitioners to explore similarities and differences using puppets and storytelling, which the children enjoyed. Importantly, engaging with children in their early/formative years through shared activities will help prevent such stereotypes developing in the first instance, which if formed are more difficult to change.



Older children can be more aware of differences between each other and schools, but through shared sessions pupils developed a better understanding and respect for differences with examples provided of positive connections made between children of different schools, along with an increased appreciation and awareness of their wider community.

Cross-border collaborations had the added benefit of allowing the children to appreciate a wider school environment experience and to explore the similarities and differences. Importantly, the involvement of Special Schools has also been regarded as significant in terms of inclusion, as it has allowed children to enhance their understanding, empathy, and acceptance of differences among their peers.

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (dealing with differences)

*Due to our participation in this programme over the last few years our children have been able to broaden their horizons and make connections with children and families from a variety of backgrounds, religions and cultures. Children have learnt about each other's cultures and traditions in a holistic way without any preconceptions at this early age. We feel that this input will have lasting benefit on children to see everyone as one and focus on integration rather than a segregated community for their future ahead.*

*Through visiting other settings children got to experience another preschool's environment and routine. They were able to then discuss afterwards the similarities and differences of settings, resources, uniforms etc.*

*During circle time we used to show photos and videos to our group of what our partner setting had sent us, and the children were able to see any similarities that they might have had such as the same name, hair colour, favourite colour and a favourite toy that they like to play with.*

*Children gain an understanding of the wider community they learn through real experiences that the children from the other school are just like them. They value and respect each other and if they happen to meet up in the park or the local shopping centre they can build on relationships formed during the sharing from the start and this in turn can influence others around them.*

*Fundamentally it promotes acceptance, inclusion, understanding and co-operation among our Nursery community. These are all values that permeate the pre-school curriculum as well as the ethos of our school.*

*A few of the children appeared apprehensive about the experience of going on a bus to another setting but with reassurance and getting to go the experience greatly helped them and I think this will help them going towards going to transitioning to new schools.*

*All of the activities encouraged learning and communication was central to all the activities helping children get an understanding of each other's interests and beliefs.*

*I found the entire experience extremely rewarding. Each year, the children were able to meet new children from partner settings and learn about different cultures and traditions, having first hand experiences. The programme also allowed the children the opportunities to live out the values that we teach, encouraging our children to be confident, considerate and inclusive of others.*

*We had a fantastic time learning together. Our partnership is made up of a mainstream nursery school, a special needs nursery unit and a community playgroup, so we have adapted our approach to teaching...e.g. if children are less vocal, we have shown them how we can talk with our hands and faces, smiling, waving. We also have shared sessions with children with feeding tubes, using wheelchairs, with various disabilities which we would not have normally been able to form friendships.*

*We are always working to broaden children's understanding of the world around them. Sharing from the Start has been effective in the children's knowledge of themselves and others in their community. These opportunities would not have been possible without Sharing from the Start and the early understanding and respect for others would not have been gained.*

<sup>25</sup> The Media Initiative for Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme is an intervention programme aimed at improving long term outcomes so that children, practitioners/teachers, parents, and communities become more aware of diversity and difference issues and positively change attitudes and behaviours to those who are different. <https://www.early-years.org/respecting-difference#mifc-introduction>

### CASE sample comments from teachers (dealing with differences)

Children were comfortable in the various settings and at ease when mixed into different groups.

The junior room blended very well together with the new pupils and had great fun playing together. It was a very natural way for the children to meet new people with ease and also they learned new words and language as well as fantastic social skills.

Pupils made and shared videos showcasing key skills for practice in each of rugby and Gaelic with conversations around culture and identity intertwined with sports.

Shared circle time experiences proved to be effective as children felt comfortable and confident sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other.

CASE supports and fits our existing policy and day to day practice in education as it promotes inclusive and positive learning experiences.

Children engaged playfully using interpersonal skills, including turn-taking, making eye contact, listening, responding, valuing similarities and respecting individual differences. Highly effective way of promoting social, emotional and behavioural skills development.

Planning and working on agreed curricular activities allows children to develop social skills, make new friends and foster mutual respect for children with different cultures.

I felt the children definitely improved in their social skills. They had the confidence to make new friends and enjoyed the days of Shared Education. It was also nice for the children to integrate with the children from a different religious background and there was positive feedback from parents also.

Children had the opportunity to talk about their favourite sports/hobbies and interests that they developed during lockdown and could find out what interested the children from the other school. They could learn from each other about different sports and games.

The students are so much more aware of their wellbeing and how to develop their own mindfulness. The students are very confident in speaking about their feelings and kindness. They have a great basis for wellbeing and for developing their own behaviours and how to act towards everyone.

The children developed and fostered a richer understanding of the world around them, the similarities and differences in the communities of each partnership school community which has resulted in more open, kind, caring and resilient individuals.

The students who take part are from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds and they all mix and interact openly.

Through our experiences we have come to respect, learn and begin to understand how our similarities are much more prevalent than our differences.

Planning and working on agreed curricular activities allow children to develop social skills, make new friends and foster mutual respect for children with different cultures.

The children were able to showcase and discuss areas of their local environment and surroundings. They were able to compare and contrast and talk about similarities and differences.

The P7 groups participated in a project in their local area. Therefore, there were opportunities to explore the different churches in each area, the local halls (Orange Hall, GAA halls etc) and ways they are used. This built an awareness of both similarities and differences.

Children followed lessons taken from Living Learning Together framework which discussed a range of reconciliation and other personal development outcomes.

### Sample comments and drawings from children

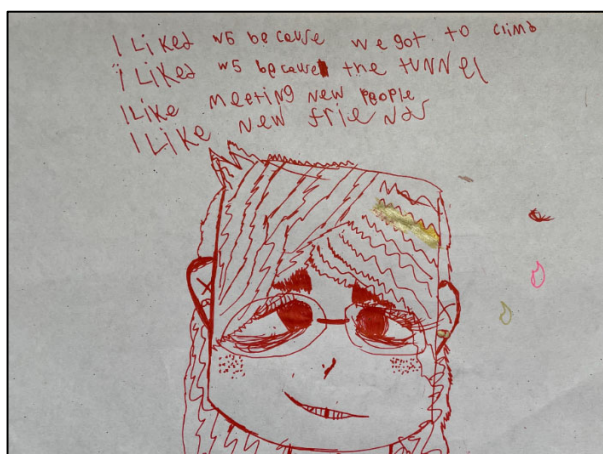
A creative engagement exercise with children was carried out to capture the voice of children about their experience of shared classes. A total of 44 children (age 9 to 11 years old) took part in these exercises, representing four separate Shared Education partnerships. For the most part, children reported Shared Education as a very positive experience. They were able to recall a wide range of the activities they had taken part in and remembered these with excitement as they discussed with their friends. Trips were among the activities children discussed most, for example W5 (the science museum), the zoo, or the Fun Factory. However, children also talked about the fun they had in the playground and eating lunch together, making new friends and getting to know one another, and the new activities they were able to try out, for example Athletics, arts/crafts, and basketball. Children were also keen to mention the activities they did not like as much, with archery and the theatre among them. This demonstrates individual preference rather than issues with the activities chosen.

Several children also mentioned their feelings when taking part in Shared Education, with some admitting they were nervous or anxious about the prospect of meeting new people or going to new places, and not being able to stay with their friends. However, for the most part, these feelings passed, and children then enjoyed their time together as they got to know one another.

### Photos: children's responses when asked to reflect on what they liked about Shared Education.

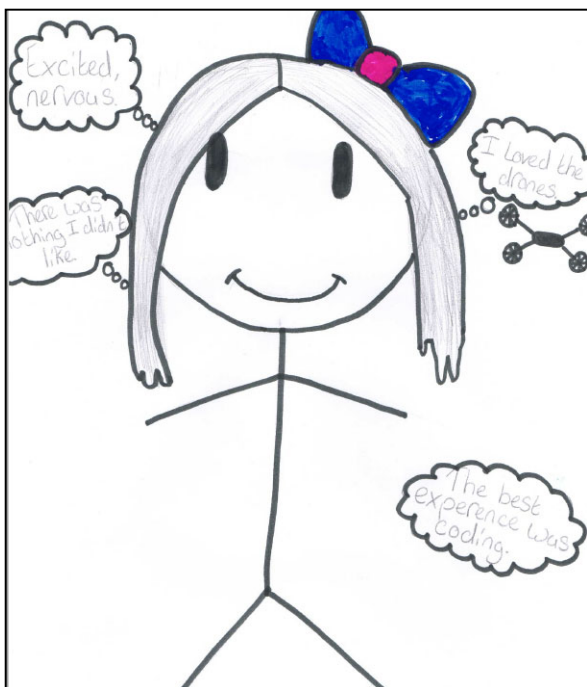
We made new friends. They shared their toys with us. We got to see their school. We had so much fun. They have a nice playground.

We get to make new friends  
We ate our lunch with them  
We shared our new friends  
We get to play in their playground  
We got to see what their school looks like  
We got to play games with ~~the~~ like  
We got to ask each other questions





Drawings: Photo from children's drawing activity - children sharing her views on Shared Education

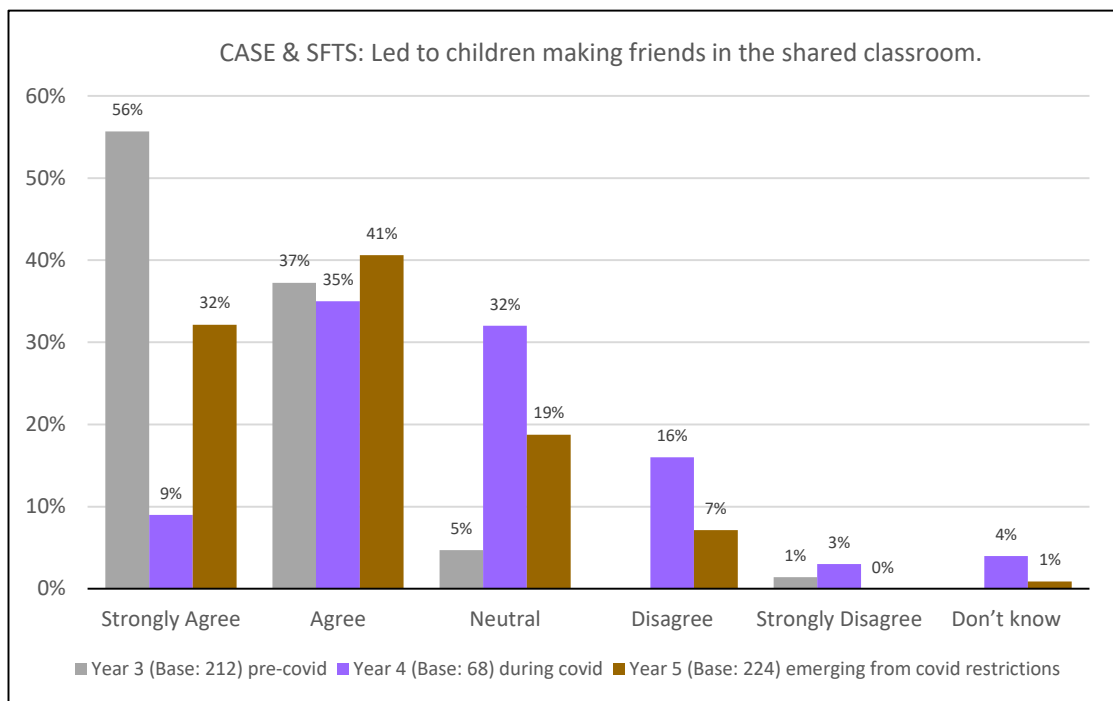


### 5.3.2 Cross-Community Friendships

**Terms of Reference:** Comment on the extent to which sharing in education has led to the development of friendships and contacts on a cross-community basis.

Shared Education aims to create opportunities for children to have sustained contact with peers from another community background within the existing educational structures. In terms of friendships, 73% of respondents to the online survey ‘strongly agreed’ (32%) or ‘agreed’ (42%) that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**. This is a significant uplift from 44% reported last year (Year 4) during the Covid-19 pandemic when contact was limited to virtual/online means only, whilst this year (Year 5) most partnerships were able to reengage in face-to-face contact by Term 3. Reflecting on pre-pandemic results (Year 3), 93% agreed that children made friends as contact was entirely by face-to-face contact, thereby highlighting the need for this type of contact to build and cement bonds between children of partnering schools (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 5.4:** Benefits for Children – Friendships in setting/school

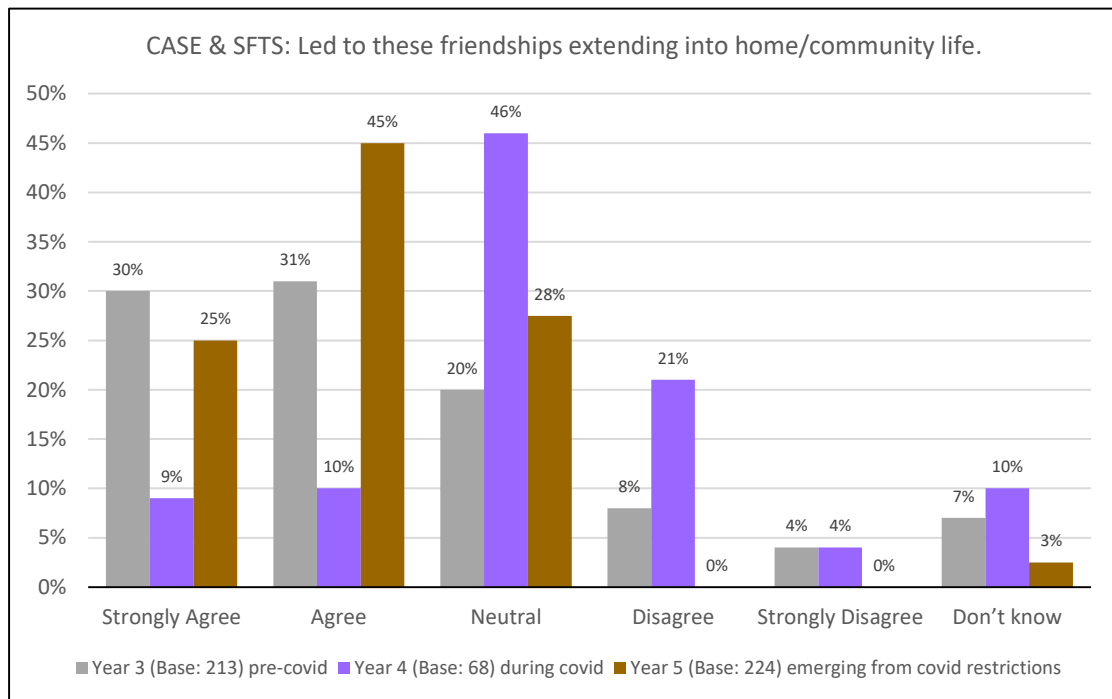


CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

Qualitative feedback indicated that teachers/practitioners observed that children recognise each other and can recall names and bonds appeared to be created between children during the shared session tasks. One of the key success factors in developing friendships in previous years (pre-Covid-19) was opportunities for children to engage in more informal, natural mixing during leisure time (break/lunch and travel to joint outings) as a means of creating and sustaining friendships. Team working tasks and informal interactions were regarded as the optimum approach for nurturing friendships.

As Covid-19 restrictions eased this year, 70% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**, which again shows a significant increase from the previous year (Year 4) where only 19% agreed with this statement as contact was restricted at this time due to Covid-19 removing opportunities for children to interact outside of their immediate family ‘bubble’. Interestingly, the results show an uplift in friendships being developed within the community to above that of pre-pandemic levels in Year 3 (61%).

**Figure 5.5:** Benefits for Children – Friendships outside of setting/school



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

Generally, connections are easier to establish and maintain for older children, who have more opportunities to meet outside of school, for example via extra-curricular activities and various sporting clubs. It was also noted that these types of interactions are reliant on parents being engaged and facilitating opportunities for children to meet, as well as community facilities being available and open to all. Opportunities for children to meet outside of school (with support from parents) will contribute to the longer-term benefits of sharing.

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (friendships)

<p>The children talked about their new friends from over the border, how lovely they were and when were we meeting again. It was a wonderful extra curriculum experience; one we would not have had if Sharing from the Start had not been offered to us. Thank you to all involved.</p> <p>Children have met other peers that will be moving to their new schools in September.</p>	<p>We had a large group of children involved in the programme and mixing was very beneficial as we could see the children gain confidence during the year. We could see them mixing more and feeling comfortable talking to children from the other 2 settings</p> <p>I feel the children really benefited from meeting other children from the neighbouring village as many were moving on to the same primary school.</p>	<p>If we had been able to have more shared sessions with face-to-face there would have been more evidence of extension of these friendships outside of our session and into community life as this was more evident in other years where there were more relationships built through face-to-face.</p>	<p>Down through the years children got to experience more when it came to outings and developing friendships however these past two years the children didn't get the same experience as everything was done online.</p> <p>We didn't start our shared sessions until towards the last term so it probably didn't help towards making proper friendships but some of the children did make new friends during the sessions.</p>	<p>Friendships extending into home life not as prevalent as previous years due to Covid-19. A lot of parents anxious about mixing.</p> <p>A few of the children have become close friends within the groups and have arranged play dates outside of the setting.</p>
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### CASE sample comments from teachers (friendships)

<p>On face-to-face days the children were mixed in groups formed of pupils from all partnership schools - this enhanced the opportunities to reintroduce and strengthen friendships while allowing children to show off their work samples to a new audience of peers.</p> <p>The key success has been in friendships being established before the move to secondary school. The CASE project has enabled the small schools to make links with pupils in surrounding schools. Funding has allowed us to access different activities that would not be available to our school.</p>	<p>It was joyful to look out to the playground or dinner hall or classrooms and see the children working and playing together, building friendships, sharing time and participating in activities.</p> <p>Beyond the curriculum the children gained lifelong skills, enjoyed many wonderful experiences and made connections and friendships outside of their local community.</p>	<p>Children developed friendships and enjoyed working collaboratively.</p> <p>Our Shared Education partnership is unique and special. At every level across our schools, friendships and genuine partnership is happening. This project has brought significant benefits for all the schools and more importantly the children involved.</p> <p>Face-to-face sessions allowed new friendships to form and previous friendships to begin again after Covid-19.</p>	<p>More face-to-face time this year allowed for greater outcomes this year and children enjoying learning together.</p> <p>Children have friends and family living in the same community so we know have continued these links outside school.</p>	<p>Children have developed long lasting relationships which have been extended by extra-curricular activities outside school.</p> <p>Pupil feedback mentioned becoming better friends with pupils from other schools at outside clubs as a result of meeting through Shared Education.</p> <p>Children are meeting outside of school at football and other social and educational activities.</p>
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**Sample comments and drawings from pre-school children (friendships)**

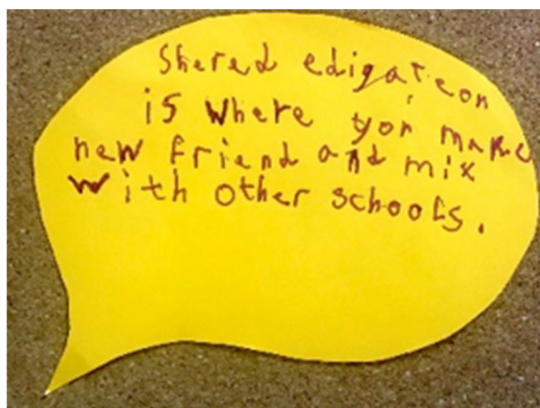
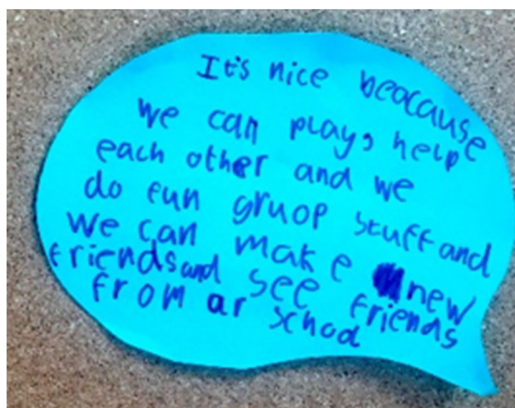
"Having great fun with our friends"



"I like to play with the toys in [partner pre-school] and I like all my new friends"



**Sample comments and drawings from primary school children (friendships)**

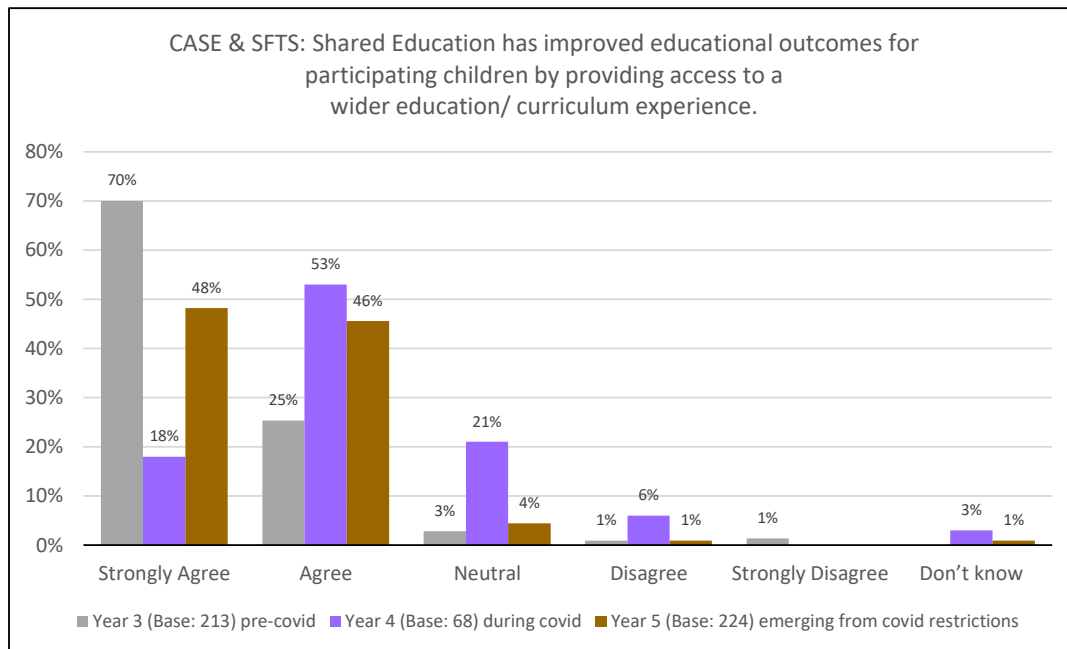


## 5.4 Educational Benefits for Children

In addition to shared/reconciliation benefits, Shared Education has had a positive impact on the curriculum by helping to meet and enhance the curricular focus of the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (Ireland).

**94%** of respondents ‘strongly agree’ (48%) or ‘agreed’ (46%) that Shared Education has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children (i.e., increased confidence, improved educational experiences achieved by access to additional educational resources/ equipment, which would not be available in the absence of funding). This is an increase from 71% the previous year, which is reflective of partnership emerging from Covid-19 restrictions and re-engaging this year. The results are on par with that in Year 3 (95%) i.e., prior to Covid-19 restrictions.

**Figure 5.6:** Benefits for Children - Educational Outcomes



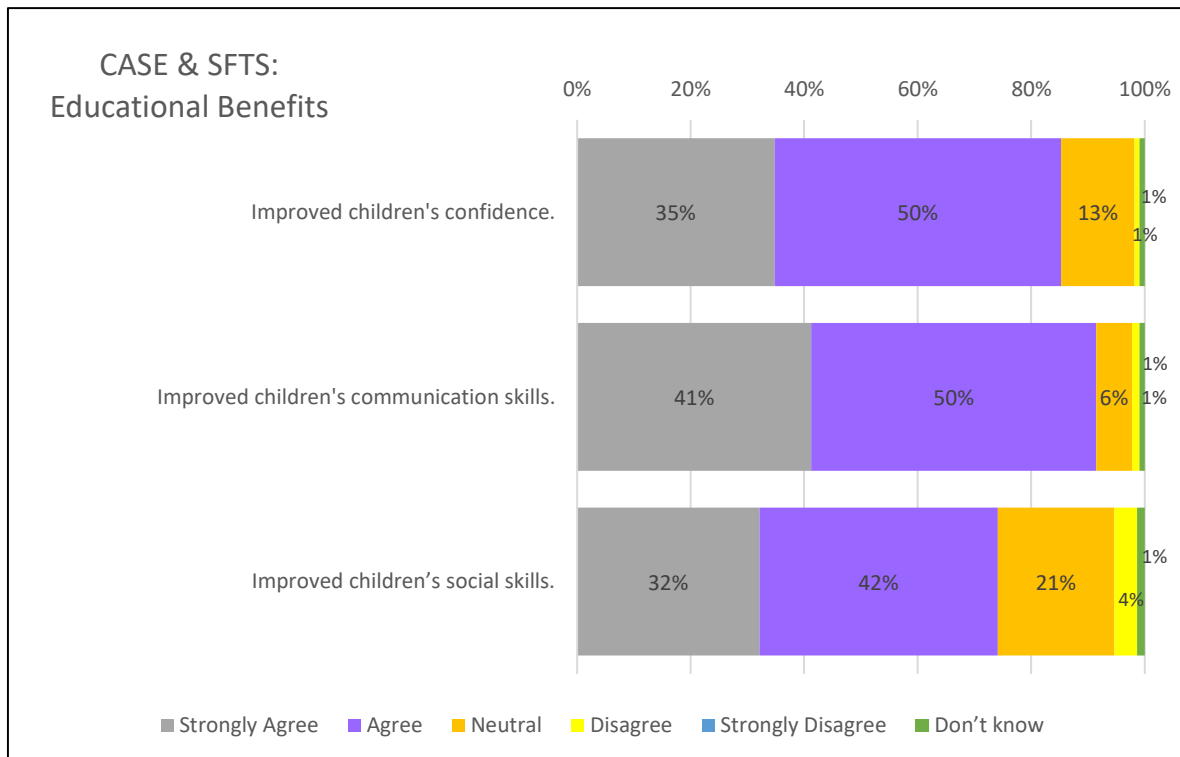
CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

Educational benefits noted included improved curriculum delivery, as well as improved confidence, communication, and social skills observed among participating children (Figure 4.3 overleaf). 85% strongly agreed or agreed that participation in shared classes has improved children’s confidence, in terms of confidence interacting with both peers and adults within each setting and confidence taking part in new activities.

91% of respondents agreed children’s communication skills has also improved in terms of using their senses to explore, play together, co-operate, take turns, share, and help one another in their shared environment. The added dimension of using online platforms contributed to improved IT skills. As face-to-face contact was limited in Term 1 and Term 2, children enjoyed writing and exchanging cards and penpal letters, which helped to enhance literacy skills.

Almost three-quarters of all respondents agreed that they had observed improved social skills and felt that children were able to solve problems and resolve conflict with peers. Again, the importance of physical, practical and team building activities was raised as contributing most to achieving shared/reconciliation benefits, which has been inhibited due to the aftermath of Covid-19 restrictions.

**Figure 5.7:** Benefits for Children - Educational Outcomes



Base: 224 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

Although not specified as a direct outcome of SFTS, 70% agreed that a by-product of being involved in the project was that it has helped to ease children's transition between pre-school to primary. Although, this outcome was less well developed this academic year.

Overall, it is evident that Shared Education has the potential to permeate throughout all aspects of the curriculum and over the last five years participation has provided access to a wide education/curriculum experience.

### CASE sample comments from teachers (educational benefits)

<p>Shared Education projects deliver educational benefits to children, enable schools to access and share resources and support pupils and school staff to build relationships and engage with those from different backgrounds and cultures. Shared Education adds to the educational experiences schools offer and I wholeheartedly have never experienced such a rewarding, valuable and beneficial project like PEACE IV. Shared Education is the way forward, the way to promote good practice and to celebrate all that is good.</p>	<p>Shared Education has been such a positive experience with everyone in our school reaping the benefits- staff and students. We have enhanced the education of all children, given them opportunities they would not have had otherwise and developed great relationships between all staff members.</p>	<p>Pupils benefitted from a wide, varied and creative curriculum as a result of participating in the partnership. Without participating in the project, as a small school we would never have been able to provide the opportunities and experiences afforded to the pupils.</p>	<p>The students have gained a lot of self-confidence through shared learning. Their communication and social skills improved from mixing with new students and also in presenting projects to other classes. Overall great development for our students.</p>	<p>Shared Education has had a hugely positive impact on our small school. The close partnership between the principals and teachers has been invaluable. The funding has allowed for the pupils in our school to share in wonderful learning experiences with pupils from other schools and to forge friendships before moving on to secondary school.</p>
	<p>Activities where children are practically involved in problem solving and completing tasks collaboratively provide both educational depth and opportunities for relationship building.</p>	<p>Shared Education has become very much a part of our curriculum and more embedded in the vision and ethos in each school. It is no longer and add on activity.</p>	<p>This process has facilitated hands on learning experiences where both schools could work collaboratively and deliver enriching educational experiences for all pupils.</p>	<p>Children are more confident and at ease with each other, working together as peers, presenting in front of each other, playing together etc.</p>

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (educational benefits)

<p>The benefits for the children have been immense. Sharing from the Start had provided them with so many opportunities that would have been impossible without the project. They have become confident, tolerant and thoughtful learners. Thank you.</p>	<p>Children are much more confident after taking part in the project. Having it online this year was not ideal but had many benefits. The children were able to use the technology themselves and were able to talk and interact online.</p>	<p>This programme encouraged thinking around the 3 settings' curriculum, observing the children, planning the different activities to encourage participation and most important that all the children had fun. The children got lots of experience as we worked through the curriculum from each other's setting. The children had lots of ideas of what they would like to do and it worked well as the 3 setting came up with similar ideas.</p>	<p>The shared sessions allowed children to mix and feel confident in a new group situation while still having the reassurance of their teachers.</p>	
<p>I feel like the children within my room loved their shared session. It was their favourite day of the week within the playschool. The children were able to explore a new learning environment and have enriched play experiences.</p>	<p>It was a great programme for all involved sharing different curriculums and sharing activities. The children gained experience from the others and indeed the staff got ideas from each other.</p>		<p>Children were able to chat on the videos and tell each other about their activities, some were shy and did not come forward but most got involved and remembered names etc of their shared group.</p>	<p>Of course we enjoyed the whole experience and the learning was amazing for us all. We looked forward to the group meetings and all the wonderful activities and adventures. We had a ball each time.</p>
<p>We had a large group of children involved in the programme and mixing was very beneficial as we could see the children gain confidence during the year. We could see them mixing more and feeling comfortable talking to children from the other 2 settings.</p>		<p>By having access to external tutors we got lots of help and ideas how the sessions can look like, how we can extend it. The tutors gave us belief and confidence that there is so many possibilities. It gave us more self confidence to manage and plan outings as well as recognise windows of opportunities for building future relationships with others in our community.</p>		

### 5.4.1 Economic Benefits

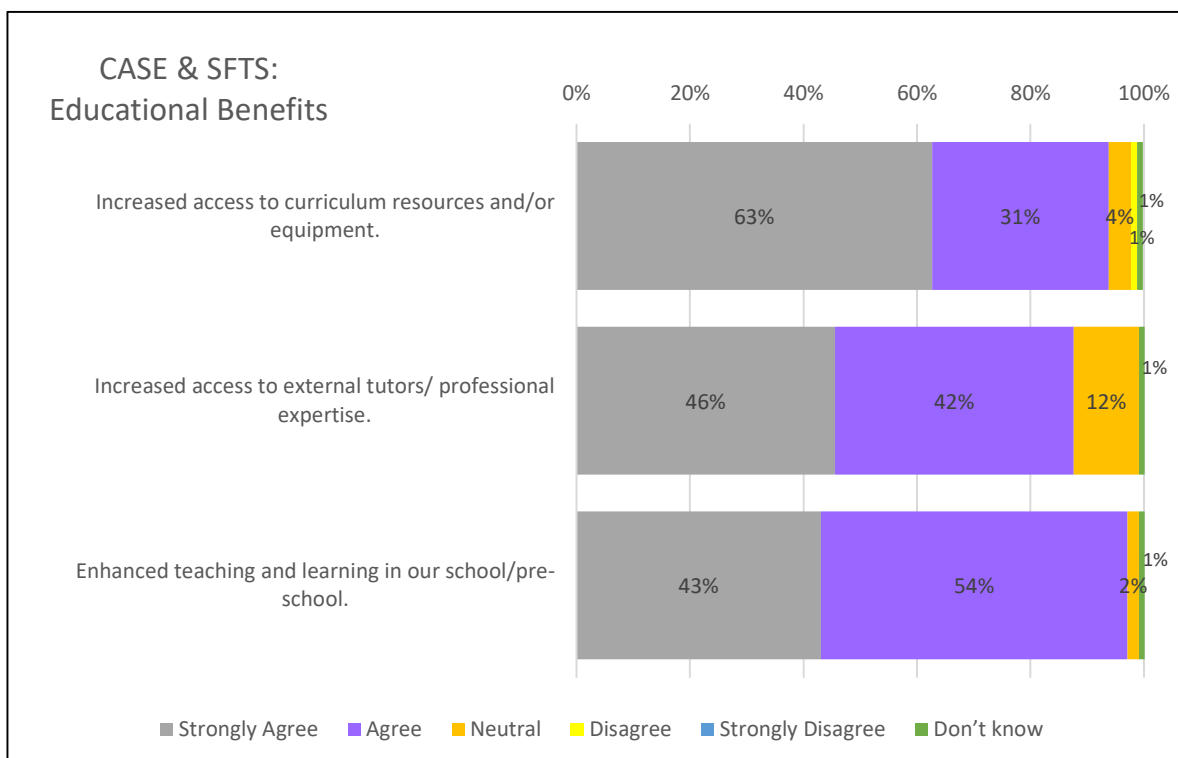
SFTS/CASE has allowed children to do activities that they would not have been able to access in the absence of Shared Education funding. Feedback emphasised that PEACE IV funding has provided a much-needed boost to enhance and enrich the curricular experience for children and the professional development of practitioners/teachers.

Respondents ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that funding has provided:

- Increased access to curricular resources and/or equipment (94%). For example, resources/equipment purchased collectively and shared between partnering pre-schools/schools included educational resources (e.g., play equipment, educational resources such as Lego, Mathletics, online maths programme, Hive Hackers, programming activity) and technology equipment (e.g., webcams, TV/Stand, Data Projector, Broadband). Partner pre-schools/schools also shared their existing resources such as indoor/outdoor facilities.
- Increased access to external tutors/professional expertise (88%) with different specialisms bringing new learning experiences. As teachers became familiar with external tutor methods, they felt more confident to deliver shared activities themselves, thereby reducing reliance on external tutors.
- Enhanced teaching and learning across the partnership (97%) where practitioner/teacher work collaboratively to share best practice for the benefit of all partners.

These benefits address the PEACE IV Shared Education aim to *promote the efficient and effective use of resources*.

**Figure 5.8:** Economic Benefits of Shared Education



Base: 226 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

### Sample comments (economic benefits)

*The extra money for resources and facilitators has been of immense benefit to our school. The children have been able to have opportunities and experiences they ordinarily would not have had.*

*Our school's involvement in the Shared Education has been hugely beneficial in many different ways. It has been a much needed additional revenue source which has allowed us to invest in training and resources which have had a significant impact on the teaching and learning in our school.*

*The funding has allowed us to be creative with our activities. We have been able to get specialist teachers in, and we have also been able to buy resources to benefit the partnership. During Covid-19, we used some funding for upgrading our ICT equipment so that we could enhance our communication together.*

*The money has allowed us to provide a greater range of resources to engage the children and pay for trips that they would not necessarily have had the chance to do.*

*Children have been able to use resources purchased to further their learning.*

*Being able to bring in professionals or purchase/hire resources to help with the delivery of sessions has been really beneficial.*

*Teachers have acquired new ideas from the use of external agencies (especially in PE and STEM).*

*The resources that are now available to the children will be invaluable in their learning and will continue to benefit children in years to come.*

*The sharing of our practice, resources and feedback via Google drive also provided many benefits for both children and staff. Both feedback from pupils and staff have demonstrated positive benefits achieved.*

*We have the opportunity to access expert facilitators to help us with our teaching. Sharing and collaborating ideas with our partner school staff means that our planning and teaching is of a higher standard.*

*Benefits of Shared Education are amazing from pupil and staff perspective. Resources can be bought to enhance teaching and learning, professional development through links with other schools and TPL, bringing schools together, developing relationships and bringing community together.*

*Overall, it has improved all areas of school life and provided resources and training for both schools that we would otherwise be without.*

*Parents can see the resources provided by Shared Education which will be around for years to come for their child and the community to benefit from. Community can also see the resources purchased.*

*It has allowed us to invest in resources in our outdoor area which will further enhance our children's learning.*

*A collegial relationship between the two schools is highly beneficial. The funding allows us to invest in quality resources. Both schools purchased an iPad caddy with 16 iPads. This facilitated our online engagement and fostered a renewed enthusiasm in digital learning. The shared learning that has taken place has benefitted both pupils and staff.*

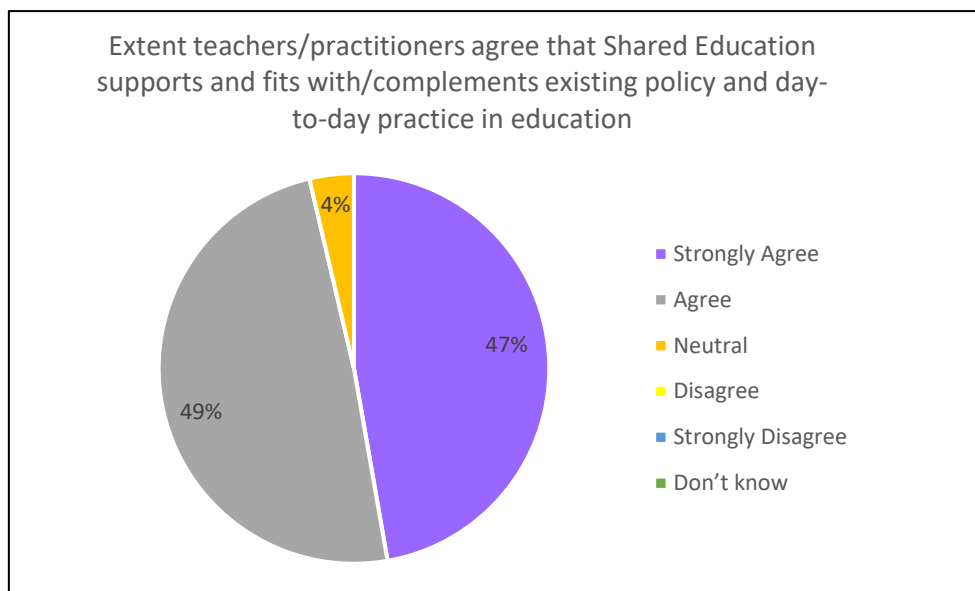


## 5.5 Impact on school development plans/priorities

96% strongly agreed (47%) or agreed (49%) that Shared Education supports, and fits with/complements existing policy and day-to-day practice in education, with respondents commenting on how Shared Education has contributed to meeting the objectives of each of the pre-school/school's curricular focus and learning outcomes.

Specially participation has had a positive impact on helping to address curricular priorities in relevant Pre-school Development Plans; Síolta Baseline Assessments; or School Development Plans and quality frameworks<sup>26</sup>. Aligning Shared Education to existing priorities has proven to be a key success factor to ensure that Shared Education is not regarded as additional but is strategically aligned to the agreed curriculum focus, recognising that they are intrinsically linked and complement each other. Shared Education alignment with pre-schools'/schools' existing objectives is a more efficient and productive use of time, rather than Shared Education being seen as an 'add-on' or additional burden to pre-schools/schools.

**Figure 5.9:** Extent to which Shared Education complements education policy



Base: 220 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

There is also evidence from SFTS/CASE partnerships that Shared Education complements and contributes to meeting the aims and objectives stated in pre-school/school shared/inclusion policies. The SFTS model has a more specific focus on working with Boards of Governors/Management Committees to develop and implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution to promote the sustainability of Shared Education.

<sup>26</sup> Quality Frameworks such as: Looking at Our School (2016) in Ireland, and the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF 2017) in Northern Ireland.

### CASE sample comments from teachers (school priorities)

<p>Shared development of planning, teaching and evaluating in Maths has improved standards across both schools and enhanced middle leadership skills.</p> <p>Shared Education is now embedded in our daily practice; the support and opportunities provided by Shared Education have contributed significantly to raising attainment.</p> <p>All schools implemented the Weaving Wellbeing programme. The funding involved was of huge benefit to the schools, and the time to focus on wellbeing in our schools as part of our SSE.</p>	<p>Both myself and the principal in our partner school invested in the relationship and building a collaborative approach from the beginning. We spent time with our staff, enabled partnership planning, ensured that Shared Education was prioritised in the SDP and throughout the course of the school year.</p> <p>Teachers in our partnership work well together; planning for Shared Education addresses the SDP where possible in at least some of the year groups.</p>	<p>Shared Education is part of our school development plan and has benefitted the whole school.</p> <p>Both schools are committed to using Shared Education as a key tool in school development planning with an emphasis on outdoor learning, PE, the Arts and improving health and wellbeing.</p> <p>CASE is fully aligned with the Quality framework/SSE framework in schools. It supports the implementation of these very important practices of gathering evidence, setting targets and goals and evaluating success of the plan/activities.</p>	<p>The sharing through play and outdoor play was a big area of development in our school and there has been no training in this area in many years. Both schools benefited from the TPL courses. It was part of the school development plan.</p> <p>The collaborative work in CASE has opened everyone's eyes to the real benefits of collaborative planning. Supports the ICT planning of all three schools - supporting creativity through STEM and Art. Helped all three schools to realise their school improvement goals through the School Self-Evaluation process.</p>	<p>Sharing of ideas for SSE plans, sharing planning for multi grade classrooms, sharing of expertise in teaching different areas of the curriculum, sharing ideas on resources for teaching different curricular areas.</p> <p>Shared Education is part of our school development plan and has benefitted the whole school.</p> <p>Shared Education enhances the teaching of curricular areas. We used the topics covered as part of our pupil activity to apply for the STEM Plaque of Distinction from the Science Foundation Ireland.</p>
<p>CASE supports and fits with our existing school policy and day-to-day practice as our school ethos focuses on the promotion of a positive teaching and learning environment. Our current SSE focuses on wellbeing which links to the overall theme of CASE while our endeavours to achieve green school and active school flags also link seamlessly to the CASE initiative.</p>		<p>Shared Education allows a school the opportunity to focus and improve on many of the targets under the teaching and learning domains of the 'Looking at Our School' (LAOS) 2016 document. Collaboration, sharing of skills and resources, focused CPD, etc were all addressed through the planning and participation in Shared Education.</p> <p>When planning our projects each school had the ability to target their wider curriculum delivery goals as well as their SSE plan and school improvement plan.</p>		

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (pre-school priorities)

<p>Sharing from the Start complimented our Aistear curriculum and encouraged us all to think of the importance of providing a quality programme for the children. Putting the child at the centre of everything we planned and delivered, providing many values for the children and indeed the staff members. It made us think of our role within the pre-school environment, how we were teaching the children, and made us look at ourselves as role models and how our attitudes contributed to a positive learning for each child in the programme.</p>	<p>It fits in very nicely with our planning for personal, social and emotional development, as well as contributing to policy on thinking skills, personal capabilities etc.</p> <p>Sharing from the Start has been fantastic on so many levels. Personally it has made me reflect and think. I feel that as a setting we are now much more aware and offer better provision.</p>	<p>We have agreed that Sharing from the Start has motivated us as staff to make sure we showcase our best practice in a friendly, competitive way and it is great to have new/shared ideas and sharing free resources is always a great thing....paper, extra jigsaws, toys, knitted clothes etc.</p> <p>It fits in very nicely with our planning for Personal, Social and Emotional development, as well as contributing to policy on thinking skills, personal capabilities etc.</p>	<p>The Siofta baselines within our services have become a huge asset to us. There was a lot of work put into them as a result of engaging in the programme.</p> <p>We as a group feel that the programme enhanced our overall practice, it supported us to look at our programme and the areas we needed to work on as a group.</p>	<p>Preschool Education focuses a lot on the personal, social and emotional development of the child. Sharing from the Start has enhanced this element of our curriculum immensely. As practitioners it has made us look at provision and what we could do better. We have been able to provide a wider, more diverse range of toys and resources. Sharing from the Start fits seamlessly into the NI Preschool Curricular Guidance.</p>
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## 5.6 Chapter Summary

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with **115,261 children** having participated in shared class activity (80% of 2023 target achieved). On average, children took part in 20-21 hours of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes. Whilst the target of 30 hours was only achieved in Year 2 (under 'normal', pre Covid-19 conditions), overall, the net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers. Feedback also highlights the year-on-year progression, with an increased number of children and/or year groups involved, with some adopting a whole-school approach and embedding Shared Education into the ethos and workings of the pre-school/school.

Encouragingly, 79% of respondents agreed that children feel comfortable and at ease when taking part in shared classes, and 72% of respondents agreed that ‘children can describe ways that they are similar and different’. Whilst this is a positive verification of the level of ease which children feel in each other’s company, it does show a reduction from previous year and pre-pandemic results.

In terms of friendships, 73% of respondents agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, compared to 44% agreeing with this statement in Year 4 (during Covid). Reflecting on pre-pandemic results (Year 3), results are more positive with 93% agreeing that children made friends as contact was entirely by face-to-face contact, thereby highlighting the need for this type of contact to build and cement bonds between children of partnering schools.

In Year 5, 70% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**, compared to 19% in Year 4 as contact was restricted due to Covid-19 removing opportunities for children to interact outside of their immediate family ‘bubble’. Interestingly, the results for Year 5 show an uplift in friendships being developed within the community to above that of pre-pandemic levels in Year 3 (61%)

Shared Education has also had a positive impact on the curriculum by helping to meet and enhance the curricular focus of the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (Ireland). 94% of respondents agreed that CASE/SFTS has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. This is an increase from 71% the previous year, which is reflective of partnerships emerging from Covid-19 restrictions and re-engaging this year. The results are on par with that in Year 3 (99%) i.e., prior to Covid-19 restrictions. Overall, core subjects have been enhanced with the addition of new resources acquired, the access to other teaching staff and in some cases external tutors providing specific expertise, which would not have occurred in the absence of funding. Other educational benefits reported in Year 5 include improved communications skills (91%); improved confidence (85%); and improved social skills (74%), as well as comments highlighting that it has helped to ease children’s transition between pre-school to primary and primary to post-primary.

Based on the above results, it is evident that the pandemic had an adverse effect on outcomes, however most significant is that the results did not experience an overly pronounced decrease as would have been expected given the challenges within the education sector at this time. The resilience, dedication, and commitment shown by partnerships to using different means of working, enabled using technology, has meant that Shared Education continued during unprecedented and challenging times. SEYS (SFTS) and DOs (CASE) have been instrumental in helping to support partnerships in their transition to a virtual Shared Educational model during the pandemic, and in their support to help partnerships as restrictions have lifted and there is a return to the conceived model of sharing. Whilst it is clear SFTS and CASE could not have continued without the use of IT, it is evident from feedback that shared and educational outcomes for children are better achieved through face-to-face contact.

In a post-funding phase, the key learning and good practice from Shared Education can continue to be embedded into the curriculum, school development plans and inclusion policies.

## 6 BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS – HIGH QUALITY TEACHING & LEARNING

### 6.1 Introduction

The PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education has been met with a total of **2,360 practitioners/teachers** with the experience of delivering 20+ hours of shared classes.

In addition, for CASE, a total of 504 teachers took part in various TPL modules throughout Year 5 (17 sessions, with an average attendance of 30 teachers per module) for example, 'Online Collaboration'; 'Sharing through Play'; 'Understanding and supporting emotional well-being'. For SFTS, training opportunities included the Media Initiative for Children, Information session for new practitioners, and Evaluating the Impact guidance, as well as Peer Cluster training. Access to a comprehensive training programme to include the concepts underpinning Shared Education, followed by more practical sessions on implementation helped to support the effective roll-out of projects.

This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, highlighting the societal impact on practitioner/teachers as well as the impact on skills and expertise.

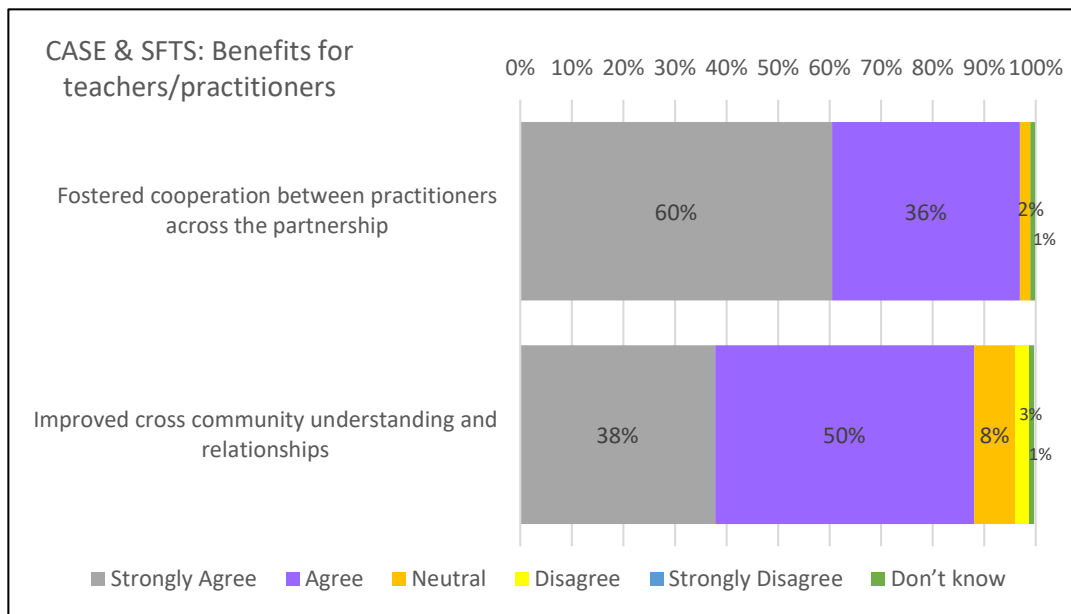
### 6.2 Shared/reconciliation benefits for teachers

In Year 5, results show that 96% strongly agreed (60%) or agreed (36%) that Shared Education has fostered **cross-community co-operation** between practitioners/teachers across their partnership, which is on par with that reported in Year 3 (97%). Feedback supports the reduction in cultural barriers and a more open, receptive approach to cross-community and cross-border sharing and collaboration, with sharing becoming increasingly 'normalised' within the pre-school and school routine. Some partnerships also reflected on the distance travelled, commented that SFTS/CASE represented the first opportunity that the school community interacted with one another, which has led to five years of contact and partnership building.

Partnerships involved in cross-border linkages have the added dimension and benefit of children experiencing a wider sense of community, outside their own jurisdiction. Over the course of the last five years, there has been 18 **cross-border partnerships** (5 SFTS and 13 CASE) representing 9% of all partnerships. Respondents commented on the benefit of working with partner(s) in a cross-border context, where appreciation was gained for the similarities as well as opportunities to learn from each jurisdiction to enhance the curriculum, as well as contributing to practice development.

88% of respondents also strongly agreed (50%) or agreed (38%) that Shared Education has improved **cross-community understanding and relationships**, this represents a 7% decrease from pre-pandemic levels in Year 3. Friendships and connections across the partnerships have been established have flourished, however limited face-to-face contact appears to have hampered progress during the pandemic.

**Figure 6.1: Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers – Shared/reconciliation benefits**



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

**SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (reconciliation benefits)**

*Absolutely recommend the continuation of this Sharing from the Start programme. The staff are motivated and have formed strong friendships. Sharing from the Start has to begin in pre-school if our divided communities are to go forward for a better future for our children.*

*Training is very important for all staff and helps them develop their understanding of their role within the setting. Helped with the understanding of Media Initiative and how to be a positive role model. Helped us look at our own beliefs and attitudes and the importance of sharing positive attitudes to children.*

*We would like to thank everyone at Sharing from the Start for affording us the opportunity to experience this programme. We found it very beneficial and worthwhile and whilst it is difficult to measure impact at this early age, I have no doubt it will be clear for all to see as these children grow up.*

*My partner teacher and I have not only become colleagues but also friends. That is something I am very grateful for.*

*Sharing from the Start is an extremely valuable programme that offers opportunities for communities to come together in positive way. A shared focus on providing the best start in life for our young children has enabled both staff and parents to work together, sharing ideas and good practice and celebrating achievements throughout this year.*

*I would recommend all pre-schools to get involved in Shared Education. It was great to build relationships with another setting in our area. The staff have built lasting friendships and children always looked forward to our sessions together.*

*I found the Media Initiative course was very helpful. It showed me new ways in which to promote inclusion.*

*Our nursery has really benefited from this programme. It has been lovely for staff to share good practice with another setting and establish lifelong friendships and support for each other.*

## CASE sample comments from teachers (reconciliation benefits)

*Shared Education has been invaluable to fostering relationships between our schools. It has engendered trust within a community with different cultural perspectives, by allowing pupils to share and learn together, in a non-threatening and very enjoyable environment. All stakeholders within the schools are aware of its aims and objectives. The commitment of staff has enabled Shared Education to be integrated into our school curriculum. It has forged lasting links between our pupils that will allow them to have a broader understanding of their community as adults - all of these are excellent achievements.*

*I think it is a fantastic project that gives opportunities to pupils, parents teachers and the wider community in a way no other project does. It taps into potential and inspires us all to be better versions of ourselves, with motivation and support and very importantly funding and time.*

*One of the teachers had never led a Shared Education programme before. Any anxieties were quickly alleviated when he met the partner school and worked as a team to plan and jointly lead.*

*I feel that the programme has been immensely important for both schools. Considering the history in the area and that both schools are based in a contentious area the programme has been very successful. We have been able to provide our children with opportunities that they would not have had if it were not for the Shared Education funding.*

*Not only have the pupils established connections/ friendships, the staff also have bonded together and got to know each other.*

*Throughout our Shared Education experiences we have fully committed to all aspects. The children, parents, staff and community have developed their understanding of the benefits sharing our education can have.*

*It has afforded pupils, staff and the wider school community the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other school communities, which have been beneficial to all concerned.*

*I love Shared Education. I've always grown up in Catholic education and this whole experience has made me consider putting my daughter into integrated education when the time comes. The staff and children are happy to meet new people and share resources. Without this project we would never have been able to ensure 400 pupils per year were meeting each other!*

*The teachers in our partner schools have developed friendships beyond that of professional colleagues. We are comfortable with each other and often contact each other for advice regarding other issues outside of the PEACE Project and Shared Education. We also organise CPD courses and workshops which we attend together.*

*Our area was very deeply affected by the Northern Ireland troubles. Local schools didn't collaborate to any degree until the CASE programme was launched. During the last five years, we have established excellent working relationships between the teaching staffs and relationships between pupils are now beginning to flourish. Sadly, Covid-19 came at a bad time and it certainly hampered the amount of visits that we could make to each other's schools, but with a concerted effort in 2022 we are now back on track.*

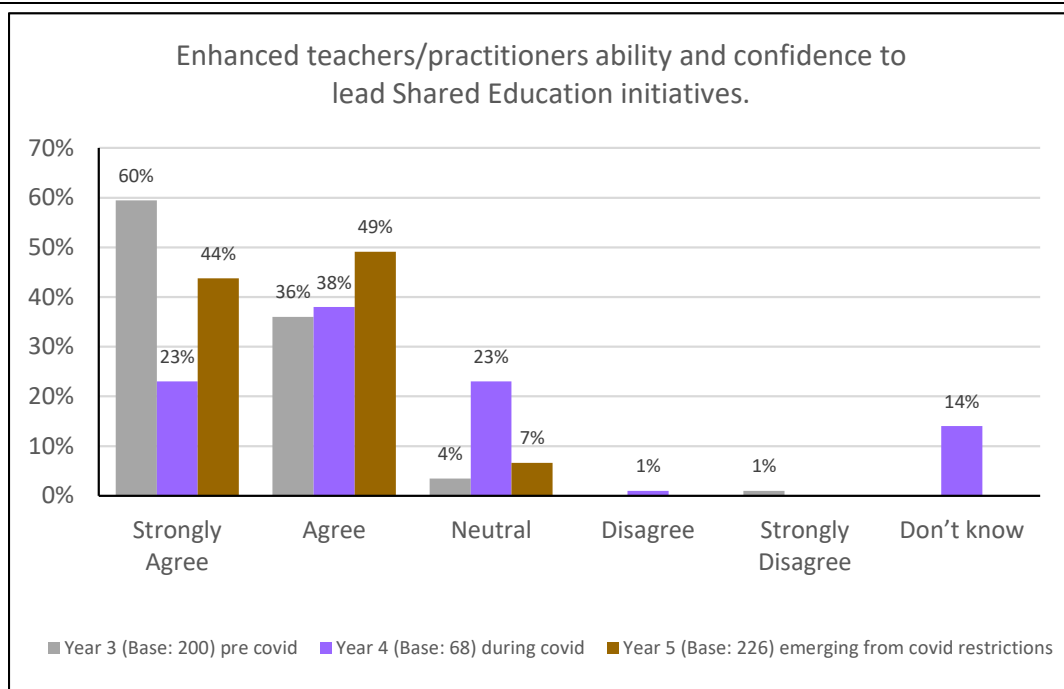


### 6.3 Leadership & Management

**Terms of Reference:** Comment on the impact of the support provided to school management and teaching staff to enhance their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives.

In Year 5, 93% of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that involvement in SFTS/CASE has **enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives**, one of the underpinning output indicators of PEACE IV. This is a marked increase from 61% agreeing with this statement in Year 4, which reflected respondents’ experiences during Covid-19. Results for Year 5 are more in keeping with results in Year 3 captured pre-Covid (96%).

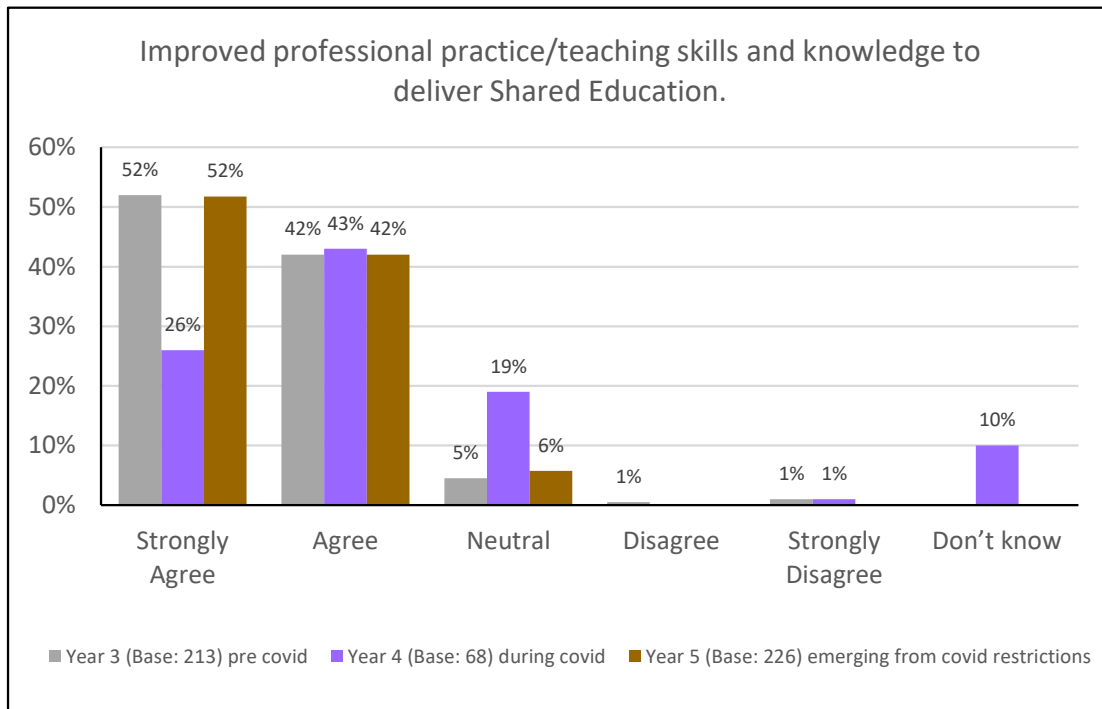
**Figure 6.2:** Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers – Training/ Educational Outcomes



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

94% of respondents, reflecting on Year 5, ‘strongly agreed’ (52%) or ‘agreed’ (42%) that their **professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved** due to involvement in SFTS/CASE, compared to 69% in Year 4 (during Covid). Year 5 results are on par with that reported in Year 3 (94%) i.e., pre-Covid levels.

**Figure 6.3:** Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers – Training/ Educational Outcomes



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

87% of respondents attributed the training provided by Project Partners as the means of helping them gain new knowledge and skills to deliver Shared Education. 70% also agreed that training has help them use IT equipment to facilitate shared activity. Specific training mentioned as being most helpful included: Media Initiative for Children, TPL courses to include Sharing Through Play, Outdoor Play, STEM, IT related courses, Digital Storytelling, Animation, Mental Wellbeing, and Collaborative Leadership.

Comments also reflected on extra responsibilities around planning and coordination of Shared Education has helped to develop expertise and confidence.

Time pressures and competing demands have meant that it is not always the lead practitioner or principal attending the training, which can sometimes limit buy-in from other staff. Turnover in staff has also meant that training cycles have been repeated to ensure adequate coverage and that individuals feel confident in the Shared Education delivery model.

Additional training and support needs suggested by respondents are grouped below:

#### SFTS/CASE – common training needs

General implementation:

- Increased opportunities to share information with other partners on types of shared class activities that work well, and to gather ideas for places to visit as shared outings.
- Shared class activities:
  - support with how to make mixed classes interactive and enjoyable to maximise the development of bonds/friendships.
  - ideas on how to deliver shared classes on subjects such as: animation/video production, computer coding, reading, literacy/creative writing, mathematics (problem solving and practical to encourage team building), building resilience, play-based learning, outdoor learning, STEM.
- Ensuring that terminology used in training aligned to both Northern Ireland/Ireland context.

Inclusion and emotional wellbeing:

- Mental health and wellbeing of children, how it could be benefited by incorporating shared classes.

Special Education Needs

- Courses/topics based around delivering the programme with children with SEN. Some respondents felt that the courses need to consider and be tailored to the specific needs of special school settings.

Wider Community

- Advise and training on how to extend Shared Education to the wider community – how to involve parents, how to promote the benefits of the initiative and contribute to wider shared/reconciliation outcomes.
- How to facilitate the conversation with parents around potentially sensitive areas about cultural differences.

#### SFTS (only)

- Supporting and managing wellbeing and emotional intelligence.
- Workshops specifically for parents of children with SEN and how they can benefit from SFTS.
- Parental engagement activities.

#### CASE (only)

- Would like training/workshops to be facilitated by teachers who have previously implemented CASE to share practical experience of what works.
- Advice on how teachers can help and support children who are involved in the projects but not enjoying the experience or gaining the desired outcomes.
- How best to embrace the use of IT for teacher collaboration and sharing of resourcing.

Some practitioners/teachers commented on their preference for face-to-face training events as they benefited from opportunities to network with others. The opportunity for formal and informal networking, and the space to acknowledge, celebrate and reflect on key successes is important to partnerships, who welcomed face-to-face contact to engage and disseminate key learning. CASE facilitated a number of 'Dissemination events' in the last Term of Year 5 (April to June 2022), and SFTS held a celebration event in June 2022 – these events have proven popular and have provided an opportunity for the wider partnership of schools to come together to share good practice and reflect on successes.

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (training & sharing ideas & good practice)

<p>Good training is a key to success. All our staff could participate in all training, and we passed information to each other. We as a team were extremely lucky to work together from the beginning of the programme. It took some time to learn how to use the IT equipment. We still feel that a little extra help in the IT would benefit us even more.</p> <p>Thoroughly enjoyed the Media Initiative training and found the resources extremely beneficial within the service.</p>	<p>When staff feel confident to deliver the programme, the children and families will experience enhanced outcomes due to the quality of the provision offered.</p> <p>Shared Education has been very enjoyable and very interesting. It was lovely to meet with staff from another setting and to visit each other's settings and to gain different ideas.</p>	<p>It has been a very positive experience for staff and has allowed us to collaborate and cooperate with staff from outside our setting, as well as having opportunities to visit each other's settings and share ideas. It has been very rewarding to build both professional and personal relationships with staff from our partner setting.</p>	<p>The cluster groups were particularly helpful as practitioners could share their practice.</p> <p>We have thoroughly enjoyed our Shared Education experience and can see development in ourselves as staff members which has had, and will continue to have, a positive impact on the children in our care.</p>	<p>In terms of staff development, participating in this programme allowed for lots of sharing of good practice and encouraged huge amounts of collaboration, self-evaluation and building of staff capacity.</p> <p>Staff capacity has continued to grow through participation in this partnership.</p>
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### CASE sample comments from teachers (training & sharing ideas & good practice)

<p>As two small schools- this has allowed us to access professional development for staff that we may not have had access to otherwise.</p> <p>Joint planning and collaborative facilitation of our shared aims provided fantastic benefits for the children.</p> <p>Staff have been given opportunities to enhance their professional development, pupils have had opportunities to be exposed to quality teaching and learning experiences. It has been a worthwhile journey and one I hope to continue on.</p>	<p>Our staff have seen first hand the benefits of working in collaboration with the partnership schools and are much better teachers because of it. The ethos of our school is grounded in sharing and collaborating in this way! Definitely the way forward.</p> <p>Teachers delivering the programme came together at least termly to plan and evaluate the programme. These sessions encouraged everyone to share their ideas and expertise. It also helped them to develop as colleagues and especially colleagues who would never otherwise have met.</p>	<p>The children benefitted from the drama classes but it also gave teachers new ideas and improved our confidence in teaching the subject.</p> <p>I found collaborating and communicating with the other two coordinating teachers invaluable to this process and provided increased confidence in my own abilities and enhanced my leadership skills.</p> <p>Teachers demonstrated best practice in shared lesson observations. Teachers worked together to reflect on their own and evaluate other teachers' development.</p>	<p>For teachers, and school support staff, participation in the partnership has afforded the school endless opportunities for ongoing professional development, networking, enhanced and strengthened professional relationships</p> <p>For the staff of each respective school the benefits far outweigh the time spent planning and preparing - networking, professional development, skill sharing, collaboration, confidence in leading activities, team teaching etc.</p>	<p>It is great to have a good relationship with schools in your local community where you can share resources and ideas leading to greater teaching and learning in all the schools involved.</p> <p>Professional relationships have been developed and nurtured over the years resulting in collaborative planning, sharing of resources, developing of joint ideas and initiatives. All collaboration has resulted in an enhanced learning experience for all pupils in our school community.</p>
<p>As a school we managed to dedicate a lot of attention to Digital Learning - something that would not have been possible in a small time scale, without the CPD, collaboration and sharing of ideas/initiatives across all partnership schools. Staff gained immensely from the CPD opportunities at TPL and at partnership meetings - this will support best practice and will enrich the teaching and learning experiences of current and future pupils. As a small school, being afforded the opportunity to meet regularly, share skills/talents and learn from other professional colleagues has been invaluable to progressing our learning environment and experiences.</p>		<p>I would thoroughly recommend Shared Education to all schools. It has impacted on our pupil outcomes and engagement. It has provided many opportunities for TPL for staff, opportunities to develop personally and as a team, given our middle leaders training and skills and helped to promote good community relations throughout the whole community.</p>		

## 6.4 Chapter Summary

In Year 5, 93% of respondents agreed that involvement in SFTS/CASE has **enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives** one of the underpinning output indicators of PEACE IV.

88% of respondents also agreed that Shared Education has fostered **cross-community co-operation**, this represents a 7% decrease from pre-pandemic levels in Year 3. Friendships and connections across the partnerships have been established have flourished, however limited face-to-face contact appears to have hampered progress during the pandemic.

94% of respondents agreed that their **professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved** due to involvement in SFTS/CASE. Continually upskilling will be required in instances of staff turnover/changes to ensure that shared classes are delivered to best effect, especially as partnerships emerge from the effects of the pandemic.

Additional training and support needs suggested by respondents include general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; using IT to deliver shared classes; incorporating mental health into activities; how to engage children; increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs; how to engage parents/wider community.

## 7 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### 7.1 Introduction

#### Terms of Reference:

Comment on the impact of Shared Education on the wider school community including governors, support staff and parents who will be exposed to the principles and ethos of Shared Education. Comment on the quality of cross-border and cross-community co-operation.

PEACE IV Shared Education aims to lead to attitudinal change in the wider school community including support staff, parents, and governors, who will all be exposed to the principles and ethos underpinning Shared Education, which in turn will contribute to and help sustain the positive impacts on children.

### 7.2 Method of Communication with School Community

A wide range of methods have been used to communicate with parents, governors, and the wider community about Shared Education. In Year 5 (Sept 2021 - June 2022), the most common method used across all channels was the setting/school website (Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1:** Methods used to engage/communicate with stakeholders about Shared Education

	Parents	Board of Governors/ Mgt Committee	Wider Community
Educational App, e.g., Seesaw/ Tapestry	76%	11%	10%
Social Media	72%	45%	65%
School website	71%	49%	57%
Newsletter	69%	35%	21%
Text messages	61%	17%	-
Email	52%	52%	8%
Face to face	41%	53%	17%
Online (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams)	28%	27%	5%
Leaflets	25%	10%	13%
Joint training for Board of Governors/Management	2%	10%	-
No contact (this academic year)	2%	5%	6%

Base: 220

Parental communication was ongoing throughout the year with updates and exchanges using applications such as Seesaw/Tapestry as the main channel used to communicate, followed by the setting/school social media accounts and website. SFTS and CASE newsletters (distributed quarterly) also proved to be popular means of communication, providing opportunities for partnerships to showcase their work to a wider audience and to promote the benefits of participating in Shared Education. It also provided a means for the Project Partners to stay connected with the partnership and provide any updates about administration, training and/or monitoring/evaluation processes.

Governors/Management Committee members engaged mostly by face-to-face meetings (as well as online meetings). Email and the school website were also used to engage with these stakeholders. Communication with the wider community was through more passive form of information sharing, with updates provided on schools' Facebook/Twitter pages and/or the SFTS and CASE newsletters and local newspapers (where relevant).



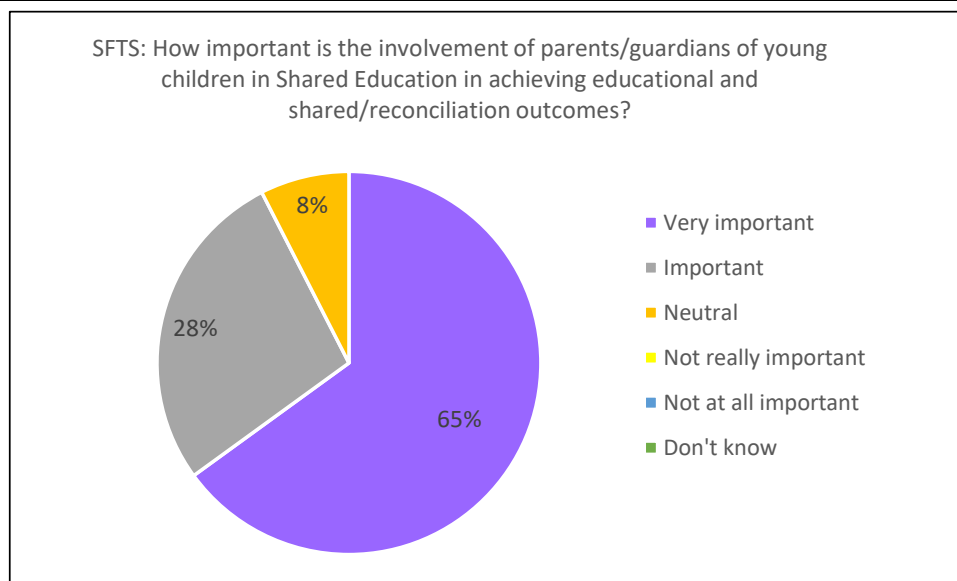
## 7.3 Parental Engagement & Impact

### 7.3.1 Parental Engagement

CASE did not focus on delivering activities specifically for parents. Due to the large number of schools and primary/post primary aged children involved, activities are less focused on parents. In general, parental engagement is linked to ad-hoc or one-off events such as launch or celebration events. In the latter part of Year 3 and all of Year 4 and Year 5, these events were restricted due to Covid-19 and therefore direct parental involvement was limited.

The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement, with an additional target of 1,100 parents to participate in shared workshops. Since the project inception parents have been engaged as a core part of SFTS delivery. Based on Project Partner records, a total of 918 parents attended SFTS information sessions and workshops. The focus was to identify the importance of parents' engagement in their child's learning at home, at school, and in the wider community. Parental engagement was supported by discussion between parents/practitioners and on how families can build on what they already do to help their children's learning and provide a supportive home learning environment. Figure 7.1 shows that 93% of SFTS respondents (i.e. practitioners and teachers) to the online survey agreed that parental involvement is particularly important for young children as shared and educational outcomes are more likely to be achieved with parental engagement.

**Figure 7.1:** Importance of parental engagement for young children



Base: 40 - SFTS: Year 5 results

Prior to Covid-19, parents volunteered to attend/support shared sessions, as well as volunteering to facilitate demonstrations e.g., fitness, preparing food, 'show and tell'. There were also other more passive forms of parental engagement, involving parents attending shared events such as: launch event, concerts, fundraising events, sporting activities, celebration event/showcasing children's work. In Year 4 and Year 5, parental engagement was understandably limited, with engagement relating to updates on shared sessions.

Interestingly, a number of partnerships commented that parental engagement has actually improved and increased in Year 4 and Year 5 (when compared to pre Covid), as online methods are easier for working parents to engage via mobile apps and zoom meetings.

### CASE sample comments from practitioners/teachers (type of parental engagement)

<p>Joint publications have heightened awareness of Shared Education and its benefits at all levels throughout the school community. It has also helped to forge greater links with the feeder preschool and P1 intake has grown as a result. The children enjoying and delighting in activities has motivated parents to embrace Shared Education further.</p>	<p>Established relationships between parents and community at local community sport clubs and transitioning for P7 children to post-primary. Shared Education has now become part of the school routine that parents are aware of and involved - through parent helpers on trips and Shared Education days.</p> <p>Joint community events such as a shared sports day (pre-Covid-19). Also, we are finding that parents from our partner school are supporting our fundraising events and vice versa.</p>	<p>Shared Education posts and photos on our school Facebook page always gain very good interaction among parents and people in the wider community. Parents particularly enjoy viewing the photos of the learning activities and have left positive comments below many photos. Some parents shared the school posts about the Shared Education projects so their family and friends can view them too.</p> <p>We haven't had a conversation with the parents in regards to it. Parents have not been in the school/involved in events due to Covid-19.</p>	<p>Parents have enjoyed observing their child's involvement in Shared Education. We have involved local community groups in Shared Education workshops and all photographs and information is shared through our sharing platforms.</p> <p>Prior to Covid-19 we really enjoyed bringing both school communities together for shared events, should they be celebration events, pupil events or a shared governor meeting, there was always positive engagement. To that extent strong relationships between the schools have been a key factor in the success.</p>	<p>We had a joint celebratory 5K run to end two programmes in our partnership. We had huge support and volunteers from the wider community of all three schools helping out at the event. We had parental involvement from all three schools as well. The children had a fantastic time and they all supported each other to get over the finish line. We had a group warm up provided by a teacher from one of the schools and the local community police officer came out to facilitate the event. There were refreshments, medals and trophies for the children.</p>
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### SFTS sample comments from practitioners/teachers (type of parental engagement)

<p>Parents are traditionally difficult to get to come to parent engagement activities but they were much more comfortable to join in when it was online on Tapestry which meant they could pick it up when the time suited them best and because it was recorded and photographs they could revisit and revisit with their children and reinforce the learning.</p> <p>We kept our parents as informed and involved as possible through Seesaw communications.</p>	<p>We have shared any Sharing from the Start related information and photos (from our group) through Seesaw. Parents have commented about their children talking about seeing their 'new friends' on the TV screen.</p> <p>The children loved the experiences of going out and about and having the trips on buses, the train and getting to visit each other's pre-school was great. One of the biggest highlights was participating in the St Patrick's Day parade and winning the overall best float and also going on the train.</p>	<p>We share all information (pictures, videos, art pieces), we encourage parents to ask the children about the children from our partner preschool. We asked them to write what their children said about it. Parents were helpful when we were going to meet in other places than our own preschool. They brought their children to other Service and some also helped us bring all the children up to the preschool.</p> <p>We have great feedback from our community, especially from the committee and organisers of St Patrick Day.</p>	<p>Pre-Covid-19, parents have accompanied us on trips for contact sessions, as well as providing their expertise in line with our theme/educational aims e.g., a parent provided yoga sessions; a parent facilitated dance workshops.</p> <p>Parents' involvement extends and supports our work. Parents helped us to create and ensure a positive and safe environment for learning.</p>	<p>Prior to Covid-19 parents came on community visits with us and to our days when we shared activities in the service.</p> <p>We haven't had the opportunity to be seen out in public with our partner schools due to Covid-19.</p> <p>We would have liked to have had more face-to-face sessions to develop friendships between parents/carers.</p>
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### 7.3.2 Impact on Parents

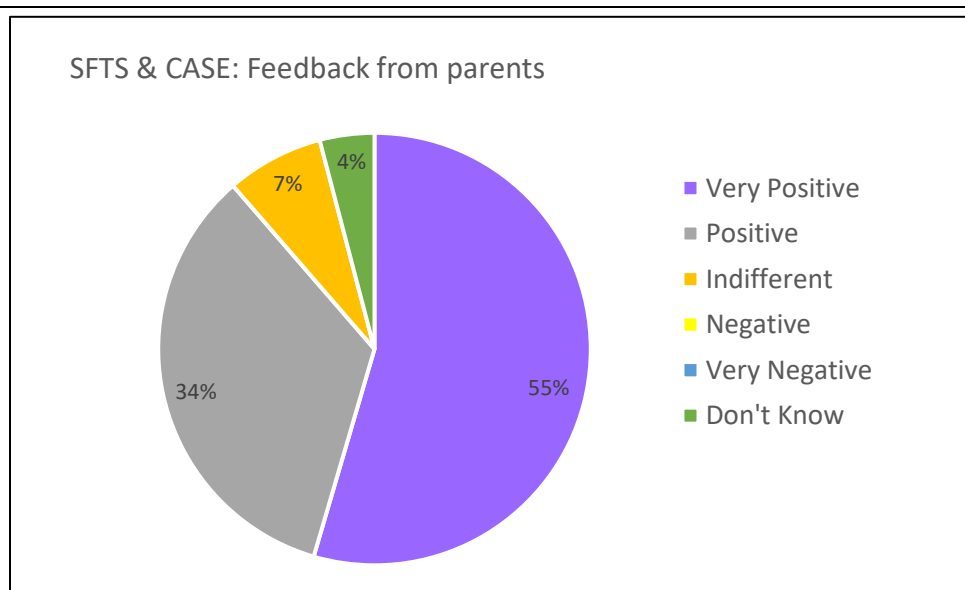
Overall parents were supportive of their child/ren participation in shared classes. There have only been a few isolated incidents where parents have not allowed their child to participate and/or attend external venues perceived to be from one community. Reassuringly, after parents had an opportunity to observe shared classes their attitudes shifted, and they permitted their child to attend shared classes. Whilst only few in numbers, these incidents prove that Shared Education has helped to change attitudes and behaviours.

Benefits of parental involvement include:

- Parents' support or otherwise is an important influencing factor on their children, and with their support can continue to drive forward the premise of Shared Education and contribute to the longevity of the outcomes achieved.
- Creates a ripple effect so that Shared Education can be extended to home, where parents and children can openly talk about their shared experiences.
- Provides opportunities for parents to meet in a different pre-school/school, thereby creating the space to communicate with other parents leading to increased understanding and appreciation of different communities. This can help reduce attitudinal barriers to participating in Shared Education and minimise any concerns of parents/wider community.
- Helped to support parents and children in the transition from pre-school to primary or from primary to post primary, not only in terms of increased confidence but it has also enhanced choice for parents/children with the option of a cross-community/ integrated school due to a positive shift in attitudes towards shared classes.

Practitioners and teachers were asked to describe the general feedback from the parents of those children participating in SFTS/CASE about the impact of Shared Education, with 89% of respondents to the online survey agreeing that feedback was 'very positive' (55%) or 'positive' (34%). Whilst a positive result, it does represent a decrease from Year 4 (96%) and Year 3 (97%), indicating that this is an area of focus for any future activities in a post-pandemic era.

**Figure 7.2:** Feedback from parents



Base: 220 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

### CASE sample comments from practitioners/teachers (parental engagement & feedback)

<p>As a small minority school, I feel Shared Education has huge buy-in from our BoM, our parent cohort, our pupils and staff as well as the wider school community. I feel staff and parents see it as an <b>ideal way to build awareness, accommodate diversity and empower young people to share their voice.</b></p>	<p>People being open to the experience of children having a Shared Education is very important. When people witness the positive effects it has on children, they agree that children should continue to be allowed to engage in shared activities with children within their partnership.</p>	<p>Some parents were reluctant for their child/ren to take part in the programme altogether and some had objections to content e.g., alternative sports, some sports not comfortable. An example is that one pupil's parents give permission for them to attend the meet up- but however this pupil is not usually allowed to go on external visits or mix with other schools.</p>	<p>When we brought the communities together it was very enjoyable and feedback from parents and children was so positive and encouraging. I would wholeheartedly recommend Shared Education to others.</p>	<p>Parents were very positive about the programme. It gave children the opportunity to meet others before heading to secondary school.</p>
<p>When parents see their children enjoy taking part in the activities, it, in turn, has a positive impact on them and their families.</p>	<p>Parents in particular were really appreciative of the opportunities the programme provided.</p>	<p>Parents are delighted their children get to meet and work with children from another school.</p>	<p>Parents have been very positive about all the extra learning opportunities and resources which have been provided through our partnership.</p>	<p>Parents have commented how much their child/children have enjoyed the sessions. It has been incredibly beneficial for everyone involved and we would highly recommend it to other schools.</p>

### SFTS sample comments from practitioners (parental engagement & feedback)

<p>As adults we all have our own beliefs and traditions. Being involved in the Sharing from the Start programme helped parents/guardians look at their attitudes and values of other communities. It helped them become aware, that they maybe, were the ones with the issues not their children. They realised, like many of the staff, that as adults we need to be careful of what we say and do as our children learn from adults involved in their lives.</p>	<p>Even very young children can pick up on the attitudes (both positive and negative) of their significant adults so if adults are active participants and are displaying positivity towards the project, the children are more likely to be enthusiastic and engaged as well.</p>	<p>Parents gave good feedback on what was happening, relaying it from being shared from their children after the events. We asked parents to complete a parents' voice on the Sharing from the Start programme. All our feedback was positive.</p>	<p>Our children and parents that have been involved have all benefited from the new links and friendships too. Parents have been reinforcing the same message at home.</p>	<p>Our parents and governors fully support our engagement in this programme. Both parties feel that children are being provided with a wonderful opportunity to broaden engagements with others in a meaningful way.</p>
<p>The parents on both sides were so accepting of the programme and delighted to hear about their child's visit to the partner school. I feel in the current climate the programme had a <b>real impact in promoting reconciliation and cross community friendships.</b></p>	<p>Lots of positive feedback about how the children have been chatting about their Shared Education experiences. The feedback from the parents was very positive, they noticed great excitement about our shared sessions especially when we were able to do outings.</p>	<p>It allows all the parents to get to know one another and build friendships. The children love it when their parents are more involved or attend the service. They get such pride showing off their artwork.</p>	<p>Parents are learning about the programme that their child is involved in and learning about their child's interests and how they can develop their interests in their home environment.</p>	
<p>The Protestant / Catholic / non-religion has changed dramatically over the past few years in our nursery school and we firmly believe it is because of the influence of Sharing from the Start. Parents are now feeling more confident to send their children because they know we are genuinely open to all and we are currently undergoing Integrated Education because of the positive impact of Sharing from the Start. Thank you so much. The parents and management were very positive about the learning goals achieved and working with cross community to build bridges and friendships.</p>		<p>All the benefits of Sharing from the Start are reinforced more effectively when the parents are fully engaged and feel confident to do this at home at a time that suits them. We have always found the parents we did get to attend previous events were the parents who were confident and it was only a small percentage but the number of hits we had on Tapestry was to be honest very emotional when our ICT coordinator was able to feed back to us who was on Tapestry, how many times they were on Tapestry and the comments from parents on Tapestry would have melted your heart. Parents who would not be confident to talk directly to us, or speak up in a public gathering but they could comment on Tapestry. A really great year despite Covid-19 restrictions.</p>		

#### 7.3.3 Parent Focus Groups – summary of feedback

Two parent focus groups were carried out between March and May 2022, one each for parents of pre-school (5 parents) and primary/post primary children (7 parents). Parents were asked to reflect on the types of activities they were engaged in, as well as their children, along with the benefits of participations and impacts gained.

#### Types of Activities:

- Respondents reflected that there were greater opportunities for parental involvement prior to the pandemic, such as attending and volunteering at events, supporting fundraising activities, supporting celebration/showcasing events of children's work.

- During the pandemic, partnerships endeavoured to communicate with parents about virtual activities. Parents understood the unavoidable disruption due to the pandemic and appreciated that partnerships did their best to continue to engage children during lockdown, with a range of online activities that made the most of the technology available.
- In Year 5, as Covid-19 restrictions eased, parents noted the need to protect the children through small ‘bubbles’ and prioritise any opportunity for children to mix with one another rather than involving parents. More recently (Term 3, Year 5) parents recounted that they and their children welcomed shared classes resuming, allowing children to mix on a face-to-face basis again. For parents living in rural settings, this opportunity to meet a wider peer group was noted as especially important for their child.
- Parents were able to name a wide range of activities, demonstrating that they have been kept informed about Shared Education sessions, either from their child or via school communication channels. These included sporting activities, outings, quizzes, wellbeing sessions, gardening, and outdoor play, as well as specific educational activities such as coding and online maths games. Parents recognised that new equipment has enabled schools to widen the curriculum delivery and enhance children’s educational experience.
- Favourite activities differed, however parents noted that those that involved physical movement, such as song and dance, were felt to be most enjoyable, while also bringing a wider health benefit and helping their children to better mix with one another, which gave them a chance to get to know one another and build friendships.

**Benefits:**

- Parents feel that Shared Education has been extremely beneficial for their children, in terms of supporting friendship building, developing confidence, and giving children the opportunity to try new things and have broader social and educational experience.
- Parents reflected on how they have observed that their child has increased confidence and ability to mix and interact with new people, as well as improved self-esteem. They believe that these benefits will positively influence their child’s engagement outside of school, helping them to mix with others in their neighbourhood or in local clubs and sporting activities more easily.
- Parents are pleased that children have had the chance to mix with those from different backgrounds that they would not have traditionally met before. This is important as many children live in small or predominantly single-religion areas, therefore mixing would not have previously occurred. Parents note that in many cases this has led to genuine friendships, rather than just an awareness of others.
- Several parents highlighted the importance of these cross-community friendships for supporting transition to post-primary school, as at this stage children often find themselves in much bigger classes/schools; seeing a familiar face from Shared Education days has really been a benefit in helping children to settle in. Experience of mixing with different children in bigger groups also prepared children for bigger classes and range of subjects/teachers in post-primary school.
- Shared Education has also been a benefit for children in rural communities, and in particular during Covid-19 lockdown, as it has widened what is normally a very small pool of peers and has helped reduce social isolation. The focus on wellbeing activities has also been welcomed by children and parents.
- Parents of pre-school aged children felt that their children were still too young to recognise difference or have negative feelings towards others. However, for this reason, they agreed that it is the right time to introduce discussions and begin to normalise difference. These parents strongly agreed that their children made friends with the other children, rather than just joining in an activity with them. While the friendships have not necessarily extended beyond the preschool settings, parents feel that Shared Education has given their children the confidence to mix with other children and build friendships outside of preschool. Again, this is important given the loss of socialisation opportunities during the pandemic.



## CASE sample comments from Parents

*I think we've moved far further on now after you know 10 years than people would have anticipated. Our children definitely would have no connection whatsoever between the religious backgrounds of different children, in fact now some of their best friends are from different religious backgrounds and I think we definitely need to be encouraging more of that within communities especially with us being so rural here and so many people coming from different backgrounds. Our children definitely wouldn't have made any connection whatsoever in regard to religious background.*

*Because as we live in a rural community and didn't even know our neighbours. They all go to different schools and now they have formed a relationship with them through the project which I think is very important in the rural community that we're living. That should definitely be encouraged.*

*In terms of transition to secondary school – for our two eldest boys, it was a great help for them because they met people when they went up to the [local sports arena] and they met up with them again through football and it really just made it easier to make new friends.*

*They've done a lot of activities. My eldest is now at college and she did a couple of years with the programme; she did rock climbing and dancing and a few other things. When we spoke about it, one of the things that struck me was she started at the Community College and she mentioned a couple of the girls' names that she met there and they've become her best friends now at the college. She said when she went down there it was a very daunting experience but to meet a few familiar faces was good for her so in my opinion even that wee bit was a huge success for the programme.*

*My son actually plays football with some of the boys that he met at [the partner school] are now in his football team so they would visit us and play at our house. He wouldn't have had reason or wouldn't have ever maybe met them before, it's just given them lots of opportunities!*

*Last year there was a lot of health and wellbeing activities too which was good because there was a lot of lockdown for the kids and mental health was obviously very important. They were well organised activities I have to say and it was well run.*

*It's the little things that made the big difference, like familiarity with faces they've seen before especially going from a small school of less than 30 pupils to a secondary school of over 1,000 pupils - it's a big jump and just having that familiarity is great alongside the bonds they've made before with other kids from everywhere. So it helps with transition.*

*There was an element of lockdown and through Covid-19 they couldn't get together but our schools hosted interactive quizzes so they would have called each other up on Fridays and did like a Disney quiz or a movie quiz and they would have tuned into each other's assemblies and stuff. I think that was really important that they didn't lose that relationship.*

*There are children who wouldn't normally have played Gaelic that come from [the other school in the partnership]. They play Gaelic football and compete with our kids too. That wouldn't normally have happened but they had friends that wanted to join them.*

*We're a very rural school and there's a lot of mixed pupils from different backgrounds going to different schools in different areas and we have neighbours that some of our children might not ever have met if it wasn't for this programme. Now they have this opportunity to meet others and I think it's a great exercise when they go to secondary school and they move on and they meet them.*

*Getting to know other kids and learning just to work with other kids that they hadn't met before as those are the crucial skills when they go on to secondary schools and they're put into groups with people that they don't know and having different teachers from all different backgrounds as well. It was all positive, they all really enjoyed it.*

*The schools had a coding programme called Sphero or where they got to develop [computer] code to get a ball to move. There were flying drones and other things involving coding stuff. My eldest girl has discovered Minecraft and is mad about anything relating to computers and coding. They had access to resources that they wouldn't have had such as the outdoor play equipment and stuff.*

## SFTS sample comments from Parents

*If you teach them when they are young that you can support different teams but still get along, that's what's most important. I think this should be taught and encouraged from the preschool age and upwards.*

*Now is the age [4 years] where it doesn't matter to them and it's the time to make it normal and get across that it's not us and them and that we can be friends with everybody.*

*Wee kids like this wouldn't even consider race or religion because they are just interested in bopping around and seeing what activities or fun things they can get up.*

*He definitely made friends at the singing and dancing in the local hall. He just absolutely loved it and he met a wee friend that he danced with.*

*The fact that they are meeting each other in preschool is just great... it ups the ante and boosts their confidence because conversations happen early which is really good.*

*I think at the age of 4, if someone wears a football top it's just that person supports this team and another person supports that team. I think when they get a bit older, they realise the meaning of that, and it becomes more political.*

*We moved here not that long ago. Before started Shared Education, my girl was shy and a bit backward about meeting new people and making friends. They weren't allowed out for two years to mix and go into people's houses and back gardens. [With the end of Covid-19 restrictions] now that they are allowed to meet other people, she has that bit more confidence in mixing with a small group of people her age and it's just a lot easier for her now to go out and ask the wee girl next door her name and things like that. She has grown in confidence, and it has been confidence building.*

*There was a lot of virtual activities. The [playgroup] had pictures up with the kids names they were sending each other wee videos. They did what they could through virtual [activities]. And they sent 'get to know me' videos to each other.*

*My child is quite quiet and for her to sit and talk and just tell me about the new friends she's made, it's a real delight for me personally to know that she can do that. It's just great for her to tell me about the different things in her class.*

*My child would be very quiet and very shy so for him to meet new people and to be mixing were real wins for him. Having different [settings] come together is fantastic and it really brings him out of his shell. He interacts a bit better, starts to talk more with others and he has made new friends. Over Covid-19, he didn't get that opportunity as he was stuck in the house for two years; there was no interacting you know, but they are interacting now, and it is really beneficial.*

*Without this initiative there would be very little opportunity to forge relationships cross-community. It's very beneficial!*

*Being from a rural community, it's not often that kids get to meet people that they don't know because the circles are small. If you were living in a town or city, there are more people to meet, so rural settings really do benefit a lot from it and children get to meet people from different communities and mix with people that they wouldn't normally see on a daily basis. It's great for them to get to mix with other communities and meet new friends, it really is beneficial.*

*Shared Education is important in terms of their education because they learn from doing and they learn from seeing how other people do things; if they see other people going up and making friends they'll follow. They make art pieces and send them to each other. The other playgroup do things differently to our playgroup so it's educational for them. She's learning as well, and they get to learn from each other.*

*I think it's very educational and it's very beneficial and I think it's just fantastic that they're able to learn new things and they get opportunities to mix with other kids. Hopefully now things are starting to ease us adults will be able to move in and experience things with the kids. It's enjoyable for them and it's good for their mental health.*

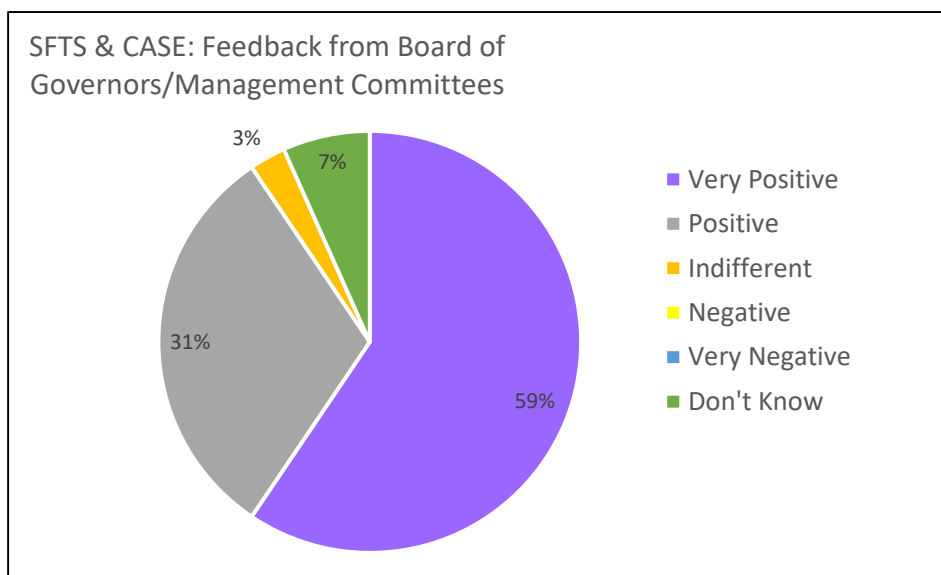


## 7.4 Governor Engagement & Impact

Boards of Government/Management Committees are committed and engaged, showing support for their respective setting/school's participation in Shared Education. For most, Shared Education is a key agenda item discussed at governor meetings, with key updates communicated as to the outcomes of shared sessions and training provided by PEACE IV funding. Governors appreciate the additional funding and resources provide and regard this as a positive contributor to meeting school priorities. Many governors are also parents of participating children and can therefore appreciate the benefits from a dual perspective. Governors also relayed feedback as to the wider benefits of Shared Education, in terms of generating support for cross-community activities and creating a shared future.

Practitioners and teachers were asked to comment on the views of their Boards of Governors/Management Committees, with 90% of online survey respondents describing the general feedback from their governors on the impact of Shared Education as 'very positive' (59%) or 'positive' (31%).

**Figure 7.3:** Feedback from School Leadership Teams

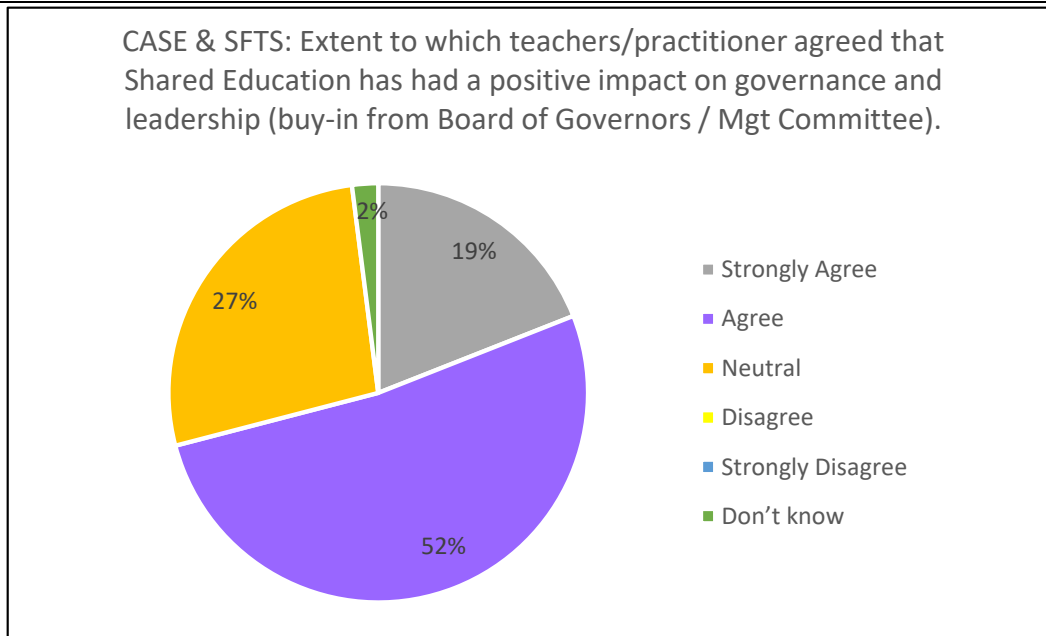


Base: 220 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

SFTS committed to an additional output relating to a target of '93 Pre-school Boards of Governors/Management Committees will be engaged in workshops and supported to develop and implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution'. As such, it is evident that progress has been made throughout the last five years, with governors volunteering at shared sessions and/or attending joint SFTS meetings/events with partner settings; and/or attending SFTS training. SFTS monitoring records indicate that 90+ pre-school governors/management committees have engaged date i.e., representing almost all the participating settings. This has helped to build support for Shared Education and to develop the capacity of leaders and management to contribute to sustaining shared activities in the future.

Both SFTS and CASE respondents (71%) acknowledged the positive impact that Shared Education has brought in developing governance and leadership skills, with governors showing their buy-in to the initiative and providing their support to the partnership at a wider community level. There is also evidence of one SFTS partnerships considering Integrated status, as a direct result and positive affirmation of their experience of Shared Education.

**Figure 7.4:** Impact on Governance and Leadership



Base: 220 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

**Sample comments (Feedback from Governors)**

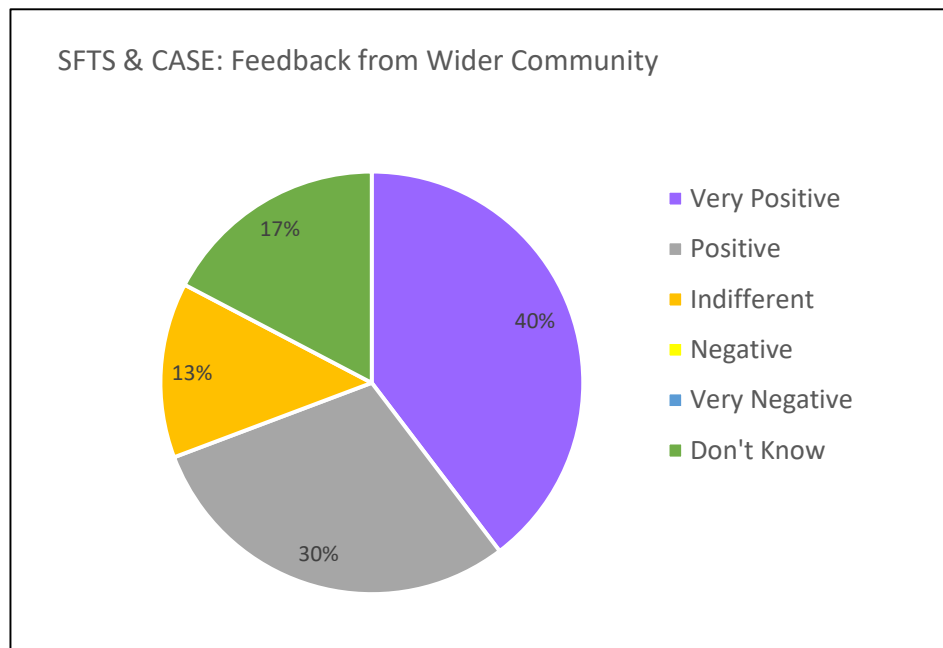
<p><i>All stakeholders fully engaged and committed to the objectives of the Shared Education. We have always benefitted from the fact that principals, teachers, parents and governors were fully supportive of participation in Shared Education.</i></p> <p><i>Governors recognise the value of Shared Education in enhancing community relationships and raising attainment.</i></p> <p><i>Members of Governors and community see the happy engagement of our pupils and hear firsthand how enjoyable activities are. Governors are supportive of Shared Education and the benefits to our pupils.</i></p>	<p><i>Our teachers and staff, parents and governors were fully committed to the programme. The workload was shared equally, as far as possible, and everyone was determined to implement a programme that would benefit both schools.</i></p> <p><i>BoM are delighted with opportunity available to children to meet and engage with local school. They are also delighted with the funding provided to assist with curriculum areas.</i></p>	<p><i>We loved this programme and the Board of Governors and families are now in the process of engaging with Integrated Education status as a direct result of this Sharing from the Start as our mix of religion has changed dramatically over the past 3 years to the benefit of everyone. We also have received a rising number of children for whom English is an additional language and children with Special Educational Needs and this is without question the benefit of Sharing from the Start.</i></p>	<p><i>Board of Governors kept abreast of developments in CASE during meetings and updates are made consistently on social media and through the section on our school website for Shared Education.</i></p> <p><i>The parents and BoM witnessed first hand the curriculum being delivered in a creative and fun manner to the benefit of the students and staff.</i></p> <p><i>Governors feel that the partnership has enhanced the school development plan.</i></p>	<p><i>Since embarking on the Shared Education programme, the benefits for our school have been great, especially as the programme is well-embedded in our schools. Governor support has always been strong. We have developed strong relationships, we have been able to access increased resources but most importantly we have benefitted from the shared collaboration and professional knowledge and skills.</i></p>
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## 7.5 Connection to the Wider Community

In Year 4 and Year 5 opportunities for wider community involvement was limited to passive forms of communication via the settings/school's social media, newsletters on website, and some coverage in local newspapers. There were a few examples of cases where community groups, or services (such as Fire Service) engage in a 'virtual' tour of their premises to engage children, which worked well in the context of face-to-face restrictions. When restrictions eased in the latter part of Year 5, there is evidence of community contact increasing once more, with examples of children using local facilities, beach clean-ups with the community, concerts delivered by partnerships now open to wider community to attend. Many partnerships noted that wider community engagement represents untapped potential to promote the shared/reconciliation benefits of Shared Education and remains a development area.

70% of practitioners/teachers responding to the Year 5 online survey agreed that feedback from the wider community (based on informal discussions and anecdotal evidence) was 'very positive' (40%) or 'positive' (30%).

**Figure 7.5:** Feedback form Wider Community



Base: 220 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

In pre-Covid years, there were many opportunities for children to have a greater sense and connection with their wider community, as follows:

- Exploring their local area through shared learning activities, travelling on a bus to partner pre-school/school, and gaining awareness of different areas and confidence using different community venues in their locality and beyond.
- Children benefited from nature trails and various team building excursions within their locality, again furthering their appreciation of a wider sense of their own environment.
- Greater appreciation for the wider community in terms of knowledge of customs, festivals, and celebrations was also a benefit of participation.

- Pre-school/school has become more visible in community, from visiting residential homes, links to local theatre, utilising community space/halls and resources, involving local community centres and sporting groups, and extending invitations to the wider community to facilitate and/or attend shared events (e.g., Police, Fire Service).
- The use of local venues to facilitate some shared classes/sessions has also contributed towards changing the perception of parents. Both communities now feel more comfortable utilising venues, associated with 'the other community'.
- Partnerships involved in cross-border linkages (i.e., 18 partnerships) have the added dimension and benefit of children experiencing a wider sense of community, outside their own jurisdiction. Respondents commented on the benefit of working with partner(s) in a cross-border context, where appreciation was gained for the similarities and different context, as well as opportunities to learn from each jurisdiction to enhance the curriculum, as well as contributing to practice development.

The forthcoming PEACEPLUS (2021-2027) Programme overview outlines plans for a new 'Shared Learning Together' Programme (€51.3m). Importantly this outline references 'a broader participant base to include the wider community' and 'following principles within the SFTS model with a focus on the wider family'. The 'use of digital based approaches as a means of developing and sustaining shared education partnerships' is also referenced.

### CASE sample comments from teachers (wider community engagement)

<p><i>The wider community enjoyed seeing the children work together and use local facilities.</i></p> <p><i>Sports groups, community groups and other groups now support and help each other in the use of facilities and services when possible. There are strong relationships established between schools in curricular and extra-curricular activities.</i></p> <p><i>Our involvement in Shared Education has improved our school community as a whole. This includes: our school environment; learning experiences; cross-community links and Governor support.</i></p>	<p><i>Shared Education helps develop community links and partnerships with local business and organisations.</i></p> <p><i>We have shared what we have been doing on social media, however we cannot be certain as to what the wider community thinks of what we are aiming to achieve.</i></p> <p><i>All aspects of the local school and wider community witnessed the benefits of the project as it impacted on the pupils, staff and the physically enhanced school environment.</i></p>	<p><i>Both partnership schools are in close proximity to each other and until Léargas there were no links to unite everyone. Now with our shared learning many friendships have been formed and strengthened both in school and in the wider community. Children meet at out of school activities and are jointly playing football at the local ground.</i></p> <p><i>Physically in the person we performed a concert for the whole community of the three schools in the partnership.</i></p>	<p><i>Not sure if the wider community are as aware of the programme as they could be.</i></p> <p><i>Due to Covid-19 restrictions, there was less interaction with the wider community from 2020.</i></p> <p><i>Shared Education has greatly benefitted staff and pupils on many levels. Not so much in the community.</i></p> <p><i>Wider community - this is an area we are looking to develop, moving forward.</i></p>	<p><i>We haven't really reached out to the wider community outside of our families, except for a poster in the local shop.</i></p> <p><i>The wider community is the hardest group to impact upon - this has been impossible due to Covid-19 in past two years.</i></p> <p><i>Realise that we need to promote Shared Education in the wider community and make them aware of the importance and significance of the project.</i></p>
<p><i>Beach clean up has benefited the wider community; this is something we strive to continue as part of our eco club. Parents are now more aware of the facilities available on our doorstep. The community facilities are being utilised by pupils.</i></p> <p><i>The friendships the children have developed through the partnership. The fun and enjoyment the children have had. The school development opportunities for staff/management/governors. This all has a positive knock-on effect on the wider community.</i></p>		<p><i>It has improved cross community links between pupils which has impacted positively on parents and the wider community. As a result of our forest schools sessions, four other schools within the local area are working together to build resources for outdoor learning.</i></p> <p><i>The celebration events where programmes are showcased have been a highlight of the programmes in previous years. This year we intend to create videos to share in social media. This visual impact of just how much the children do together and their smiles especially is essential to put across the benefits of Shared Education.</i></p>		

## 7.6 Chapter Summary

Community Connections is one of the four pillars of the Shared Education Framework. The involvement of the wider community ensures that Shared Education extends beyond the confines of the immediate pre-school/school community.

### **Parents**

The vast majority of respondents (89%) described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from parents as 'very positive' (55%) or 'positive' (34%). Whilst a positive result, it does represent a decrease from Year 4 (96%) and Year 3 (97%), indicating that this is an area of focus for any future activities in a post-pandemic era.

There are differences between the models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project. The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement, whereas CASE did not focus on delivering activities specifically for parents. The involvement of parents has the potential for greater impact and achievement of PEACE IV peace and reconciliation aims. Connections with the wider community can also provide an important vehicle in which to build a shared and cohesive society, and as such will be a focus of future Shared Education interventions under PEACEPLUS.

### **Boards of Governors/Management Committees**

This positivity extends to parents with 90% of respondents agreeing that feedback from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as 'very positive' (59%) or 'positive' (31%). Furthermore, respondents (71%) acknowledged the positive impact that Shared Education has brought in developing governance and leadership skills, with governors showing their buy-in to the initiative and providing their support to the partnership at a wider community level.

### **Wider Community**

In terms of the wider community 70% agreed that feedback was 'very positive' (34%) or 'positive' (36%) with the remaining 30% stating that they did not know. When restrictions eased in the latter part of Year 5, there is evidence of community contact increasing once more. Many partnerships noted that wider community engagement represents untapped potential to promote the shared/reconciliation benefits of Shared Education and remains a development area.

## 8 IMPLEMENTATION – CHALLENGES & KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

### 8.1 Introduction

**Terms of Reference:** provide an account of key success factors and challenges affecting impact achievement.

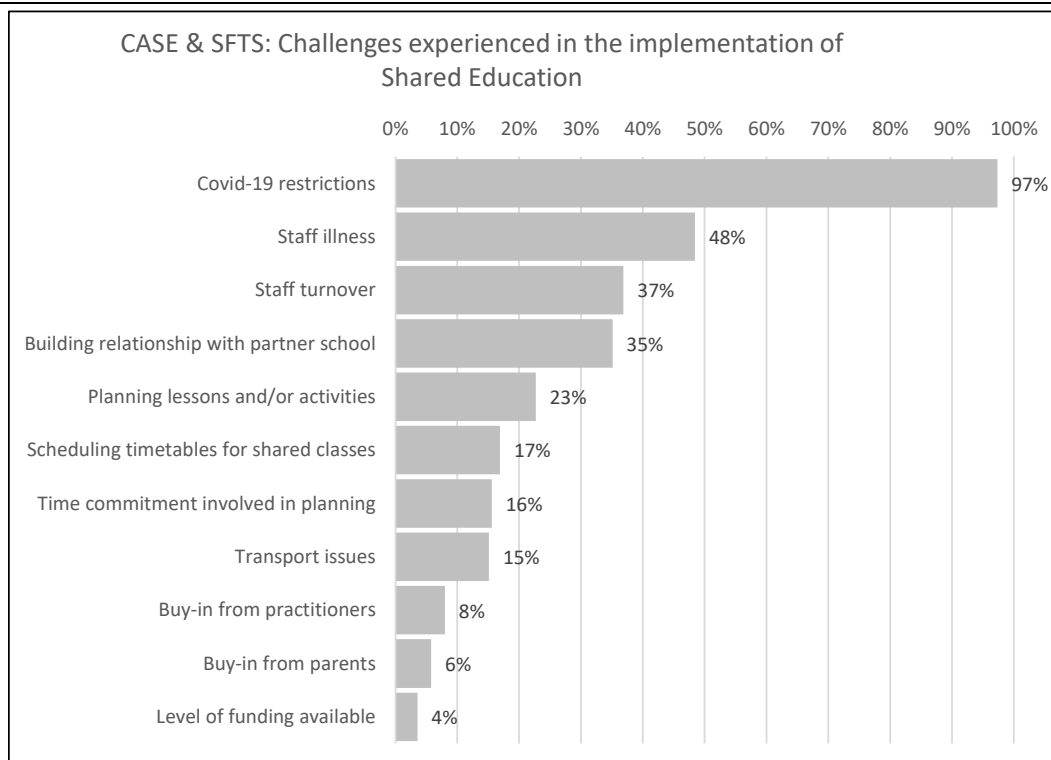
This chapter outlines feedback on the **challenges and how these have been overcome / key success factors based** on a range of qualitative data including feedback from early years practitioners and teachers via the online survey; interviews with Project Partners; focus group with SEYS, interviews with DOs; focus groups with teachers; review of monitoring information; eleven case studies and associated consultations.

### 8.2 Challenges

#### 8.2.1 Global Covid-19 pandemic halted progress

The main factor impacting achievement is the outworking of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020. Covid-19 has been an unprecedented disruptor to Shared Education, having a profound impact on the momentum gained for Shared Education over the last number of years under PEACE IV. In Year 5 (2021/22) the restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic continued to hamper progress of shared sessions in Term 1 (Sept-Dec 2021) and Term 2 (Jan-Mar 2022), with a focus on virtual contact remaining as the main channel. However, by Term 3 (April-June 2022) partnership were able to resume face-to-face shared classes. Given this context, it is not surprising that almost all (97%) respondents to the survey highlighted Covid-19 as the biggest challenge. Related to Covid-19 is the high level of staff illness (48%) and staff turnover (37%).

**Figure 8.1:** Implementation Challenges



Base: 220 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

## CASE sample comments from teachers (challenges)

<p><i>With Covid-19 restrictions, it meant that we couldn't meet face-to-face. We had a number of vulnerable pupils in our partnership, so it was not safe to meet. Outbreaks in both schools meant that there were issues with staffing etc.</i></p> <p><i>The biggest challenge we had was the restrictions from Covid-19. There were varying degrees of restrictions on both sides of the border and so it was very difficult.</i></p> <p><i>Shared Education, while worthwhile, is time-consuming to plan for and deliver.</i></p>	<p><i>Covid-19 restrictions impacted face-to-face meetings. Staff illness in schools impacted on the staff members available for meeting up as pupil/staff ratios had to be adhered to.</i></p> <p><i>Some teachers were reluctant to engage in the Shared Education journey - seeing it as something else they have to do.</i></p>	<p><i>Staff and student illness. Activities had to be rescheduled if too many students were absent from school. Also if staff were off, we rearranged these dates.</i></p>	<p><i>Lots of staff changes/illness meant that it was difficult to grow relationships between teachers who were new to the programme; more from a practical point of view than motivation of staff.</i></p>	<p><i>There were a lot of absences this year between staff and pupils due to Covid-19 so this led to difficulties organising lessons between both schools at times. It was important that the health and wellbeing of our vulnerable staff and pupils were protected at all times.</i></p>
	<p><i>There has been a change in principal teacher in our partner school and it has taken some time to begin establishing a working relationship particularly during Covid-19 times.</i></p>	<p><i>Covid-19 has impacted on teachers' confidence and ability to lead face-to-face Shared Education activities and developing the relationships across our community.</i></p>	<p><i>This year we have experienced a high number of teacher illnesses and struggle for sub cover. This restricted planning between partner teachers and prevented teachers from building relationships.</i></p>	<p><i>Shortage of transport provision proved difficult in arranging joint trips in Term 3.</i></p>
<p><i>This year has perhaps been an extraordinary year as we have tried to juggle the demands of the impact of lockdowns on children's education plus planning for and implementing Shared Education. Our shorter timescale has also meant more workload in Term 2 and 3. However, 2022/2023 will hopefully be more normal.</i></p>		<p><i>Another challenge was highlighted during a shared learning day in a forested park. We required as much staff from all three schools as possible and while most approached the day with optimism and were ready to facilitate the building of friendships, provide opportunities for the sharing of skills and make links back to school, home and the community, other individuals appeared withdrawn or lacked motivation. I believe this was down to personal attitudes but also highlights the importance of communicating expectations of staff, explaining schedules and responsibilities as well as working to motivate one's own colleagues.</i></p>		

### 8.2.2 Other challenges encountered

Other challenges raised by practitioners/teachers as part of online survey include:

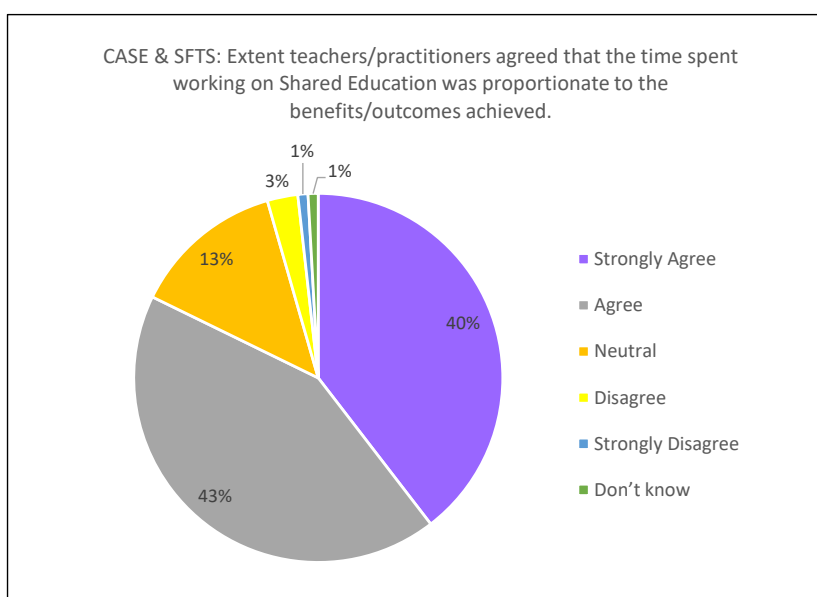
- **35% - Building relationship with partner school** was noted as requiring time and commitment towards collaboration. This was impacted by the pandemic and the move from face-to-face contact to online meetings. However, it is evident that partnerships, many of which had no experience of working together, have developed strong relationships to enable delivery of Shared Education. There have only been a few cases where partnerships breakdowns have occurred and instances where original partner school paused due to the impact of Covid-19 with the need to re-configure the partnership with new/different partner.
- **23% - Planning lessons and/or activities** with partner was reported as being challenging, especially as pre-schools/schools had no/limited interactions prior to SFTS/CASE. For example, large partnership (3+ partners) being more complex to coordinate, and different size (number of children) of partnering schools making it more difficult to mix children. Space available for shared classes to take place proved to be a challenge for some smaller schools, where the larger partner's school and/or local community hall was used. A few respondents felt that they were too ambitious in their first year and it proved to be challenging to schedule shared activities, although they have adapted the shared activities in subsequent years to reduce the numbers involved which has minimised the challenges encountered. Planning was also raised as one of the key success factors – so evidently the time taken to overcome challenges has been well spent in terms of outputs and outcomes achieved.
- **17% - Scheduling timetables for shared classes** proved to be challenging, although less so in Year 5 when compared to Year 3 results (pre-Covid) where 47% agreed that this was the top issue. Scheduling issues such as the large number of pupils involved, adjusting timetables to allow for travel time between schools, coordinating teacher timetables, meeting teacher-child ratios for class, and securing available substitute covered, were raised.



- 16% - The **time commitment** involved in planning and administrating shared classes, although, many appreciate that this is necessary to ensure the success of the SFTS/CASE projects. Collaborative working helped to ease the additional pressure on competing demands.
- 15% - **Transport** was raised as a challenge. Issues such as gaining the required number of quotes to evidence claims also proved problematic, as well as acknowledgement that travel remains as one of the biggest costs, and consequently potential barrier to sustaining Shared Education activities
- 8% - A few respondents asserted that gaining initial **buy-in from practitioners/teachers** was a challenge, with a few adding that this was at the outset and due to the uncertainty of what was involved. Respondents acknowledged the importance of a whole-school approach and good communication and buy-in from all.
- 6% - A small proportion noted that gaining **buy-in from parents**, particularly at the outset of the project, was a challenge. This was reflected in some parents being unwilling for their child to participate in Shared Education (due to preference for single identity contact). Importantly, according to practitioners/teachers, there are examples of this stance/attitude changing as the projects progressed and the benefits for children's educational experiences became apparent and consent was then provided by parents for their child to take part.
- 4% - Challenges relating to the **level of funding available** were linked to schools having to consider travel costs and venue hire. Respondents noted that they spent a lot of time gaining quotes for transport, facilitators, and resources to ensure value for money was achieved. A few respondents also noted that the funding was reduced in line with a reduction in the number of shared hours that could be delivered due to the pandemic.

Reflecting on the five-year programme, respondents recalled the steep learning curve in the initial phases of the implementation, but as experience was gained, they agreed that increased efficiencies have been achieved year on year. Importantly, 83% either strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (43%) that in Year 5 the time spent working on Shared Education is proportionate to the benefits/outcomes achieved. Comments reflected the added workload, but respondents felt it is commensurate to benefits achieved, with respondents remarking that the effort has been worthwhile given the educational and social benefits gained from participation.

**Figure 8.2:** Extent to which the time spent on Shared Education was proportionate to benefits/outcomes achieved



Base: 225 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

### 8.2.3 Challenges overcome

To overcome the various challenges encountered, respondents commented on the need for ongoing communication, robust planning, and flexibility. Examples such as adapting to using technology and online lessons by trying to make these as interactive as possible, coupled with using more traditional methods like writing cards/letters between partnering pre-schools/schools to maintain interest and engagement between children.

#### SFTS sample comments from practitioners (challenges overcome)

<p><i>Being flexible with our time. Meeting after school and giving up the option of sub cover to do so. Asking the questions we didn't know the answers to. Keeping in close contact with [SEYS]. However, once we began planning everything moved smoothly and the outcomes for the children were well worth the difficult planning sessions.</i></p>	<p><i>Both settings overcome these challenges by being able to support and encourage each other and being able to communicate effectively with each other.</i></p>	<p><i>We used alternative methods of communication, not solely ICT based, which made the partnership more exciting for our children, for example, posting letters and cards etc.</i></p>	<p><i>Through planning and thinking outside the box we were able to minimise the impact of Covid-19 during our virtual sessions.</i></p>	<p><i>The playgroup had to plan ahead to ensure there was enough funding in place to pay for transport and facilitators. Whereas in other years we were able to avail of funding at the start of the programme. Due to the number of hours being reduced the amount of overall funding available was also reduced.</i></p>
<p><i>We made our sessions more interactive and carried out a few short activities to keep them interested.</i></p>	<p><i>We adopted a much more fluid, blended approach to our sessions so that we could respond to a situation if it were to arise on a day that Shared Education was planned for.</i></p>	<p><i>We continually reminded our children about our partner group. We showed them the videos on the big screen and when we went to visit our partner group our children knew where they wanted to play. They knew the lay out of the preschool and this led to them being super excited. Parents felt more at ease by their children's reactions.</i></p>	<p><i>The planning and evaluations alongside the normal day to day planning is cumbersome. I appreciate that we receive time for it but the level of work is time consuming.</i></p>	<p><i>If some funding was made available near the start of the year this would be useful. We overcame the challenge of Covid-19 through planning appropriately for this.</i></p>

#### CASE sample comments from teachers (challenges overcome)

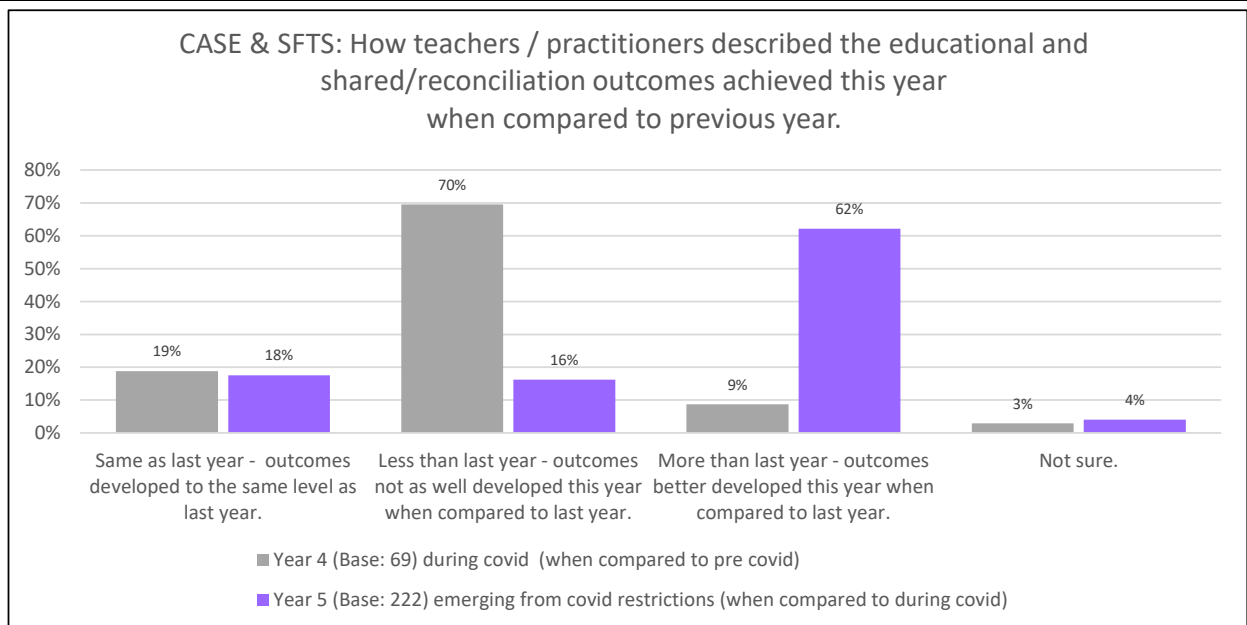
<p><i>Clear and regular communication with adults to ensure scheduling between all the schools.</i></p> <p><i>The coordinators adapted and came up with some excellent solutions.</i></p> <p><i>Thanks to the hard work and commitment of staff, challenges have been overcome by creative use of technology.</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, moved to online, and teachers used their creativity to ensure the partnership work continued.</i></p>	<p><i>Flexible in scheduling meet ups. Focused on outdoor activities. Organised joint activities in smaller groups.</i></p> <p><i>Organisation is key, especially when technology is involved - always have a back up plan and the ability to be flexible with your partner teachers is a must!</i></p> <p><i>Found online option really beneficial in terms of time commitment, we were able to work more consistently together.</i></p> <p><i>Time challenge overcome by careful time management and advance planning.</i></p>	<p><i>We capitalised on the use of digital learning by engaging in online activities and Zoom calls. We also used emails, shared photos and posts on our school website to communicate our learning. We engaged in shared topics and used a broad area of STEAM to ensure we completed the pupil activity in an enjoyable and varied way.</i></p>	<p><i>Thankfully we have great communication and relationships in our partnership. Teachers keep in touch regularly through WhatsApp groups. Children in senior classrooms, wrote throughout the year to each other and all children took part in Zoom calls.</i></p> <p><i>Very strong relationship between both principals, leading to commitment to Shared Education.</i></p> <p><i>The support of other staff members to support their colleagues and management. They covered classes, assisted with project work and provided support for the students.</i></p>	<p><i>While we got very creative in our delivery and planning, there was a fear of scheduling face-to-face activities initially. Flexibility across the partnership ensured that the pupils remained engaged while everyone continued to feel safe, at ease and comply with guidance.</i></p> <p><i>We utilised virtual learning tools and social medias to engage in shared campaigns and explore identified topics from September to December. We also availed of the planning day to co-ordinate activities, reflect on and evaluate the success of the partnership to that point.</i></p>
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At the outset of pandemic, many of the partnerships experienced barriers in accessing IT to facilitate sharing—this challenge was overcome by Project Partners engaging with settings/schools to identify skill gaps in the use of technology, as well as a review of what equipment was needed to sustain contact. To address gaps, the SFTS Project Partners redirected programme funds in Year 4 towards increasing digital capability for settings to include €72,994 towards additional IT equipment and €25,994 for installation and training. For SFTS, a total of 72 settings availed of this funding with the following equipment dispatched and installed: webcam (72); laptop (20); TV/Stand (45); Data Projector (7); and Broadband (21). The majority of CASE respondents (69%) reported that they used existing IT equipment within their respective schools to advance shared activities, whilst some used a combination of both existing IT equipment in school and IT equipment provided by CASE.

### 8.3 Impact of Covid-19 on outcomes

In Year 4 (Sept 2020-June 2021) 70% of respondents stated that educational and shared outcomes achieved were 'less than last year i.e., outcomes not as well developed this year when compared to last year' (Sept 2019-March 2020) prior to pre-schools closures. Reassuringly, by Year 5 (Sept 2021 – June 2022) there is a shift in results showing that respondents now believe that outcomes are improving and are now 'more than last year', albeit it at reduced levels when comparing to pre-pandemic levels.

**Figure 8.3:** Extent to which the time spent on Shared Education was proportionate to benefits/outcomes achieved



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4)

The following outlines the benefits and challenges/limitations reported by respondents in both Year 4 and Year 5, with respect to the use of IT in the implementation of Shared Education and the achievement of educational and shared outcomes.

**Table 8.1:** Benefits and challenges of using technology to implement Shared Education

Benefits of using IT	Challenges of using IT
<b>General</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided a welcome distraction from the face-to-face restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.</li> <li>• Helped maintain connections between partnering settings/schools.</li> <li>• Facilitated spontaneous/ad-hoc communication between practitioners/teachers.</li> <li>• Transport costs and travelling time to and from partnering settings/schools removed/reduced, as contact was via virtual connections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unreliable internet signal / poor internet connections reported by some partnerships.</li> <li>• Delays in internet connections can, at times, result in shared sessions being 'stilted'.</li> <li>• At the outset, some partnerships had limited confidence and competence using IT, with many not having equipment to progress virtual shared activities.</li> <li>• Time required to set up/prepare equipment and resources to facilitate interactive virtual shared sessions.</li> <li>• Ongoing upskilling required due to staff shortages and turnover.</li> </ul>

Benefits of using IT	Challenges of using IT
Educational	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved ICT skills for both staff and children.</li> <li>• Increased experience and confidence in the use of technology.</li> <li>• Allowed training/professional development to continue during the pandemic.</li> <li>• Promoted new ideas for educators in the use of technology.</li> <li>• Facilitated sharing of resources and work (e.g., use of shared networks such as Google Drive).</li> <li>• Virtual tours proved to be beneficial, and many will use this format in the future to help prepare children for when face-to-face visits resume.</li> <li>• Some children more confident communicating while in their own setting via a virtual class, and for these children learning outcomes improved.</li> <li>• The virtual classes allowed partnerships to use external tutors to facilitate shared sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer Shared Education hours completed as shared sessions were shorter due to virtual delivery, limiting educational benefits.</li> <li>• Learning outcomes achieved through individual class work as opposed to shared classes. Often classes worked on projects separately and only came together at start and end to share/ compare / discuss.</li> <li>• Shared sessions not always 'live' as settings/schools opted to pre-record and exchange recordings with partner activities of activities carried out in parallel.</li> <li>• More difficult to engage children, in particular pre-school and younger primary school children were sometimes disengaged from virtual meetings and limited attention spans for this form of delivery.</li> <li>• Some children were uncomfortable and 'self-conscious' whilst taking part in virtual classes.</li> <li>• Some practitioners/teachers found online training more restrictive and difficult to form wider relationships with other partnerships, as well as limited opportunity to network and share good practice.</li> </ul>
Shared	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the pandemic, virtual classes provided an opportunity for children and practitioners/teachers to 'meet' that would not have happened otherwise – therefore the use of IT has been as a positive enabler of Shared Education.</li> <li>• Some children were able to form bonds and friendships with their peers and have worked positively together on shared projects and exchanged letters and cards.</li> <li>• Staff relationships and friendships have been maintained and many welcome the use of virtual meetings as an efficient use of time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some partnerships did not wish to take part in 'live streaming' of shared sessions as this is discouraged for child protection reasons, therefore classes exchanged pre-recordings of their respective work – limiting shared outcomes that could be achieved.</li> <li>• Whilst children recognised each other and worked on tasks, forming of friendships was not as evident in Year 4, as these bonds/connections are more difficult in virtual shared classes. In many cases, the format of the class meant that children interacted as a wider class rather than individually.</li> <li>• Children missed the opportunity to interact and 'play' with their peers from their partner setting/school. These informal and natural interactions are often the basis of forming friendships.</li> <li>• There were no/limited opportunities for children to form friendships outside of the Shared Education virtual shared classes, therefore the extent to which friendships extended into the community is difficult to gauge but given restrictions across the community there were no opportunities for children or parents to build relationships outside of setting/school environment.</li> </ul>

The qualitative feedback (below extracts) shows a strong support for face-to-face contact as a means of developing relationships and contributing to shared/reconciliation outcomes.

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (face-to-face vs online shared classes)

<p><i>Due to our classes taking place via a virtual platform some opportunities were limited. From previous years where we had face-to-face interactions it was certainly more beneficial and outcomes fully achieved. However our interactions this year still achieved desired outcomes and provided opportunities for the children.</i></p>	<p><i>I feel this year was more successful as we are able to meet face-to-face again. The children get more out of the sessions when they are able to meet up face-to-face contact.</i></p>	<p><i>Prior to the pandemic, the face-to-face shared sessions were far more beneficial to the children's learning than any of the virtual shared sessions following the pandemic. There is really no comparison between them. Virtual sessions are without question, of limited value and it is difficult to justify them and prove significant learning taking place.</i></p>	<p><i>Parents would probably be more positive if more shared sessions had been face-to-face and therefore of more benefit to the children.</i></p>	<p><i>I feel that after a number of successful years initially on the programme that we have established great links with our services in our locality and that we have learned a lot from them. However, the impact of Covid-19 had undoubtedly made the partnership and means of communication much more difficult and I feel that the final year of the programme was a much more stressful experience for practitioners. The virtual connection, although we tried our best with it, was meaningless to our children. They did enjoy our face-to-face meetings when they were allowed to continue but the disconnected feeling was very evident from both staff and parents' perspectives.</i></p>
<p><i>Our children showed increased confidence when linking with our partner school remotely. However as this was not face-to-face it is difficult to establish the full impact that the programme has had on their social skills etc.</i></p>	<p><i>Last year was interpreted by lock downs and the Covid-19 pandemic. We were getting used to new technologies and situations. This year we felt more confident in the use of these technologies moving forward. This year we were also able to have outside facilitators in our setting which helped deliver our goals.</i></p>	<p><i>We had more opportunities to meet up face-to-face [this year] and this really added to the children's involvement in truly shared experiences.</i></p>	<p><i>There were great benefits for the children and staff, but Covid-19 prevented us from meeting face-to-face and we felt children need to meet in person to really gain the full benefit of the programme.</i></p>	

### CASE sample comments from teachers (face-to-face vs online shared classes)

<p><i>Although the children met regularly through online dialogue, the conversations were organised and structured. I believe the lack of face-to-face lessons prevented true rapport and natural friendships to be developed as would have been the case in previous years.</i></p>	<p><i>Since most of the work was online the children did not get the same opportunity to make friends and build up a rapport with each other. The children were not so relaxed during the online meetings as they would have been during face-to-face meetings.</i></p>	<p><i>It was very hard to keep the momentum going as it wasn't face-to-face. It felt very contrived and wasn't possible for any relationships to be built between the children.</i></p>	<p><i>Unfortunately this year our shared collaboration was all completed virtually and although beneficial, pupils gain more from face-to-face interaction with their peers.</i></p>	<p><i>Restrictions of Covid-19 meant that all of our programmes were done within the context of each school and online collaboration was exclusively through Google Classroom. This meant children were not getting the true experience of building deep and meaningful connections and making friends through the normal activities of playing together, working in groups, working as a team, taking turns, etc.</i></p>
<p><i>There was nothing to beat the face-to-face group work experience, as the children benefitted so much from meeting their friends and having rich shared educational experiences.</i></p>	<p><i>Ultimately Shared Education has increased the opportunities for children participating to develop friendships, improve integration, extend social and communication skills but the quality of these is greater in a face-to-face capacity.</i></p>	<p><i>Not being able to meet with our partner school was difficult to build and progress the development of relationships between children although we were able to do some work online it wasn't the same.</i></p>	<p><i>Due to Covid-19 we postponed our planned activities as we felt that without the face-to-face element of the programme the integrity of the programme was compromised. The face-to-face element of the programme is the key to the successful outcomes for the children.</i></p>	<p><i>Due to lack of face-to-face time the children's relationships were hampered although when they did get to meet their relationships began to flourish.</i></p>
<p><i>Zoom and online sessions did not lend itself to making friendships easily particularly for those pupils with communication difficulties.</i></p>	<p><i>The ability to do lessons online allowed schools to continue to have Shared Education taking place but ultimately it is more meaningful to have face-to-face sessions. Teachers still plan effectively online and through the use of WhatsApp groups. Fortunately our partnership has been in place since 2017 and both principals and teachers have strong working relationships which was incredibly beneficial.</i></p>	<p><i>Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the children were unable to meet in person and being in P2 and P3 it was hard for them to make meaningful connections through online videos.</i></p>	<p><i>Unfortunatly Zoom contact with only one face-to-face meeting did not lend itself to progressing friendships as would normally happen. Some children were quite shy using Zoom and practical shared activities which usually allow friendships to begin and deepen were not able to happen.</i></p>	
<p><i>While online may not have been ideal, it was better than no contact among the children and this type of Shared Education has allowed for them to develop their technology skills.</i></p>			<p><i>While our online experience was positive and the children worked well together, it was challenging for the children as it is difficult to form friendships online via platforms such as Teams/Google Meet etc.</i></p>	

### CASE sample comments from teachers (face-to-face vs online shared classes)

*Prior to March 2020 [pre-Covid-19] we had an excellent shared program with all 800 plus children involved. Programmes were running seamlessly and staff and pupils were comfortable in each other's schools deriving shared lessons. We had built on the previous three years and very good pupil relationships were developing. Shared Education was an integral part of our schools so once the face-to-face element was removed, it was difficult to maintain these relationships and the momentum of the programme. The biggest impact was on the relationships of the children.*

*It has resulted in less face-to-face interaction, although we made up for it with online meetings and this has brought new learning experiences for the pupils also.*

*Pupils feel more at ease when face-to-face rather than engaging via Zoom.*

*Poor Wi-Fi connections which meant that sessions did not run smoothly. There was often a delay which was very frustrating for the children.*

*I feel that this year has not been a true reflection on the benefits and outcomes from the Shared Education project as online session have not allowed for good friendships to be formed. I am looking forward to participating face-to-face again next year where I am sure there will be great benefits and outcomes achieved.*

*We will try to do as much face-to-face with the pupils as possible as we believe this is the most effective way to form and build natural friendships.*

*Zoom meetings were good however not as effective as 1:1 interaction.*

*We feel there are benefits to both approaches - it's great to meet face-to-face a couple of times a year and to have the option of online too - online is particularly effective for delivery of information. Face-to-face required for good interaction.*

*Planning to move more towards more face-to-face opportunities as Covid-19 restrictions relax. We continue to be mindful of how we may have to adapt to the situation at the time so the skills we have learned this year will be invaluable should they be required in the new academic year.*

*We were very creative around problem solving and hot seating issues as we made educational videos using our external facilitators and shared these to all three schools in the partnership during lockdown and then we still managed to have more time together than apart by keeping the meets outdoors, so all in all we were happy that while contact was a little less (10 hours online) we got so much done and were more productive in our face-to-face meetings as we needed to get so much done for the show, that we made sure we had planned and reviewed well and concisely.*

## 8.4 Key Success Factors

In achieving educational and shared/reconciliation impacts a range of key success factors was identified as to why project delivery has been effective, to include:

- Effective leadership generates whole-school buy-in and helps support implementation.
- For partnerships to appreciate that early stages of implementation will represent a learning curve and will require flexibility in approach to adapt and meet the needs of the individual partnership.
- Aligning shared class activities to the existing curriculum meant that practitioners/teachers were able to embed Shared Education into normal planning and curricular delivery.
- Providing engaging and enjoyable activities for children helps them to feel that sharing is part of their daily lives in pre-school/school and is 'normalised'.
- Effective implementation practices, such as sharing resources; focus on in-house delivery; format of shared classes to encourage natural mixing; face-to-face contact; delivery of blocks of shared sessions and consistency in mixing to allow for friendships to develop, partnering with pre-school/school within close proximity, and streamlining administration documentation, are all practical examples of what works well.
- Commitment to ongoing communication will lead to better and more effective partnership working between practitioners/teachers (and partnering settings/schools), this will lead to improved planning, sharing of resources/equipment to delivering shared activities.
- Professional development opportunities and access to support for practitioners/teachers leads to effective implementation of Shared Education.
- Dedicated time and space for partnerships to reflect and celebrate achievements will boost morale and motivation for continuing shared activities. Partnerships can avail of Project Partner led networking events, celebration events, engaging in social media conversations on the benefits of Shared Education; and generally promoting their experiences across the pre-school/school community and beyond.
- Involving parents/wider community in Shared Education communications and encouraging their involvement (as passive or active volunteers) in shared activities has the potential to build community connections across diverse communities, which will positively contribute to longer-term shared and reconciliation benefits. However, these practices were not possible during the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to virtual collaboration.

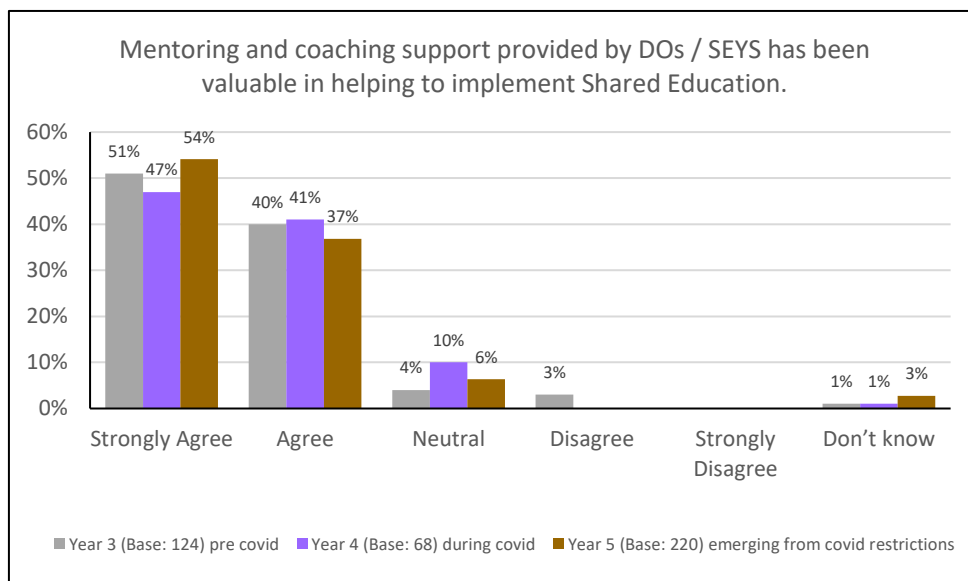
Both practitioners and teachers reflected on the importance of being flexible and willing to adapt to change and try new ways of working. This, along with effective planning and organisation as part of a collaborative approach, have meant that Shared Education has continued in Year 4 and Year 5, despite the challenges encountered through closures and staff shortages. This is a testament to the value partnerships place on Shared Education as a vehicle in which to achieve educational and shared/reconciliation outcomes.

#### 8.4.1 Mentoring Support

A key success factor positively impacting achievement is the ongoing tailored support and mentoring provided by SFTS Senior Early Years Specialists (SEYS) and CASE Development Officers (DOs) in helping settings and schools adapt. Throughout the five years of Shared Education, partnerships have greatly benefited from this mentoring, guidance, and implementation support (refer to Section 2.4.1 and 2.5.1 for list of support provided to partnerships).

Results for Year 5 show that 91% either strongly agreed (54%) or agreed (37%) that continuous mentoring and coaching support from SEYS and DOs has been valuable in helping to implement Shared Education. Comments provided were very complimentary with regards to the support given in helping teachers to manage administration, planning, and monitoring tasks, as well as benefiting from constructive feedback on how to improve shared sessions based on the knowledge of approaches adopted in other schools.

**Figure 8.4:** Extent to which mentoring/coaching was valuable to implement Shared Education



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

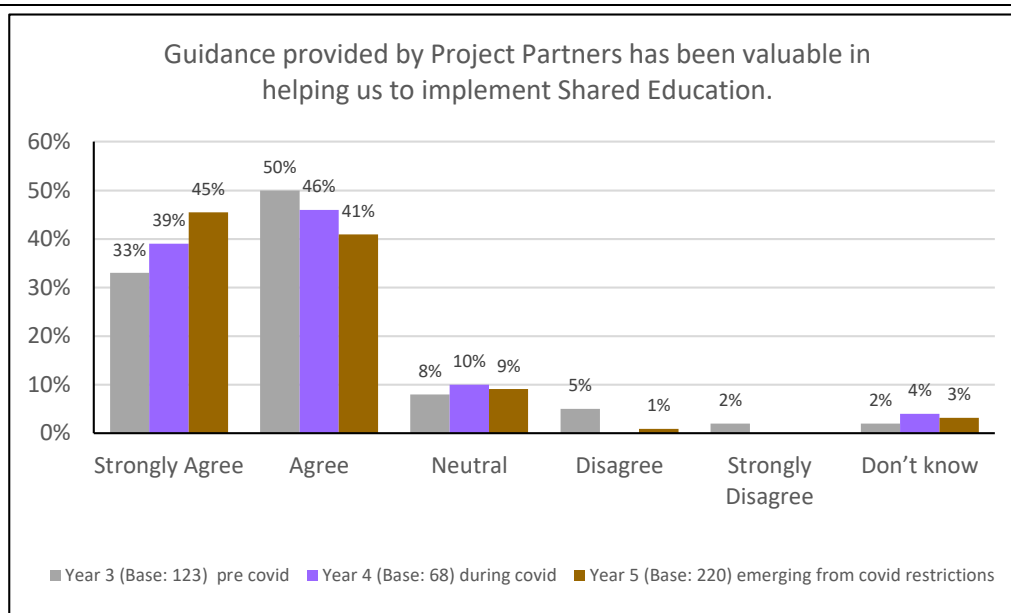
The EYS and DOs play an instrumental role in helping their respective SFTS and CASE partnerships to engage in reflective practice, identifying strengths and areas for development to enable corrective action to be made, where relevant, to enhance the self-evaluation process and consequently the impact of the Shared Education activities. Support is provided to aid settings and schools to review and evidence progression along the continuum of sharing from a baseline position towards developing and expanding activities, with the ultimate aim of school leaders reaching the skills and capacity, as well as the confidence, to embed in-depth and high-quality Shared Education to benefit children, practitioners/teachers and the wider community.



Focus on shared/reconciliation outcomes, as well as educational outcomes, has helped to focus attention on creating or enhancing inclusion and diversity policies within settings/schools. During the pandemic, EYS and DOs have worked closely with staff to empower them in their use of technology as an enabler to implement virtual shared sessions. To help partnerships stay connected during the pandemic, EYS and DOs endeavoured to motivate and engage their respective partnerships, utilising a range of methods to communicate (for example, email, telephone, virtual calls, manuals/FAQs, training, webinars, vlogs, virtual cluster meetings). The turnover and changes of staff were more apparent due to the outworking's of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has resulted in the need for an uplift in the level of support required by partnerships to sustain Shared Education this year.

In addition to the mentoring support provided by SEYS and DOs, respondents also acknowledged the guidance provided by Project Partners, with 86% agreeing that this guidance has been valuable in helping partnerships implement Shared Education.

**Figure 8.5:** Extent to which guidance provided by Project Partners was valuable to implement Shared Education



CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results (compared to Year 4 and Year 3)

### SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (mentoring support)

*Our Early Years Advisor was always on hand to give guidance and support and we were delighted to share a few of our Sharing from the Start experiences with her.*

*Having someone that we could always contact in our senior advisor meant nothing was impossible.*

*The recent years when we could meet each other the communication was much smoother. We still feel that there was always someone for us to talk to about how we were doing, and to make sure that we understood everything. The email and phone support was always available.*

*We did not really avail of any support this year as we felt confident in what we were doing, having been delivering the programme for several years.*

*I would like to thank everyone involved in the programme from funders, organisers and implementors for their dedication to ensuring it was operational and the opportunity for our involvement.*

*The support from Sharing from the Start staff has been excellent throughout.*

*My EYS has always been available on call or email for any of my questions that I may have had. She has been a great support to me throughout the programme.*

## CASE sample comments from teachers (mentoring support)

*Our CASE officer and project partners are always there to support, talk to and guide us every step of the way and are invaluable for all they do along with CASE in the head office.*

*We are very grateful for the support and guidance provided by the CASE development officers together with the funding for transport.*

*Support is fantastic and very reassuring in times of challenge.*

*The development officer has been very supportive and understands the difficulties experienced by school during the past two years. She also provided us with very good guidance on creative ways to work together.*

*Our development officer has been exceptional in answering all questions and easing concerns and providing guidance when needed.*

*The CASE leaders have been very approachable at all times. They send lots of useful links to courses and newsletters that have helped develop and inspire new ideas amongst the partnership. This guidance has helped us plan for a tough year. It has allowed us to see alternative ways of delivering the programme in a new way, which has at times been daunting for some staff.*

*As a relatively new principal the assistance of the development workers, and my peers in the partner schools, has been invaluable in helping me develop my understanding of Shared Education and the impact it can have on the development of the school community.*

*They have always offered very practical support to our partnership at all stages. She has been fantastic in her support and advice to us each year. Always courteous and willing to help. She has been invaluable!*

*Our partnership has been well supported by development officers throughout the programme, whether that is via email, phone or in-person. While myself and my partner principal were unable to attend sessions in June locally, our development officer met us in person and this support has been invaluable.*

## 8.5 Chapter Summary

The main factor impacting achievement is the outworking of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020. Covid-19 has been an unprecedented disruptor to Shared Education, having a profound impact on the momentum gained for Shared Education over the last number of years under PEACE IV. Given this context, it is not surprising that almost all (97%) respondents to the survey highlighted Covid-19 as the biggest challenge. Related to Covid-19 is the high level of staff illness (48%) and staff turnover (37%).

Despite challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, partnerships embraced the use of IT as an enabler to facilitate virtual collaboration and Shared Education activity to continue. To overcome the various challenges encountered, respondents commented on the need for ongoing communication, robust planning, and flexibility.

In achieving educational and shared/reconciliation impacts a range of key success factors was identified as to why project delivery has been effective, to include:

- Providing engaging and enjoyable activities for children.
- Acknowledge the steep learning curve and need for flexibility in approach.
- Aligning shared activities to the existing curriculum.
- Providing engaging and enjoyable activities for children.
- Effective implementation practices.
- Effective partnership working.
- Effective leadership to support implementation.
- Professional Development Opportunities and access to support.
- Dedicated time for reflection and promoting/celebrating benefits of Shared Education.
- Building community connections.

IT has acted as a significant enabler to allow Shared Education to continue during the pandemic. It is also acknowledged that the SEUPB showed flexibility in supporting Project Partners to change approach during the pandemic and in facilitating the distribution of funds for IT equipment to maintain virtual shared activities. This, along with the support of Project Partners and the willingness of partnerships to engage in extraordinary circumstances is a positive testament to the SFTS and CASE projects and recognition of the importance placed on continuing Shared Education. The PEACE IV targets are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools.

## 9 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECTS

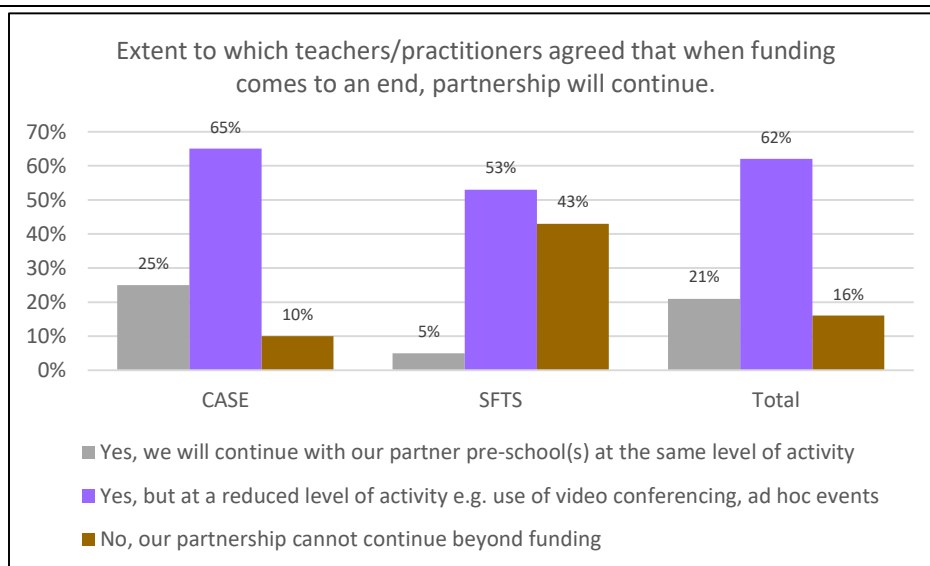
### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises feedback on the sustainability of projects based on a range of qualitative data including views from early years practitioners and teachers via the online survey; interviews with Project Partners; interviews with EYS and DOs; and a review of monitoring information.

### 9.2 Key Findings

SFTS practitioners and CASE teachers were asked to reflect on the sustainability of their partnership and shared activities in the absence of funding. For CASE, one-quarter (25%) of respondents felt that they could continue partnership working at the same level, compared to 5% of SFTS settings. One of the most frequently cited barriers to continuing Shared Education was the need for funding to cover transport costs for travel between pre-school settings/schools. The overall majority (62%) reported that they would be able to sustain their partnerships but at a reduced level of activity, for example, using video conferencing and ad hoc events.

**Figure 9.1:** Sustainability of Shared Education when funding comes to an end



Base: 221 - CASE & SFTS: Year 5 results

To aid future mainstreaming activities, factors such as close proximity to partner, leadership and desire to advance Shared Education, linkages with school development plans/curricular priorities across the partnership, use of IT to supplement face-to-face contact, and funding are required.

As a legacy of PEACE IV Shared Education, the key learning and good practice from Shared Education will be sustained and can continue to be embedded into the curriculum, school development plans and inclusion policies. Furthermore, practitioner/teacher training aims to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills to ensure that sharing is sustainable once PEACE IV funding ends. Friendships and connections between early years practitioners/teachers across the partnerships have also been established and can continue to flourish post funding.

CASE is due to continue until March 2023, therefore CASE respondents were asked about what methods they will use in Year 6 (September 2022 to March 2023)

**Table: 9.1:** CASE – proposed approach to implementing Shared Education in Year 6

	Will not continue	Face-to-face only	Online only	Blended approach (i.e. face-to-face and online)
Partnership working (e.g., action planning)	1%	27%	1%	72%
Shared classes	1%	17%	1%	82%
Training	2%	21%	2%	76%
Meetings with Boards of Governors / Management Committees	1%	56%	3%	41%

*Base: 181*

Given the experience of using IT to facilitate sharing during the pandemic, there is a shift towards this model and recognition of the benefits of a 'blended approach' to include a combination of face-to-face and online/virtual contact as part of the delivery model. It is noteworthy that qualitative data suggests weighting towards face-to-face contact as the preferred method for children to achieve social and emotional development. The future PEACEPLUS (2021-2027) Programme overview references that the digital based approaches will be used as a means of developing and sustaining Shared Education partnerships.

### 9.2.1 Perspective of SEYS, DOs and Project Partners

Based on discussions with SEYS and DOs, along with testimonials provided, it is important to reflect the voice and perspective of the individuals delivering Shared Education on the ground. It is evident that SEYS and DOs have also benefitted greatly from their involvement in supporting the implementation of the respective SFTS and CASE projects, with comments highlighting their own professional expertise and experience has been enhanced, which is a legacy of PEACE IV Shared Education.

It is also heartening to listen to the enthusiasm shown by SEYS and DOs who have worked tirelessly both before Covid-19 and during the pandemic in what was an unprecedented and challenging time for all, the result is that there was a high retention rate of partnerships who have delivered upon their action plans to meet the PEACE IV targets and outcomes.

The views of SEYS and DOs also mirror that provided by practitioners/teachers in terms of the range of shared/reconciliation benefits and educational benefits achieved. In particular SEYS and DOs were able to comment on the wider impacts of Shared Education, from their overarching view of mentoring a number of partnerships and from sharing good practice to ensure the smooth implementation of activities. Wider impacts such as considering the distance travelled by partnerships from a low baseline to a state where partnerships are defining and expanding shared activities (considering the ETI Shared Education Framework, and Siolta Standards) which is hoped can be sustained to an extent once funding comes to an end.

Project Partners were also reflective of the distance travelled and the achievements gained in the last five years, and whilst significant shared/reconciliation outcomes were achieved these were somewhat hampered by the pandemic, which can be considered as unmet potential of Shared Education, to be pursued as part of the future PEACEPLUS Programme.



## SFTS sample comments from Senior Early Years Specialists and Project Partner

Sharing from the Start championed diversity and inclusion. It provided invaluable opportunities for children, parents, practitioners and communities to come together through purposeful and innovative ways, which encouraged participation through Shared Education at the earliest stage. The Project Team have been able to develop our skillset further as Early Years Specialists and have seen first-hand the difference the programme has made for the children participating and development of relationships across areas which would otherwise remain divided. (SEYS)

I would strongly recommend Sharing from the Start to others, not just in terms of the benefits to staff and children but also in terms of the benefits to the wider community. Sharing from the Start has broken down barriers and as a result we see a deeper level of sharing within communities. Supporting these young children creates a ripple effect that we hope to see continued in the years that follow. (SEYS)

Through participating in the Sharing from the Start programme, practitioners have had the opportunity to come together and share good practice. Many Leaders have developed strong professional relationships that have created robust support systems that could be relied upon during testing times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these relationships, the quality of education and reconciliation has been developed to a higher standard. (SEYS)

The Sharing from the Start programme has provided parents and children from different communities and socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to take part in shared educational sessions which included the celebration of their differences. These shared sessions have helped to break down barriers and build relationships with staff, children, parents and the wider community, including areas that have been historically divided. (SEYS)

Practitioners from the community and voluntary and statutory sector within Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties, have formed strong relationships with one another through engagement in the Sharing from the Start programme. They have planned and evaluated shared sessions and they have become much more reflective about their practice. I truly believe that our practitioners are leading the way to improving outcomes for our parents, who are providing a safe space where parents can come, along with their children, to engage in shared sessions and other local events. (SEYS)

Settings pairing up together has challenged and strengthened the professional practice of each setting, and provided strong leadership across the early childhood sector in both jurisdictions, and we see a legacy of reflective practice that we know will continue on. The programme has ensured that children feel included, visible and heard in their own communities, and their families, and in the social cohesion the programme has harnessed for those who have made the island of Ireland their new home. **Sharing from the Start has enabled us to place a wider focus on equality, diversity, inclusion and social cohesion, and together, to push the envelope of policy and practice across both jurisdictions, to deepen our understanding and to contribute to the potential of the Good Friday Agreement.** (NCN, Project Partner)

I recommend involvement in the Sharing from the Start programme, as I believe it is enabling small seeds to be planted, and through continued support and guidance, I can see that these small seeds will flourish and grow, to enable and support peace and reconciliation within Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties. (SEYS)

## CASE sample comments from Development Officers and Project Partner

When an experienced teacher states that the Shared Education Partnership has been the highlight of their recent teaching years and a seasoned Principal says it has been the most exciting development in their 20+ years of their career, you know you have struck gold. The uptake and commitment of the school staff to CASE and the embedding of shared practice and professional dialogue between schools has been outstanding. It's been a pleasure to work with these great professionals. (Léargas, Project Partner)

With educational and reconciliation benefits at the core of the project, the history of our country has shown, that when we all talk, we look forward. And when we stop talking, we tend to look back. The legacy of CASE should always be about looking forward. Children from diverse backgrounds who talk to and learn from each other. Teachers from different types of schools who share practical advice. School admin teams who worked so hard for the benefit of all. And school principals who took a risk to ensure that their school communities continue to look forward. I have seen all of this in all of our partnerships. (CASE DO)

As someone who's been involved in Shared Education for nearly ten years, I have been able to see first hand the benefits of schools working together: the sharing of resources, the sharing of expertise, the sharing of time. I have observed how teachers went above and beyond in continuing to encourage their pupils to share and work together throughout the pandemic, an incredibly challenging time. Thank you. CASE simply would not be where it is today, if not for your enthusiasm, your dedication and your willingness to talk to each other. (CASE DO)

It is a real privilege to have the opportunity to support school partnerships as part of CASE. It is a courageous choice for a school to decide to work together with another school/s of a different management type in order to move towards changing the historical narrative and to equip pupils with the skills and attitudes to help build a more cohesive, peaceful society. I have seen first-hand the benefits of effective collaboration for pupils, teachers, senior leadership teams and the wider school communities. Our school administrators, teachers, and principals should be so proud of what they have achieved. I believe these partnerships will continue to develop and flourish in the future. (CASE DO)

Through my role as a Development Officer for the CASE PEACE IV Shared Education programme, I have had the opportunity to witness the immense benefits for schools involved in collaborative partnerships. It has been inspiring to see the development of respectful and supportive relationships between staff. Through commitment to their partnerships, staff engage in professional dialogue, sharing of expertise and best practice, which undoubtedly promotes a vast array of educational and reconciliation outcomes for their pupils and wider communities (CASE DO)

## 10 CONCLUSIONS

### 10.1 Conclusions & Recommendations

#### **Achievement of Aims & Output Indicators**

The EU PEACE IV Programme aims ‘*To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society through the promotion of reconciliation amongst all communities across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland*’. Shared Education is one of four Specific Objectives of PEACE IV, and its success is based on the achievement of the defined aims, as well as result and output indicators.

This concluding chapter provides a summary of achievement against these aims and indicators, along with recommendations. Some of the recommendations outlined relate to the SEUPB specifically and other ‘key lessons’ relate to project development and can be passed on from the SEUPB to inform Project Partners of the new [PEACEPLUS Programme \(2021 – 2027\)](#). Recommendations are therefore stated as for the ‘SEUPB’ or key lessons for future PEACEPLUS applicants.

#### **Aim: Meet the needs of, and provide for the education together of, learners from all backgrounds and socio-economic status:**

With a starting/baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact, over the last five years a total of 494 pre-schools/schools have participated in PEACE IV Shared Education projects (141% of target achieved), along with 2,360 teachers/practitioners trained (112% of target achieved). SFTS and CASE projects have collectively involved 115,216 children from all backgrounds joining for curriculum-led shared classes (80% of 2023 target achieved). Based on the achievement to date, SFTS and CASE have met or are on target to meet output indicators, with building the capacity for partnerships to be sustainable a key focus of Project Partners.

The inclusion of Shared Education in the PEACE IV Programme has provided a significant uplift in the number of pre-schools/schools having the opportunity to experience Shared Education. By targeting pre-schools/schools with no prior experience of Shared Education, PEACE IV contributes to meeting the aims outlined in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – therefore positively contributing to the legislative and policy focus in NI to encourage, facilitate, and promote Shared Education. Whilst there is no similar legislative or policy focus specifically on Shared Education in Ireland, there is increasing recognition by Government officials of the benefits of Shared Education in meeting a range of relevant policy objectives, contributing to enhancing learning and achievement, well-being, identity and belonging and the wider diversity and inclusion agenda particularly given changing demographics.

Both SFTS and CASE Project Partners provided insights on their respective projects to inform the recently launched [Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy](#) for Northern Ireland (Sept 2022), demonstrating how the collective learning from PEACE IV has helped to raise awareness and influence policy development.

#### **Aim: Involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.**

Over the last five years, there have been a total of 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) representing different sectors, therefore this aim has been achieved. The geographic spread reflects a split of 74% within Northern Ireland and 26% in the Border Region of Ireland. The majority (71%) of partnerships are comprised of a North-North collaboration; 20% of partnerships are comprised of a South-South collaboration; and 9% relate to cross-border partnerships. Shared Education is based on a partnership between schools that are predominantly associated with one community (Catholic) joining with another community (Protestant) with the aim of building sustained cross-community relationships as well as contributing to improved educational outcomes.

In terms of the result indicator, there is no current reading for the number/percentage of schools involved in Shared Education as a proportion of all schools, as the 2020 Omnibus Survey was delayed but is due to take place in October 2022 (results available from January 2023). The most recent reading (September 2018) indicated that from a baseline position of 58%, there are now 63% of schools involved in Shared Education, against a target of 69%, highlighting the positive shift towards achievement. The School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, whilst it has not yet taken place will be available prior to the end of the programming period.

- **Recommendation:** The result indicator has been difficult to assess throughout the duration of the Impact Evaluation due to delays in the identified measurement instrument being administered. It is noted that results will be available in time for the end of the PEACE IV Shared Education initiative, and therefore will provide a useful renewed 'baseline' for the forthcoming 'Shared Learning Together' project as part of PEACEPLUS. It is recommended that the SEUPB considers a range of measurement tools for potential future result indicators to ensure that they are readily available to assess achievement at more regular intervals.

**Aim: Deliver educational benefits to learners, promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and promote equality of opportunity, good relations, respect for identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.**

Based on Impact Evaluation findings, there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, and between practitioners/teachers in partner schools, as well as enhanced educational outcomes (for example increased confidence working in a diverse classroom, improved educational experiences achieved by access to educational resources/ equipment to enhance curricular subjects, which would not be available in the absence of funding).

There are also economic benefits for participating pre-schools/schools. The evidence indicates that the aim to 'promote *the efficient and effective use of resources*' has been met via the following: sharing of resources and indoor/outdoor facilities; equipment purchased collectively and shared between partnering pre-schools/schools; shared trips/outings and access to external tutors with different specialisms; and joint shared practitioner/teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.

The emergence of Covid-19 has clearly been an unforeseen and unprecedented disruptor to Shared Education, having a profound impact on the momentum gained for Shared Education over the last number of years under PEACE IV. From the latter stage of Year 3 (March to June 2020) for Year 4 (Sept 2020 to June 2021), and to a lesser extent Year 5 (September 2021 to June 2022) partnerships experienced closures and staff shortages resulting from the pandemic. In Year 5, the pandemic continued to hamper progress of shared sessions in Term 1 (Sept to Dec 2021) and Term 2 (Jan to Mar 2022), with a focus on virtual contact remaining as the main channel. However, by Term 3 (April to June 2022) partnerships were able to resume face-to-face shared classes.

Despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive to help support pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established. Project Partners have demonstrated resilience and perseverance to ensure the sustainability of activities, and as such agreed with the SEUPB new proposals to advance shared activity in Year 4 and in Year 5. This has involved re-allocation of funds towards IT equipment to facilitate virtual training and shared classes, as well as an extension of activities to meet original PEACE IV targets, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the societal and educational benefits that have been achieved to date.

Partnerships have generally adapted well to Covid-19 conditions, and whilst some settings/schools withdrew or 'paused' shared sessions in Year 4 due to feeling overwhelmed by the pandemic (14 SFTS and 22 CASE partnerships), the vast majority continued their Shared Education projects (to varying extents).



Many of the partnerships that withdrew/paused activity re-engaged in Year 5 (from September 2021) and were supported by SEYS and DOs, and as such there has been a strong retention of participating pre-schools/schools.

Given the experience of using IT to facilitate sharing during the pandemic, there is a shift towards this model and recognition of the benefits of a 'blended approach' to include a combination of face-to-face and online/virtual contact as part of the delivery model. To help sustain and extend partnership working in a cost-effective way, a key learning is the investment in IT infrastructure (and training in its use) to help practitioners/teachers and school leaders to plan work together, with virtual options particularly beneficial when coordination of schedules proves difficult. It is noteworthy that qualitative data suggests weighting towards face-to-face contact as the preferred method for children to achieve social and emotional development.

The future PEACEPLUS (2021-2027) Programme references that '**digital based approaches will be used as a means of developing and sustaining Shared Education partnerships**'. In line with the PEACEPLUS approach, it will be important to explore a range of digital based approaches and various 'blended' delivery models. This has been foreseen in PEACEPLUS and will be considered in future projects. PEACEPLUS applicants should consider the pros and cons and weighting of face-to-face and virtual contact for each stakeholder group (i.e., children, teachers/practitioners, parents, wider community) and the model selected for each stakeholder that will best achieve meaningful shared/reconciliation and educational outcomes.

Future Shared Education projects should consider the alignment of digital literacy/coding classes with Shared Education will also allow children to work together as part of a 'blended' approach, which will enhance efficiencies. For any future model, it is important that online collaboration complements/adds-value to shared classes rather than replace face-to-face contact.

- **Recommendation:** Whilst shared/reconciliation outcomes were achieved over the course of the last five years, these were somewhat hampered by the pandemic. When considering the ETI Framework for Shared Education, along with the Síolta Standards<sup>27</sup>, it is evident that partnerships have not progressed along the continuum of sharing for Community Connections as well as expected/conceived at the outset of PEACE IV. Therefore, it is considered that this is unmet potential of Shared Education, which could potentially be pursued as part of the future PEACEPLUS Programme i.e., it is recommended that the SEUPB consider renewed investment in current PEACE IV Shared Education partnerships to build on the collaborative relationships developed to date.

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<sup>27</sup> Project Partners used the ETI Shared Education framework to support implementation and self-assessment across a range of pillars (1) Learner Centred (2) High Quality Learning & Teaching (3) Leadership (4) Community Connections; as well as the Síolta Standards – please refer to Chapter 3 of main report for details. Progress along the Shared Education continuum is not formal target or requirement of the PEACE IV Corporation Programme or the Project Partners letter of offer requirements but provides a useful guide to aid monitoring in terms of baselines and stages of progress each year.

### **Implementation Support**

The EYS and DOs play an instrumental role in helping their respective SFTS and CASE partnerships to identify strengths and areas for development to enable corrective action to be made, where relevant, and to enhance the self-evaluation process and consequently the impact of the Shared Education activities.

During these exceptional times, the EYS and DOs have worked extensively to tailor their support and training to address any issues in the continued delivery of Shared Education to ensure a smooth transition to a virtual Shared Educational model during the pandemic. Similar to last year, 91% of respondents either 'strongly agreed' (54%) or 'agreed' (37%) that continuous mentoring support provided by EYS and DOs has helped to build early years practitioners' and teachers' capacity to implement Shared Education.

A key success factor positively impacting the achievement of output indicators is the training packages offered by SFTS and CASE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). This coupled with the tailored mentoring support provided by SEYS and DOs has allowed Shared Education to continue, with feedback from partnerships being very complimentary.

Key learning for PEACEPLUS applicants:

- The Shared Education model relies on effective leadership from pre-school/school management, senior leadership teams, and being able to generate whole-school buy-in. Therefore, it is suggested that training is strongly encouraged for school leaders (e.g., principals, representatives from Management Committee/Board of Governors, lead coordinators etc.).
- It would be beneficial if all staff involved in Shared Education take part in at least one information session and initial training to ensure 'whole-school' buy-in. Consider extending training to include support staff/classroom assistants, and special educational needs coordinators, as these individuals play an important role in the logistics and delivery of shared classes and would value training in Shared Education.
- Continual upskilling will be beneficial in instances of staff turnover/changes to ensure that shared classes are delivered to best effect to address attrition of staff experienced. Nb. Whilst staff attrition will always be a factor, feedback from practitioners/teachers noted that this was more pronounced during the pandemic.
- Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e., general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; using IT to deliver shared classes; incorporating mental health into activities; how to engage children; increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs; how to engage parents/wider community.

Suggested recommendation to improve evaluation of training delivery:

- **Recommendation:** The Impact Evaluation focused on the overarching feedback about training and the achievement of the output indicators for PEACE IV. There is a potential gap in the review, where further consideration should be given to the specific training courses/modules delivered by SFTS and CASE and identification of those that contribute most to meeting the shared/reconciliation outcomes of PEACE IV. Further discussion on CASE Joint Practice Development and SFTS/CASE peer clustering endeavours should also be considered going forward.

In terms of the research approach, it is important to note that the original SFTS and CASE projects were due to close by March 2022 and the evaluation timeframe aligned to this. However, due to project extensions agreed by the SEUPB for SFTS (to 30 September 2023) and CASE (to 31 October 2023), there is an identified gap in the planned research schedule for the extended programming period. The SEUPB is aware of this gap but has requested that SJC proceed with the original three phases of research (Year 3 to Year 5), acknowledging that the final year of SFTS and CASE (Year 6) will not be captured by an external evaluator. Project Partners will submit monitoring data and a final Post Project Evaluation to the SEUPB at project closure, however this will self-reported and not an independent evaluation.

- **Recommendation:** In response to the project extensions described above, it is the evaluator's recommendation that further consideration is given to extending research activities into Year 6 (2022-2023), as part of an independent evaluation, to ensure that outcomes are captured for the end of the programming period. This is particularly important as partnerships have been negatively affected in Year 3 (Term 3), Year 4 (Term 1, 2 and 3) and Year 5 (Term 1 and 2). Year 6 (2022-2023) presents an opportunity to capture outcomes in a post-pandemic era, where partnerships will resume Shared Education activities which are more aligned to what was originally planned at the outset of the PEACE IV Programme. At a minimum, it is recommended that the same online survey be re-run for the final year, with the option of case studies to supplement this work.
- **Recommendation:** Due to the time required for procurement of evaluation expertise, evaluators were commissioned to carry out research activities from Year 3 (2019-2020). Earlier commission (from funding awarded in 2017) would have been beneficial to capture a baseline and to reduce duplication<sup>28</sup> in monitoring activities and to minimise the admin burden on both Project Partners and participating settings/schools. For PEACEPLUS it is recommended that procurement of independent evaluators begins as earlier as possible to launch in time to agree output and outcomes indicators and research tools to capture same. This will also ensure a close working relationship between evaluators and Project Partners in the planning and implementation of research activities.
- **Recommendation:** For the future 'Shared Learning Together' project as part of the PEACEPLUS Programme, consideration should be given by the SEUPB to aligning objectives and the evaluation Terms of Reference to the ETI Shared Education framework (and related standards), which will provide a consistent approach to Shared Education and to evaluating the shared/reconciliation and educational outcomes of Shared Education.

### **Shift the focus to a more outcomes-based approach**

It is noted that the PEACE IV Programme output indicators focuses on the numbers participating (children, pre-schools/schools and teachers/practitioners trained), and therefore SFTS/CASE monitoring focuses on capturing project data for each of these outputs to report back to the SEUPB. This means that there has been a gap in monitoring data with regards outcomes and impacts, which is addressed by the external Impact Evaluation.

- **Recommendation:** There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcome/impact indicators (rather than solely outputs) in the future programming period (PEACEPLUS), and how the intervention contributes to the overall aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, our survey results and evaluation findings provide evidence of the types of societal and educational outcomes achieved (Figure 10.1 overleaf) and should be considered as indicators for any future Shared Education Impact Evaluation Plans, with a focus on research capturing attitudinal and behavioural change. It is envisaged that these outcome indicators will be set as part

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Project Partners created monitoring forms to capture feedback from partnership from Year 1 onwards – whilst this is clearly good practice in terms of continuous monitoring, it created an additional layer of monitoring when the Impact Evaluation commenced in Year 3. The Project Partners and Evaluators worked together to minimise this burden on participants - for instance CASE and the Evaluators combined monitoring tools in Year 5, which resulted in a high response rate as partnerships had only one evaluation survey to complete

of Evaluation Plans, rather than specific targets at an overall PEACEPLUS Programme level. Project Partners and project beneficiaries will be asked to consider these indicators when devising action plans and delivering shared activities.

The model adopted by SFTS includes a community development aspect, recognising the importance of actively involving parents and the wider community to enhance societal outcomes. It is noted that some partnerships were beginning to develop these school-community links in Year 3; however, progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the move to remote working at the end of Year 3 and all of Year 4, and the start of Year 5. By promoting the benefits and allaying the concerns of the wider community will aid the sustainability of activities and will result in longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes. Reassuringly, the PEACEPLUS (2021-2027) Programme overview outlines the direction of travel for Shared Education under a new 'Shared Learning Together' Programme (€51.3m). Importantly this outline references a **'broader participant base to include the wider community'** and **'following principles within the SFTS model with a focus on the wider family'**.

- **Recommendation:** A parental/community engagement model (such as that currently adopted within the SFTS model) should be more widely adopted as a means of embedding the ethos of Shared Education. The SEUPB should consider the inclusion of an indicator to capture parental/wider community involvement, which is desired to have longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes.

**Figure 10.1: Suggested menu of outcome indicators for future Shared Education projects under PEACEPLUS**

**Societal/Shared/Reconciliation outcomes:** *Proportion agreeing that Shared Education has....*

*Children:*

- *Increased level of comfort and ease when taking part in shared classes / when in their partner school(s)*
- *Improved sense of similarities and differences in a shared class setting e.g., through storytelling, poems, music, art.*
- *Led to children making friends in the shared classroom.*
- *Led to these friendships extending into home/community life.*
- *Improved sense of the wider community for example, explore the wider community through shared learning, knowledge of different areas in the locality, travelling on a bus, customs, festivals, celebrations etc.*

*Practitioners/Teachers:*

- *Fostered cooperation between practitioners across partnership.*
- *Improved cross community understanding and relationships.*

*Parents/Wider Community*

- *Increased integration of school within the wider community i.e., enhanced community connections.*
- *Increased opportunities for shared/cross-community engagement for parents.*
- *Enhanced cross-community relations/awareness and respect for diversity.*

**Education outcomes:** *Proportion agreeing that Shared Education has....*

*Children:*

- *Improved accessed to a wider education/ curriculum experience.*
- *Improved children's communication skills e.g., use their senses to explore, interact/play together, co-operate, take turns, share, and help one another in their shared environment.*
- *Improved children's social skills e.g., children can solve problems and resolve conflicts with peers.*
- *Improved children's confidence.*

*Practitioners/Teachers:*

- *Improved professional teaching skills and knowledge.*
- *Enhanced ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives.*
- *Increased access to curriculum resources.*
- *Increased access to Continual Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and training.*
- *Increased opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice.*