



PEACE IV Programme - Shared Education Impact Evaluation

Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE)

Case Study Report: Primary School Partnership

Moyle, Olderfleet, Whitehead and St. MacNissi's Primary Schools

(Co. Antrim)



Approach

As part of the wider Impact Evaluation of Shared Education¹, a number of partnerships were invited to host a case study visit. Case studies were identified by CASE Project Partners (i.e. The Education Authority and Léargas).

The specific objectives of the case studies are:

- To provide examples of good practice i.e. projects which have shown improved educational and shared outcomes for children; enhanced teacher training and partnership working; and projects which demonstrated engagement with parents and the wider community.
- To enrich the Impact Evaluation of Shared Education by capturing real-life stories of funded projects.
- To contribute to the wider dissemination efforts to showcase the work funded under the PEACE IV Programme.

This case study included the following research activities:

- An in-depth interview with the principals of each partnership school.
- Group interview with Shared Education Coordinators.
- Review of existing partnership documentation.

The case study report is structured as follows:

- Background to the partnership;
- Previous experiences of Shared Education and motivations for getting involved;
- Model of sharing;
- Benefits: for the child, school, parents and wider community;
- What has worked well and why;
- Challenges and barriers;
- Looking forward: sustainability and future plans; and
- Conclusions.

¹ The evaluation is being undertaken by SJC Consultancy, in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, and on behalf of SEUPB.

Background to the partnership

This is one of the larger partnerships, with four schools involved.

School name	School type	Enrolment 2019-2020
Moyle Primary School, Larne	Controlled	428
St. MacNissi's Primary School, Larne	Catholic Maintained	189
Olderfleet Primary School, Larne	Controlled	149
Whitehead Primary School	Controlled	438

Three of the schools are based in Larne town, while the fourth is in Whitehead, a small town 10 miles outside Larne. Larne town has a population of 32,563 (NISRA, 2018). The 2011 Census reported that approximately 26% of residents belong or were brought up in the Catholic religion, 67% in the Protestant religion, and 7% other or no religion. Whitehead has a population of 3,802 of which 17.5% belong or were brought up in the Catholic religion, 69% in the Protestant religion, and 13.5% other or no religion (Census, 2011). While the partnership includes three Controlled schools (with a Protestant ethos) and one Catholic Maintained school, all schools are

welcoming of pupils of all faiths or none.

The partnership applied to take part in Shared Education in 2017, and the first shared activities took place in early 2018. 2021-2022 will be the final year of funding for the partnership.

Only one of the schools reported having an inclusion and diversity strategy in place, however they also emphasised that this had been in place long before the school's involvement in Shared Education. The other schools noted that they did not currently have a need for such a policy.

Previous experiences of shared education

Olderfleet PS and St. MacNissi's PS have a long history of taking part in shared activities, however this was always informal and supported by a working friendship between the two principals. As the schools are physically close, classes from either school would on occasion walk over to visit, or would meet up at the local library, which is within walking distance for both schools.

“ In the past, because it was easy to walk to St MacNissi's, we would have walked to the library, the museum or up to the school for a visit, but if the weather was bad, we'd not have gone. Now the buses make it easier. (Principal)

Whitehead PS had a previous relationship with a local Catholic Maintained school, Lourdes PS; the schools attended one another's events and took part in other shared activities, however Lourdes PS closed in 2011. Whitehead PS has not been involved in any formal shared partnerships in the past.

Moyle PS has never previously been involved in shared activities. However, the school recruited a new principal who had been involved in a Shared Education partnership in his previous school, and he actively sought shared opportunities as a priority when he took up his position.

“ Previously, although there are lots of schools in Larne, we have been quite alone usually, this has changed since the arrival of a new principal who has been quite proactive and open to new opportunities. (Coordinator)

“ I was in a partnership in my previous school [in Carrickfergus] and it was very difficult to step away from when I moved, so I was keen to get involved again. (Principal)

Motivations for getting involved

All principals were excited at the prospect of signing up to Shared Education; for some, this was a formalisation of existing relationships, while for others it was an opportunity for the pupils and staff to experience something different. Principals and staff reported a range of motivations for getting involved in Shared Education; these are summarised below.

Challenging stereotypes: For many, motivations stemmed from their own upbringing and personal experiences of segregation while growing up in Northern Ireland. Several staff and principals talked about not having the opportunity to mix with people of other religions until after they left school, and they did not want this experience for the children they work with.

“ I didn't want the children in my school, or my own children, growing up without meeting a Catholic until they were 18. (Principal)

“ There are lots of mixed things happening in the town, e.g. from Larne Football Club, and the kids will meet each other at those kind of things. So we can help prepare the way for that. (Principal)

Several staff reflected on the shifting attitudes within Larne itself, and the changing demographics as new families move into the area and bring a more diverse population. There is a clear belief in the Shared Education model and the role it can play in breaking down barriers to a more integrated town, as well as the need for children to be exposed to opportunities for sharing as early as possible.

“ I've worked in Larne for many years now, and over that time have seen attitudes change. Primary school is the time to begin moving beyond the mistakes of previous generations, and I want to start those early aspects of sharing. (Principal)

Broadening experiences: For others, there was no religious aspect to involvement in Shared Education, with some staff feeling that the pupils do not recognise differences in this regard. Rather, they were motivated by the opportunities for pupils to meet new friends, broaden their social and educational experiences, and strengthen their social skills.

“ Even within one area where people are from the same cultural background, it can be difficult to get them to mix, people can be quite insular, so we hoped to encourage children to think outside the box and to look at what is around them. (Principal)

The opportunity to build relationships between schools: Principals and staff were also motivated by the potential benefits for their wider schools, including training and networking opportunities for teachers, funding to invest in resources, and overarching opportunities to collaborate and support one another, and to share learning and experiences

“ It just looked like a great opportunity for the children and for the staff, e.g. to be able to access training. Networking opportunities are also great, and obviously the money. (Principal)

Model of sharing

As the partnership is large, smaller numbers of pupils initially took part, however this has increased year on year, with 52% of all pupils now taking part. The table below summarises the pupils involved, and the length/frequency of sessions:

	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
Year groups involved	P2 & P5	P2, P3, P5, P6	P2 – P7
Total enrolment (all schools)	1236	1223	1204
Total number of pupils involved	240	423	628
Number of pupils involved per school	Moyle: 60 Whitehead: 60 St. MacNissi's: 60 Olderfleet: 60	Moyle: 109 Whitehead: 110 St. MacNissi's: 118 Olderfleet: 86	Moyle: 150 Whitehead: 170 St. MacNissi's: 174 Olderfleet: 134
% pupils involved	19%	35%	52%
Model of sharing	6 sessions x 5 hours each, every 1 – 2 months.	6 sessions x 5 hours each (Year 2 and 3) and 5 sessions x 6 hours each (Year 5 and 6), every 1 – 2 months.	6 sessions x 5 hours each (Year 2 and 3) and 5 sessions x 6 hours each (Year 4 to 7), every 1 – 2 months.

Olderfleet and St. MacNissi's are smaller schools, with only one class per year group, and all Year 2 - 7 pupils take part. Whitehead and Moyle have two classes per year group, therefore only one class from each year group takes part. Classes are alternated yearly to ensure everyone has a chance to take part.

The partnership made the decision not to involve Year 1 pupils in Shared Education. Staff and principals felt that their priority for the youngest pupils should be to help them settle in to their new school routines, and shared classes may be overwhelming on top of this.

The required 30 hours of contact time per pupil is made up of 6 sessions x 5 hours each (Year 2 and 3) and 5 sessions x 6 hours each (Year 4 to 7). Aside from one child who does not take part for personal reasons, all pupils in allocated classes engage in Shared Education.

Shared activities are centred on outdoor play (for younger groups) and STEM education (for older groups). Teachers concentrate their efforts on designing fresh, creative and engaging sessions especially for Shared Education lessons to encourage children to fully participate. This is facilitated by the planning time that is allowed within Shared Education funding, and would not be possible without it.

“ We have used some of the funding to give teachers time to plan and coordinate, especially when they are hosting as the onus sits with the host teacher. Giving the teacher a half day prior gives them time to plan and prepare. (Principal)

There is no specific focus in lessons on discussing religion or cultural background. One principal noted they would like to embrace this aspect, and felt his staff would be happy to support this, however he recognised that this is not a focus of Shared Education, and would be difficult for some schools to deliver.

“ I would love to be able to progress things, have a child bring in their dad's sash, or talk to us about their first communion, share learning on those cultural and religious differences in an accepting way. But we don't currently touch on those issues, and don't have plans to. Within my school, we'd be quite willing and prepared to tackle that, but it might not be the same in other schools. (Principal)



Benefits for the child

Educational: Pupils have benefited from experiencing different learning environments and teaching methods. They particularly enjoy the STEM activities which involve interactive and 'exciting' resources such as rocket launchers, and the adoption of a practical and fun approach to make lessons more engaging and thereby enhance the curriculum. This also brings potential benefits for pupils that have different learning styles, recognising that not everyone learns best through traditional teaching methods.

“ We try to keep activities quite practical, rather than 'chalk and talk', so they get more enriching opportunities to learn in hands on ways, which is good for aesthetic learners. (Principal)

“ At the end of the day, the ultimate critics are the children. We do a debrief session at the end, what did you enjoy etc. It's always been about friendships and fun, like 'it's good not to have to do boring work' or 'we got to play and have outside time'. (Coordinator)

Social:

Breaking down barriers: While none of the schools reported having any concern about or experience with sectarian issues amongst pupils, staff do believe that stereotypes are complex and passed down through generations, and these may influence the way pupils react to one another, albeit subconsciously.

“ I do think pupils are aware of cultural differences and have implicit ideas or stereotypes about 'others', but they don't always fully understand what that means. (Principal)

Shared Education aims to provide pupils with an opportunity to get to know one another through sustained contact. For those teachers and principals with experience of other shared activities, this sustained contact is the most important aspect, bringing an opportunity to challenge stereotypes through proximity and experience, and allowing children the time needed to build meaningful relationships and to familiarise themselves with the partner school buildings and staff. Staff and principals agree that building relationships and forming friendships are the biggest benefit for the pupils, and they are hopeful that these friendships will last beyond Shared Education.

“ Breaking down barriers, building relationships. Things in the town have changed, and a lot of the children will see each other outside of school. Hopefully these relationships that have been built will continue as time goes on. (Principal)

“ There are lots of mixed marriages in the school now, and across the towns, so children are much more mixed and often don't even know what religion they are. It has opened up opportunities for discussion and learning. (Coordinator)

Preparing for transition: Staff also see involvement in Shared Education as good preparation for the transition to post-primary school, which can come as a shock to many pupils after the sheltered experience at primary school. There is a large Integrated post-primary school nearby, which many of the pupils will go to, and staff hope that many of them will already know each other from Shared Education.

“ Primary school can be a safe bubble and we don't necessarily get to come together with other primary

schools. Transition can be scary, so I hope this helps to prepare them. (Principal)

“ It has worked really well and has been amazing for pupils to have this opportunity to meet with other kids from schools that they probably wouldn't have had a chance to meet. (Coordinator)

Experiencing diversity: One of the schools has a Learning Support Centre with three full time classes providing support for pupils with Special Educational Needs. These classes are small (around twelve pupils in each) and the pupils tend to have fewer opportunities to mix with other children or take part in extracurricular activities. These pupils have been able to take part in Shared Education, therefore broadening their educational experience, allowing them to see other schools and meet other children and staff. Likewise, children in the other schools have got the opportunity to mix with children with a variety of needs, some for the first time, and they have gained an understanding of diversity in this regard.

“ The kids from those classes have been able to get involved which is great as they are normally perhaps more isolated. (Coordinator)

“ *It's not just religion, but giving pupils the opportunity to mix with children who maybe have autism or behavioural or health needs. Some children may not have experienced that before, so it is interesting to see how they react and engage with one another. (Coordinator)*

Benefits for the school

Staff: Teaching staff involved in directly delivering Shared Education feel that it has enhanced their teaching skills and prompted them to try new things. Preparing a creative and fun activity for the shared groups pushes teachers out of their comfort zone and helps them to think more widely about how to deliver exciting lessons. They also get the opportunity to see how another teacher would approach the same activity, and learn something new from this.

“ *The shared ideas, bouncing things off each other and getting together to plan is so beneficial. We are all doing the same subject, but approach them in different ways, so it gives my staff new ideas of how to approach things. (Principal)*

However, it is important to note that this would not be possible without the sub cover provided to allow teachers and coordinators this planning time (up to a maximum of 5 days per school per year, to cover planning, evaluation, training and delivery).

“ *This is a really critical part of it, if they didn't have this time, it would be much more difficult to deliver on what is required. It takes a lot of work as we need to plan new sessions. (Coordinator)*

Training and CPD: Staff have benefited from several training opportunities related to Shared Education, with topics including play based and outdoor learning, and STEM skills. For initial training days, all staff were involved, even if they were not going to be immediately involved in Shared Education delivery; staff felt this was useful in gaining buy-in from the wider team. Schools have also been able to avail of other training opportunities outside of Shared Education, with a particular focus on wellbeing. All these opportunities build staff skills and knowledge, and contribute to the longer-term impact of Shared Education.

“ *We've all been involved in training days, and it's been great to be able to get together and share with each other. (Coordinator)*

“ *Upskilling staff and investing in resources contributes to sustainability as well. (Principal)*

Building relationships between schools: Staff across the partnership have really benefitted from the relationships they have built with each other, not only in relation to Shared Education activities but in wider school life too. The coordinators are given five days per year to meet and plan, and while there has been some turnover in staff, the existing coordinators provide good support for one another. For the principals, the opportunity to identify joint priorities and to share challenges and opportunities with one another has been a benefit that should last beyond the lifetime of the school.

“ *I've been involved in shared practice over the years and often it's been an add-on to normal school life. The four schools in our partnership all want to make things better for our kids, so we've really been able to work on that together over the course of the funding. Schools have become better at what we do individually, but have also built up those relationships with like-minded schools. (Principal)*

“ *It's about schools collaborating, whether they are Protestant, Catholic, whatever. It's about trying to establish better collaboration between schools, set up a shared understanding and a support mechanism where we aren't competing against one another but have lots of things that we can share. (Principal)*

Shared Education has also brought wider networking opportunities, where teachers and principals have space to meet others in a non-educational setting, discuss and share ideas, and take time to think and plan.

“ *The best learning sometimes happens outside of formal training. We've been at sessions where they give a talk in the morning, then allow time in the afternoon to work together. And the setting helps, so meeting up in a nice hotel puts us at ease and takes us out of the school mind-set for the day. (Principal)*

Economic: The money available to buy resources was reported as a significant benefit for the wider school, with effort being made to invest in things that can be reused and that will benefit the school beyond the scope of Shared Education. Resources purchased include rocket launchers for STEM education, and an outdoor sandpit and picnic table for younger children. The trips also enhance the educational experience, and would not have been possible without Shared Education.

“ *In the first year we used money for craft materials and things, but realised that it would be better to buy resources that could be reused again and again, therefore benefit classes further down the line.*
(Coordinator)

The shared training discussed above also brings economic benefits; schools have been able to come together outside of Shared Education to share the cost of trainers which would have been too expensive for an individual school.

“ *We come together as a staff for training as well, on our own initiative. We had training last year on thinking skills, and this year on mental health.* (Coordinator)

Benefits for parents and the wider community

Parents: There are no specific Shared Education activities directed at parents, however parents are kept informed of what is happening. A joint information evening was held for parents to showcase the activities the pupils had taken part in, although engagement from parents was limited. Parents also receive school newsletters, and teachers know through discussion with pupils that they go home and talk to their parents about the things they have done in class.

“ *The children are very enthused after their sessions, and they go home and talk about what they are doing, so the parents hear about Shared Education that way. But it is very difficult to get parents to more fully engage.*
(Coordinator)



“ *We had a couple of evenings where we encouraged parents to come along and hear what we were doing, but only a handful of parents came to the first session we organised, and a second one we were due to hold was called off. (Principal)*

Community members: There are no activities focused specifically on engaging with the wider communities, therefore no wider benefits were reported. One principal reflected that, rather than immediate impact, the benefits would filter down to the wider community in years to come when all the pupils who have been involved in Shared Education grow up with changed or changing attitudes. Of course, that depends on continuity of funding so that further classes get to benefit.

“ *Things aren't going to change overnight, I see it as we're in for the long haul. If we can raise a generation with different attitudes, then there will be a massive impact in the future, but it'll be hard to see at the minute. (Principal)*

What has worked well and why?

Building team work into the everyday curriculum: In general, staff feel that working on normal curricular activities, with topics such as 'the world around us' and 'natural disasters', while building in opportunities for collaboration, has worked best in terms of engaging pupils. In planning shared sessions, teachers work together to identify creative lessons which require negotiation and teamwork.

“ *The best part for me is when I go into the gym hall and see lots of groups of children, two from each school, engaging on a practical activity or problem solving. (Principal)*

“ *We always start with activities that encourage pupils to engage and work together- solve problems, build structures, create things - activities like that which need conversation. (Coordinator)*

Free play: While pupils enjoy the organised activities, staff feel that the opportunity to mix freely in the playground is also extremely

important. This also allows pupils who have not been involved in the session to see pupils in other uniforms in their playground, and to take the opportunity to play either together or alongside one another.

“ *When children are at their happiest is when they are playing together in the playground having free time. From the first meeting when they got outside, they just seemed to mesh very well together. When they came back in to class and carried on lessons, they were more interactive at that stage.*
(Coordinator)

“ *Of course, they will also go back and play with their own friends and groups but it has been good even just for them to have other schools in the playground in different uniforms and to learn to share their space.* *(Principal)*

Often, pupils find that they already know each other or have shared interests outside of school, for example they may be members of a local sports or youth club. Staff also reflected that the younger children tend to mix better than older ones; this may be led by the focus on learning through play in the early years, and the less structured nature of lessons.

School trips: Staff see these as an important part of Shared Education, especially since they have been fully funded, however consider these a reward or incentive for taking part, rather than the core activity.

“ *The trips are an added bonus. Previous schemes I've been involved in, the trips have been it, and there was no sustained contact.*
(Principal)

“ *We've had a trip at the start to introduce kids, then a trip at the end as a celebration. But the trips are a reward at the end, not the ultimate goal of Shared Education.* *(Principal)*

Trips have varied, including the Ulster Museum, Let's Go Hydro, World of Wonder, Carnfunnock Country Park and Colin Glen, and are considered a perfect way for all four schools to mix informally and for pupils to build relationships.

“ *Trips are a really good opportunity to meet, because it isn't forced and 'fun', allows for relationships to be built.*
(Principal)

On reflection, a less structured trip is better at the beginning of the school year, when pupils don't yet know one another.

“ *The first activity for P5 was a trip to W5 and felt like they didn't really mix because they had never met before. So that was a hard one, but hopefully when we do the end of year trip (physical pursuits) things will be different because they'll have built up those relationships.*
(Coordinator)

Support from wider stakeholders: All governors, teachers and parents have been supportive of involvement, with no negativity expressed. Boards of Governors have hosted joint board meetings, which have been positive and helped the planning and administrative processes to run smoothly. The only complaints received from parents have been due to the need to alternate classes each year to give everyone a chance, with some parents fearing that their child is missing out.

“ *The year a class isn't involved, that is the year that parents complain, 'why is my child not having the opportunity to do the Shared Education'.* (Coordinator)

Challenges and barriers

Size of the partnership: The biggest challenge for the partnership has been the number of schools involved and therefore the organisational logistics required, particularly in the early days. There are four schools, with six year-groups involved, and two of the schools are quite large (400-plus pupils).

“ *It is really tricky, there is something happening every week, then there are school trips to organise at the start and end of each year for each group. And as the years have gone on, more classes have got involved, so it's got more complex.* (Coordinator)

“ *It was a challenge in the beginning in getting everything set up- we wanted to make sure that we maximised the contact time between children, especially as we realised that we couldn't bring four schools to one place so they couldn't all be together at once.*
(Principal)

Coordination of the various classes has been logistically difficult; however, this has been addressed in several ways, including by developing a colour-coded timetable so that everyone knows in advance where they should be; by holding all activities on a Wednesday to minimise disruption to the school week; and by putting the host teacher in charge of their session. While the timetable has been up and running well, if one of the four schools needs to change plans, this impacts on many pupils across four schools. Given the distance between the schools, and the number of pupils involved, buses to transport children are an essential part of the planning, and take up a significant proportion of the budget as well as administration time.

“ *The logistics are difficult. Sometimes with the buses and so many pick-ups, by the time it gets here the children are late and we need to contact parents etc. and if one school drops the ball, we all struggle.*

Physical capacity: Lack of space was a concern in the early days; for schools already at capacity, there is little room for visitors, and this has been more difficult for the smaller schools than the bigger ones.

“ *We had the original idea that the visiting children would just come and join in with school life, have their*

lunch at the same time, play in the playground. This works for us because we have a spare gym hall we can dedicate to CASE on the day, but it's not as easy for the smaller schools. (Principal)

The partnership has solved this by running concurrent sessions so that two groups of pupils join up in one school and two in another, then rotate next time. This means however that the children split their 30 hours of contact across three partner schools, rather than spending all 30 hours with the same partner group if only two schools were involved. Staff have some concern that this may impact the quality of relationships built, however have no comparison against which to measure this. Schools also feel like some of the staff relationships may have been enhanced had there only been two schools involved.

“ *Looking back now, I probably wouldn't have gone with four schools in the partnership. For the children, they are going to three different schools during the visits, so it's actually harder for them to build those relationships and become familiar with their partnership schools. (Principal)*

“ *There may have been more organic exchange of information etc. between staff if the partnerships had been smaller. (Coordinator)*

Pupil relationships: Staff reported a few clashes between pupils in visiting classes in the early stages, but these were not due to 'religious differences', rather due to personality differences that emerge with every group. There have also been some pupils who are nervous to visit other schools and meet new people, however teachers are skilled at dealing with such issues.

“ *You know when you walk into a room which personalities are going to clash. We have also had a nervous pupil, but once we got there it was all OK. There are always different personalities, and a change in routine can upset children, but we work through this. (Coordinator)*

Staff buy-in: While teachers and wider staff are generally on board with Shared Education, there are some who struggle with balancing this with the wider pressures and stressors they are facing in their work. They are content to take part as they can see the wider benefits for the school and pupils (e.g. in funding for resources, increased opportunities), otherwise it may be difficult to sustain their cooperation.

A lot of effort is required by the teachers and coordinators, and they noted that while teachers can be awarded additional pay points if they deliver extra activities beyond their basic teaching, there is no additional remuneration for the Shared Education Coordinator role.

“ *As teachers, we hate to be taken away from our class, especially those preparing for transfer tests. So, while we love the other schools coming to visit, it's really a day out of the normal teaching time. You have to really be passionate about it to keep it going. (Coordinator)*

“ *Initially it is time consuming, another thing for the staff to do and that's a big difficulty; no matter how hard we try to link it to their existing work, it is additional pressure. (Principal)*



Staff continuity: There has been an ongoing issue with staff continuity during the lifetime of the partnership. The principals led in the early stages, and made most of the initial decisions themselves, before handing over to the coordinators. In hindsight, all feel it would have been beneficial for coordinators to have been involved in discussions from the beginning onwards. There has also been some staff movement within schools, with several principals and coordinators leaving for pastures new, with no opportunity for transfer of knowledge before he or she left.

Only one of the original coordinators is still in place, meaning there has been an over-reliance on this individual to keep things running while the new coordinators build their experience and knowledge.

“ *My role as Shared Education Coordinator came quite quickly after starting at the school, so I haven't quite got all the background information yet and I'm just catching up on what has been happening. The previous coordinator is no longer at the school, so there was no opportunity for handover; that has been difficult to pick up. I have very much relied on [other school coordinator] to help me. (Coordinator)*

“ *We've rejigged teaching staff this year and so have other schools so we are lacking some continuity, and it is hard to keep track and bring the collective knowledge along. With the size of the group too, sometimes it can be like the blind leading the blind! (Principal)*



Looking forward: sustainability and future plans

All involved feel they would like to see a Shared Education legacy post-funding. While all agreed that it has been a worthwhile experience and they very much want to maintain the relationships built, staff do not feel it will be possible to sustain the activities currently undertaken. Both capacity of school staff, and available funding, were considered the main barriers to taking Shared Education forward as it is post-funding.

“ *We'd still want to stay in touch, and do joint trips etc., but wouldn't have the money for transport or for trips as they are all being funded. And I don't think teachers would be up for doing the actual host days, we just wouldn't have capacity. (Coordinator)*

“ *In some aspects we'll continue, but it'll be difficult. Transport is the biggest cost and enabler. And schools are busy places, so there has to be an incentive for doing it. The relationships have been built now though, we've already got a principals group*

in the East Antrim area, so the support is there, but to continue for the kids there has to be at least some money. (Principal)

Feelings are mixed in terms of potential options for the future. One principal, who had an existing relationship with a school prior to Shared Education, reflected that perhaps the formal arrangements had restricted them in their interaction. They felt hopeful that the relationship developed between staff and principals across all four schools would drive continued collaboration, however the approach will be more flexible and ad-hoc going forward.

“ *[The visits] previously happened naturally, they weren't so planned. Shared Education has no room for spontaneity, and we can't just join up with another school when we want to, without leaving someone out. (Principal)*



Another principal felt they would like to see the Shared Education aims and desired outcomes reviewed and expanded, with the opportunity to train staff to actively address themes of difference and acceptance. This approach would require core, long term funding to bring all schools on board, rather than leaving it to individual choice, as is the current position.

“ We can either half do it, or do it properly. And if we are doing this properly, then we need to go further, and be able to tackle the big issues and train up staff to facilitate that, really look at differences and acceptance. Leaving schools to set up their own partnership and come together is hit and miss. If it's not a priority for the principal, and there are already so many conflicting priorities, it won't happen unless the principal sees it as important. (Principal)

Conclusions

As one of the biggest partnerships within Shared Education, this partnership has understandably had difficulties in terms of practical arrangements. However, three years into engagement, partnership working is now embedded, and the practical aspects of organising shared activities are working more smoothly. Although looking back, staff may have done things differently, for example engaged in a smaller partnership. All agree that it has been worthwhile and they can clearly see the benefits for pupils, schools and staff.

“ Overall our experience has been very positive. It's stressful and tiring and there's a lot of work involved, but the pupils always enjoy it. (Coordinator)

“ The benefit is hopefully children are growing up in a different society to what we grew up in, and Shared Education is contributing to that. (Principal)



This report was produced by SJC Consultancy and National Children's Bureau, as part of the wider Impact Evaluation of Shared Education (PEACE IV Programme, Specific Objective 1, Action1)

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