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Shared Education
Impact Evaluation (Year 3)

PEACE IV Programme – Specific Objective 1

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NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

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We would particularly like to thank the seven case study partnerships (comprised of six pre-schools and eleven primary schools), involving practitioners/teachers, support staff, and the children who engaged in research activities, and their parents who gave consent.

The research was overseen by a Project Board to include: The Education Authority; Léargas; Early Years – the organisation for young children; the National Childhood Network (NCN); and The Fermanagh Trust. We would like to sincerely thank the Project Board members for their contribution in engaging in interviews, as well as providing access to monitoring data and importantly their key role in providing strategic direction and examining the research findings and implications in terms of potential recommendations.

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.1 Introduction

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assess the impact of the interventions within the EU PEACE IV Programme Specific Objective 1, Action 1: Children participating in Shared Education, which 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, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

To deliver upon these aims, SEUPB awarded €33.14m to two separate consortia – one focused on early years and the second on the primary/post-primary sector. These include:

Project Name	Lead Partner (LP) and Project Partners (PP)	Funding
Sharing from the Start (SFTS)	Early Years – the organisation for young children (LP) The National Childhood Network (PP) The Fermanagh Trust (PP)	€4,256,007 (13%)
Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE)	Education Authority (LP) Léargas (PP)	€28,890,790 (87%)
2 projects	**5 delivery agents**	**€33,146,797**

Funding is targeted at pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools that have not previously participated in Shared Education[1]. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of pre-schools/schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background collaborating to deliver shared classes. SFTS partnerships comprise of 2-3 pre-schools[2]. CASE partnerships comprise of 2-5 schools[3]. Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2022, as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018:
  - September 2017: Funding awarded by 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.
- **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 – SFTS to complete by March 2022.
- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity and project closure from September 2022 to June 2023 – CASE to complete by November 2022.

[1] 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.
[2] SFTS 46 partnerships: 85% comprised of two pre-schools in partnership; and 15% three pre-schools.
[3] CASE 168 partnerships: 75% comprised of two schools in partnership; 18% three schools; 6% four schools; and 1% five schools in partnership.

This phase of the evaluation reflects project activity from **January 2020 to June 2020** (three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures). SFTS and CASE projects were in the middle of Year 3 implementation at the beginning of the period under evaluation and at the end of Year 3 by the end of the evaluation.

Since reporting, the effects of the pandemic have persisted for a further nine months and are having a considerable impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes, the extent to which was not known at the time of completing this report. Subsequent evaluation reports will focus on this impact and how projects have adapted to meet objectives.

I.2 Approach

A mixed-method approach was adopted to deliver the Impact Evaluation to include:

- An online survey of SFTS early years practitioners and CASE principals/teachers was carried out in June 2020. Respondents were asked to provide feedback based on pre Covid-19 conditions. A total of 216 survey responses were received, representing 126 unique partnerships. A good response rate was achieved based on the total number of SFTS (87%) and CASE (51%) partnerships, particularly as schools were closed (March – June 2020), and demonstrates the goodwill shown by all and willingness to provide feedback about their experience.
- Interviews with SEUPB staff and case officers.
- Interviews with Project Partners.
- Review of Project Partner monitoring data, including pre-school and school baseline data; partnership progress reports, portfolios of evidence including photos and feedback from shared classes.
- Focus group with SFTS senior early years specialists (EYS).
- Interviews with CASE Development Officers (DOs).
- Attendance at two CASE 'Dissemination of Learning' events, involving observations and focus groups with attending teachers.
- Development of seven case studies involving contributions from 17 pre-schools/schools including interviews with early years practitioners/teachers, support staff and research with children.

There are several outputs, which collectively provide a robust Impact Evaluation of Shared Education, to include: (1) Overall Programme Report (2) SFTS Survey Results (3) CASE Survey Results (4) Case Studies (x7) and Summary Report of Case Studies.

To aid the dissemination of learning, the evaluators also created a short video animation [click here] to summarise the report findings, an infographic, and a video showcasing SFTS/CASE shared class activities [click here]. These outputs will be promoted as part of a week of focused social media activity (scheduled for April 2021).

I.3 PEACE IV – achievement of indicators

It is evident that SFTS and CASE projects have demonstrated excellent progress against the PEACE IV output indicators set for 2023, with outputs having already exceeded the respective number of pre-schools and schools participating, with remaining outputs on schedule to be met (pre Covid-19).

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. Milestone target of 19,200 by 2018).*

School/pupil participation began in January 2018 and by June 2020 there were:

- 482 pre-schools/schools taking part in Shared Education, exceeding targets (138% of target achieved – recruitment of schools is now complete).
- 1,409 early years practitioners and teachers having completed training and now have the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (67% achieved and on track to meet target).
- Almost 73,000 children have now benefited from shared class activity (51% of target achieved).

Output Indicators	Overall (CASE & SFTS)		
	PEACE IV output (2023)	Achieved (June 2020)	% achieved
Number of pre-schools/schools involved	350	482	138%
Number of trained teachers/ practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	2,100	1,409	67%
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	144,000 (milestone target: 19,200 by 2018)	72,752	51%

The above targets were achieved within 2.5 years (up until June 2020), therefore if project activity remains at the same pace it can be assumed that within the next 1.75 years for SFTS (21 months until March 2022) and almost 2.5 years for CASE (29 months until November 2022) the output indicator for the number of teachers/practitioners trained and children participating in Shared Education will be achieved (pre Covid-19).

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.

The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as SFTS/CASE partnerships have completed three years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing (as per ETI's Shared Education Framework[4]) from a baseline position of 'Defining' to subsequent stages of 'Developing', and 'Expanding', and in some cases 'Embedding' where 'in-depth and high-quality Shared Education' has been achieved. There is also year-on-year progress across each of the Síolta five standards for early years settings[5].

On average, children have benefited from 23 hours each per year of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes.

- Year 1 – 2017/18: 20 hours per child (6 months activity from January 2018 to June 2018).
- Year 2 – 2018/19: 30 hours per child (10 months activity from September 2018 to June 2019).
- Year 3 – 2019/20: 18 hours per child (5 months activity from September 2019 to February 2020).

In Year 3, pre-schools/schools closed for the final term (from early March to June 2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures, greatly inhibiting Shared Education activities. However, the overall net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers.

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%.*

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

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 shift in the overall proportion of schools involved in Shared Education, which will increase further, i.e., as of June 2020, a total of 482 schools are now participating 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

[4] The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Shared Education Framework outlines stages of progression to effective Shared Education against four pillars: (1) learner-centred (2) high quality learning and teaching (3) leadership and management and (4) community connections. The Framework for Schools is available online at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/developing-shared-education-framework-school-partnerships-november-2014 and the Framework for Early Years Settings is available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/developing-shared-education-early-years-settings-framework-collaborative-partnerships-2016-2017

[5] The Síolta Standards - the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education outlines 12 principles and 16 standards of quality, details available online at https://siolta.ie/about.php The five standards relevant to Shared Education include: (1) Rights of the Child (2) Parents and Families (3) Professional Practice (4) Identify and Belonging (5) Community Involvement.

School Omnibus Survey was delayed, but is due to take place in 2021/22, and the School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, whist it has not yet taken place yet will be available prior to the end of the programming period.

In terms of 'non-participating' schools i.e., those not involved in Shared Education, there are some disparities in the figures from various sources[6]. It is evaluator's estimate, using these sources, that there are approximately 657 'non-participating' schools across the PEACE IV eligible area (to include Northern Ireland and the Border Region). These could represent latent/unmet demand, and a potential pool of schools for future EU funding linked to Shared Education interventions.

I.4 Evidence of Impact – Key Findings

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with partnerships highlighting the significant benefit to those involved. There is an appetite for this work to continue to allow partnerships to complete their shared activities, and to build on the educational and reconciliation benefits achieved.

Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on the following areas: cross-border collaboration; and outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, practitioners/teachers, parents, and the wider community.

Impact on Cross-border Collaboration at a Strategic Level

PEACE IV Shared Education has helped to build capacity in cross-border working, to include between Department of Education (NI) and Department of Education and Skills (RoI); 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.

Capacity has also been built at an implementation level, with SFTS Early Years Specialists (EYS) and CASE Development Officers (DOs) now equipped with the skills to work on a cross-border basis to manage the current SFTS/CASE projects and any potential future PEACE-funded, or other initiative, to support the advancement/mainstreaming of Shared Education.

Benefits for Children

Educational
One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with almost **73,000 children** having benefited from shared class activity (51% of target achieved). Shared Education has had a positive impact on the curriculum by helping to enrich the curricular focus of the CCEA Curriculum (NI)[7] and NCCA Curriculum (RoI)[8]

Most significant is that almost all (95%) of respondents agreed that SFTS/CASE has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. For instance, 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 key educational benefits reported include improved communications skills (93%), improved social skills (88%); improved confidence (94%); enhanced learning experiences (94%); and eased transition process (78%).

[6] Sources include: (1) School Omnibus Survey (2) Education Authority study and events for non-participating schools (3) PEACE IV result indictor baseline assumptions.
[7] CCEA – The Northern Ireland Curriculum [Online] available at https://ccea.org.uk/about/what-we-do/curriculum
[8] National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) - Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework; Primary Curriculum, Junior and Senior Cycle [Online] available at https://curriculumonline.ie/Home/

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.

Cross-community Friendships
Involvement of children in Shared Education as part of their overall education has contributed to positive behaviours and attitudes towards different communities, with evidence of connections and friendships made. 93% agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, with practitioners/teachers observing social development and many close relationships emerging over the duration of the projects. 61% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life.**

This experience will positively influence children's behaviours in the future in terms of building cross-community links and friendships. Opportunities for children to meet outside of school (with support from parents) will contribute to the longer-term benefits of sharing.

Dealing with Differences
Reconciliation benefits in terms of enhanced mutual understanding and tolerance is also evident. For example, participants reported that partnership enabled children feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner pre-school/school (93%); to meet other adults and become comfortable with them (95%); describe ways that they are similar and different to others in a shared classroom (85%), as well as having increased empathy for others with different needs/abilities.

The positive starting position of children was noted as a contributing factor to the success of SFTS/CASE projects with children's willingness to engage in shared activities; stereotyping and negative attitudes were not (or less) apparent among young children. 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. For older children it has helped to reinforce the importance of accepting differences to help positively influence attitudes and behaviours, thereby contributing towards a shared society.

Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers

One of the key outputs of Shared Education is the development and delivery of related teacher training and professional learning initiatives i.e., the PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is on schedule to be met with a total of **1,409 teachers trained to date**.

Shared Education has had a positive impact on practitioners'/teachers' continuous professional development. **96%** reported that they are **more confident in their ability to lead Shared Education activities**, consequently adding to the sustainability of such activities in the future.

Other key benefits include improved professional teaching skills and knowledge (94%); increased access to curriculum resources (93%); increased access to external professional expertise (89%); increased access to CPD opportunities and training (87%); enhanced teaching and learning in your pre-school or school (95%); provided opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice (96%).

Benefits for Pre-schools/Schools

Shared Education has had a positive impact on helping to address curricular priorities in relevant Pre-school Development Plans; Síolta Baseline Assessments; or School Development Plans. 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 strategically aligned to the agreed curriculum focus, recognising that they are intrinsically linked.

There is evidence that Shared Education is being translated into quality standards[9] for teaching and learning 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. A review of inspection reports provides evidence that Shared Education is recognised as a valuable intervention to improve teaching and learning.
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 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.

There are also economic benefits for participating pre-schools/schools. The evidence indicates that the aim to '*promotes 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 shared practitioner/teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.

Benefits for Parents & Wider Community

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. Results are positive with 92% of practitioners/teachers agreeing that children now have a greater sense of the wider community; 75% agreed that due to Shared Education there has been an increased integration of the respective pre-school/school within the wider community; and 95% agreed that Shared Education has improved cross-community understanding and relationships.

89% of respondents described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as 'very positive' (41%) or 'positive' (48%). This positivity extends to parents with 91% of respondents agreeing that feedback from parents was 'very positive' (40%) or 'positive' (51%).

Support from parents is evident as they have given their consent for their child to be involved in SFTS/CASE shared classes, with increased visibility of parents at various shared events – showing a tangible support for SFTS/CASE.

There are differences between the models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project i.e., **85%** agreed that SFTS increased opportunities for cross-community engagement for parents, compared to CASE where **56%** agreed with this statement. The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement (parents attending training/workshops), whereas CASE did not focus on delivering activities/workshops specifically for parents.

[9] The ETI Shared Education Framework for Schools and Early Years Settings (NI); The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate's Quality Framework for Schools, and School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (RoI); and The Síolta Standards for early childhood care and education services (RoI); are key national frameworks and quality standards adopted by SFTS and CASE to support the implementation and self-assessment of Shared Education.

The involvement of parents has the potential for greater impact and achievement of PEACE IV peace and reconciliation aims. 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.

Challenges

In terms of challenges, practitioners/teachers were asked to provide feedback based on pre Covid-19 conditions. Results highlighted that challenges related to general administration and planning, rather than issues underpinning the actual model and cross-community dimension of SFTS/CASE. The main challenge was the **time commitment** involved in planning and administrating shared classes (50%), although, many appreciate that this is necessary to ensure the success of the projects. Collaborative working helped to ease the additional pressure on competing demands.

Feedback from key stakeholder interviews and focus groups with Project Partners, EYS, DOs, highlighted other challenges including: travel/transport in terms of planning, coordination and the administration burden surrounding gaining the required number of quotations (and evidence) to meet procurement requirements, noting that travel remains as one of the biggest costs, and consequently potential barrier to sustaining Shared Education activities; greater demand than expected from practitioners/teachers for Project Partners training events; ensuring that terminology used in training aligned to both NI/RoI context; competing pressures in respective jurisdictions; large partnership being more complex to coordinate; different size (number of children) of partnering schools making it more difficult to mix children; partnership breakdowns in a minority of cases; and some issues relating to staff (DO) turnover are now resolved.

Importantly, 80% agreed that the time spent working on Shared Education is proportionate to the benefits/outcomes achieved. Overall, the challenges outlined have not inhibited pre-schools/schools achieving their objectives (pre Covid-19). Comments acknowledged the added workload but felt it is commensurate to benefits and that the effort has been worthwhile given the educational and social benefits gained from participation.

Sustainability

As a legacy of the PEACE IV funding, 15% reported that 'yes, we will continue with our partner at the same level of activity' in the absence of funding. This is due to connections established via SFTS/CASE and will provide ongoing cross-community benefits for those involved. A further 61% agreed that a reduced level of activity would be possible, mainly involving ongoing practitioner/teacher contact (informal and formal) and ad-hoc events for children.

I.5 Conclusions & Recommendations

Improved cross-community relations

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'*.

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, and as such has positively contributed to meeting this Programme aim. Based on the impact data, there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, as well as between practitioners/teachers in partner schools. This coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established will create a legacy of the funding.

Achievement of Aims & Output Indicators

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, there are now 482 pre-schools/schools actively involved in PEACE IV Shared Education projects. These projects currently involve almost 73,000 learners from all backgrounds joining for curriculum-led shared classes.

Based on the achievement to date, SFTS and CASE have met or are on target to meet output indicators, therefore these benefits will continue to evolve, with building the capacity for partnerships to be sustainable a key focus of Project Partners.

Aim: Involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.
There are 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) involving 482 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors. 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.

Aim: Deliver educational benefits to learners, promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and promote equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.
Impact data (section I.4) on the educational benefits, economic benefits, and shared/reconciliation benefits provides the evidence that this aim has been achieved. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact, to include:

- Enhanced cross-community and cross-border collaboration at a strategic and operational level.
- Improved quality standards in teaching and learning.
- Enriched the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (RoI) offer, with subsequent benefits for children in improved educational outcomes.
- Contributed to meeting objectives in Pre-school/School Development Plans and Inclusion/Shared Policies.
- The efficient and effective use of resources through adopting a shared model (sharing equipment, resources, joint training).
- Developed cross-community friendships and supported children's ability to acknowledge and promote differences.

- Increased opportunities for parents to generate cross-community connections.
- Increased community connections with and across the wider community through the involvement of parents and use of local facilities/community venues.

PEACE IV – to shift the focus to a more outcomes-based approach

The PEACE IV Programme defined output indicators focused on the numbers of participating (children, pre-schools/schools and teachers/practitioners trained), and therefore SFTS/CASE project data focused on measuring these outputs. **Recommendation:** There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcomes in the future programming period, and how the intervention contributes to the overall PEACE Programme aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, the survey results provide evidence of the types of outcomes achieved and should be considered as indicators for any future Shared Education interventions.

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. A parental/community engagement model should be more widely adopted as a means of embedding the ethos of Shared Education – by promoting the benefits and allaying the concerns of those not receptive to the premise of Shared Education this will aid the sustainability of activities and will result in longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes. It is noted that some partnerships were beginning to develop these school-community links in Year 3 of the projects, however progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the move to remote working. **Recommendation:** For any future Shared Education intervention, for SEUPB to consider the inclusion of an indicator to capture parental/wider community involvement, which is desired to have longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes.

Addressing implementation challenges

PEACE IV incorporated a range simplification measures to reduce administration for beneficiaries, to include the introduction of simplified costs. For Shared Education this related to the adoption of flat rates for staff costs, and unit costs per child participating. However, pre-schools/schools have raised issues relating to the administration burden of travel costs, for example sourcing quotes from several bus providers, and if the date/duration of travel changes having to source updated quotes.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that challenges relating to the administration burden are monitored by Project Partners to gain a better understanding of the time spent on tasks. This will allow Project Partners to understand any issues and work with pre-schools/schools to minimise the impact.
- Going forward, it is important that SEUPB and Project Partners ensure that this burden is reduced/not transferred to project beneficiaries, and the focus remains on achievement of outputs and outcomes. This could be achieved by introducing a unit cost for travel.

SFTS training and CASE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) offer a comprehensive training package for participants. Furthermore, EYS and DOs provide valuable support to partnerships and feedback has been very complimentary. Whilst feedback was positive, suggested recommendations to improve training delivery include:

Recommendations:

- For Project Partners to endeavour to meet training demand and that content considers the context of both jurisdictions in both design (terminology used) and delivery (locations to cover spread across both jurisdictions).
- Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e. guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support accessing expertise/external tutors; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; support using IT in the

delivery of shared classes (particularly important during Covid-19 restrictions on contact); incorporating mental health into activities; and increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs.

- 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.

Quality cross-community contact is fundamental to the success of the projects, and there is evidence from the impact data this has been achieved in terms of educational and societal benefits gained. However, some feedback suggests the need for further guidance on how to mix children in instances where class sizes vary across schools within a partnership. **Recommendation:** Guidance for partnering pre-schools/schools of disproportionate size (in terms of number of children) on how best to mix children so they can develop quality contact and relationships.

Impact of Covid-19

The emergence of Covid-19 (from March 2020) has 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.

This phase of the evaluation reflects project activity from January 2020 to June 2020 (three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures). Since reporting, the effects of the pandemic have continued for another nine months and are having a considerable impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes. This poses a risk to achievement, as the extent to which progress can be made by SFTS/CASE in Year 4 and Year 5 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector under Covid-19 restrictions. Furthermore, prolonged lockdown presents a risk to the sustainability of relationships developed between partnering pre-schools/schools.

Despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive to help support pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established.

The SFTS/CASE Project Partners submitted respective proposals to SEUPB outlining a blended learning approach to shared sessions to ensure that SFTS/CASE targets are met, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the educational and societal benefits that have been achieved to date.

Practitioners/ teachers have endeavoured to use technology to maintain contact between partnerships, and there are good examples of this working. They are keen to work with the SFTS/CASE Project Partners and would welcome support and training as to how best to deliver Shared Education in the current climate and to maximise the use of technology/virtual classrooms to maintain linkages with children and staff.

Subsequent evaluation reports will focus on the extent of this impact and how projects have adapted to Covid-19 conditions to meet objectives.

Recommendation: The immediate sustainability of activities is dependent on when pre-schools/schools can resume normal routines, in a post Covid-19 environment. Timely guidance is required from SEUPB/European Commission on the model/likely future roll-out of Shared Education.

1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assess the impact of the interventions within the EU PEACE IV Programme Specific Objective 1, Action 1: Children participating in Shared Education, which 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, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

PEACE IV Programme, 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%. The target value for 2023 is 88%.*

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. Milestone target of 19,200 by 2018).*

To deliver upon these aims and Specific Objective, 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 primary and post-primary schools (€28.9m). These projects are delivered by two consortia of Project Partners:

Project Partners:
- Early Years – the organisation for young children.
- The National Childhood Network (NCN).
- The Fermanagh Trust.

Project Partners:
- The Education Authority.
- Léargas.

Funding is targeted at pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools that have not previously participated in Shared Education[10]. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background collaborating to deliver shared classes. SFTS partnerships comprise of 2-3 pre-schools[11]. CASE partnerships comprise of 2-5 schools[12].

Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2022, as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018: September to June 2018.
  - September 2017: Funding awarded by 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.
- **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 – SFTS to complete by March 2022.
- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity from September 2022 to June 2023 – CASE to complete by November 2022.

This phase of the evaluation reflects project activity from **January 2020 to June 2020** (three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures). SFTS and CASE projects were in the middle of Year 3 implementation at the beginning of the period under evaluation and at the end of Year 3 by the end of the evaluation.

Since reporting, the effects of the pandemic have persisted for a further nine months and are having a considerable impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes, the extent to which was not known at the time of completing this report. Subsequent evaluation reports will focus on this impact and how projects have adapted to meet objectives.

1.2 Approach & Research Outputs

A mixed-method approach (Annex I) was adopted to deliver the Impact Evaluation to include:

- Interviews with SEUPB staff and case officers.
- Interviews with Project Partners.
- Review of Project Partner monitoring data (Annex II), including pre-school and school baseline data; partnership progress reports, portfolios of evidence including photos and feedback from shared classes.
- Focus group with SFTS senior early years specialists (SEYS).
- Interviews with CASE Development Officers (DOs).
- Attendance at two CASE 'Dissemination of Learning' events, involving observations and focus groups with attending teachers.
- Development of seven case studies involving contributions from 17 pre-schools/schools including interviews with early years practitioners/teachers, support staff and research with children.

[10] 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.
[11] SFTS 46 partnerships: 85% comprised of two pre-schools in partnership; and 15% three pre-schools.
[12] CASE 168 partnerships: 75% comprised of two schools in partnership; 18% three schools; 6% four schools; and 1% five schools in partnership.

In addition, an online survey of SFTS early years practitioners and CASE principals/teachers was carried out. A total of 216 survey responses were received, representing 126 unique partnerships. A good response rate was achieved based on the total number of SFTS (87%) and CASE (51%) partnerships, particularly as schools were closed (March – June 2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and demonstrates the goodwill shown by all and willingness to provide feedback about their experience.

Table 1.1: Online Survey Response Rate

	SFTS	CASE	Total
No. of individual survey responses	83	133	216
No. of partnerships represented	40	86	126
TOTAL number of partnerships funded	*46*	*168*	*214*
% response rate (based on no. of partnerships)	87%	51%	59%

There are several research outputs, which collectively provide a robust Impact Evaluation of Shared Education, to include:

Table 1.2: Research Outputs

Research Output	Description
1. Overall Programme Report	This report provides the background to the Impact Evaluation to include: Terms of Reference; methodology; strategic and operating context; summary of monitoring information i.e. detailing the number of pre-schools/schools involved each year, and numbers of early years practitioners/teachers trained; 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	Quantitative and qualitative research findings based on survey administered in June 2020.
3. CASE - survey results	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 seven standalone case studies have been developed, along with a summary paper of key findings emerging across the case studies. Findings mirror that gained from the online survey.

This report reflects Research Output 1.

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. Please refer to the standalone Research Outputs 2 and 3 for a breakdown of statistics for each of the SFTS and CASE projects.

In addition to the above Research Outputs, SEUPB required that two major conferences on Shared Education be held in 2020/21 and one in 2022, to involve a range of stakeholders including participating pre-schools/schools, education authorities and policy makers. The evaluation team had initiated conference planning, however due to Covid-19 restrictions, a large-scale face-to-face conference is now 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. Given ongoing Covid-19 related challenges facing the education sector, the virtual conference was cancelled. In its place, a week of focused social media activity was agreed (scheduled for April 2021). This will provide an opportunity to share the evaluation resources and share a range of short, creative inputs from the funder and Project Partners to highlight key messages emanating from Shared Education.

To aid the dissemination of learning, the evaluators also created a short video animation [click here] to summarise the report findings, an infographic, and a video showcasing SFTS/CASE shared class activities [click here].

1.3 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** Strategic & Policy Context
- **Section 3:** PEACE IV Shared Education Projects
- **Section 4:** Supporting Frameworks & Quality Standards
- **Section 5:** Achievement of PEACE IV Objectives & Indicators
- **Section 6:** Benefits for Children
- **Section 7:** Benefits for Pre-school/School
- **Section 8:** Benefits for Teachers
- **Section 9:** Shared/Reconciliation Benefits for Children
- **Section 10:** Shared/Reconciliation Benefits for Wider Community
- **Section 11:** Implementation – Success Factors & Challenges
- **Section 12:** Conclusions and Recommendations

- **Annex I:** Approach
- **Annex II:** Project Data
- **Annex III:** Horizontal Principles

2 STRATEGIC & POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the environmental context within which the PEACE IV Programme resides, and research took place, as well as key policy developments in Shared Education in recent years.

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 solely with children of a similar background in Northern Ireland (NI) with 93% of children attending either a predominantly Catholic or Protestant school; 7% of all children attend integrated schools[13]. In the Republic of Ireland (RoI), 96% of pupils attend religious-run schools[14], also with few opportunities for interaction with others from a different community background. 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)[15] and NCCA Curriculum (RoI)[16] 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[17]. 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[18].

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'[19].*

The table below provides a snapshot of the key Shared Education policy developments in Northern Ireland, and linkages with the Republic of Ireland (RoI) policies and strategies.

[13] Department of Education [Online] available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/integrated-school
[14] Department of Education and Skills [Online] available at https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Diversity-of-Patronage/Diversity-of-Patronage-Survey-of-Parents.html
[15] CCEA – The Northern Ireland Curriculum [Online] available at https://ccea.org.uk/about/what-we-do/curriculum
[16] National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) - Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework; Primary Curriculum, Junior and Senior Cycle [Online] available at https://curriculumonline.ie/Home/
[17] The Social Change Initiative (2017), Shared Education: The First Ten Years: Insights from The Atlantic Philanthropies Experience.
[18] Advancing Shared Education: 2nd Report to the NI Assembly for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2020. (June 2020). [Online] available at http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/45143
[19] 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.

Table 2.1: Strategy/Policy document and link to Shared Education

Strategy/Policy	Shared Education focus:
Northern Ireland	
Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) 2013	T:BUC outlines a vision of *"a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of **good relations and reconciliation** - one which is strengthened by its **diversity**, where **cultural expression is celebrated** and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance."* The Strategy outlines how Government, community and individuals will work together to build a united community and achieve change against the following four key priorities: 1. Our Children and Young People; 2. Our Shared Community; 3. Our Safe Community; and 4. Our Cultural Expression. The Strategy recognises that the early years in a child's life are the most formative and it is at this early stage that children can establish opinions, mindsets and attitudes that shape their behaviours for the rest of their lives. In this regard, nursery and primary school education have a key role to play (such as that provided by SFTS and CASE). Relevant commitments are: To **enhance the quality and extent of Shared Education** provision, thus ensuring that sharing in education **becomes a central part of every child's educational experience**; and **build good relations** amongst children and young people and equip them for a future in which the cycle of sectarianism and intolerance is broken.
The Programme for Government 2011-2015	"Building a Strong and Shared Community" is recognised by the Northern Ireland Executive as a key priority within its Programme for Government (PfG) and as essential to the growth of a strong, modern economy and society. A shared society that respects diversity (outcome 9); a safe community where we respect the law and each other (outcome 7); and children and young people will have the best start in life (outcome 11). In terms of Shared Education, the PfG outlines Government's commitment to **building a more shared learning environment** for young people i.e., by 2015 all children should have the **opportunity to participate in Shared Education** programmes; and to substantially increase the number of schools **sharing facilities**.
Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge: 2006 – 2016	In recognition that Northern Ireland is emerging from a prolonged period of conflict, this Strategy outlines Government's pledge to ensure that children and young people are supported to grow together in a **shared, inclusive society** where they **respect diversity and difference**. This is particularly important given the increasing intercultural make-up of Northern Ireland. Action to deliver on the commitment is set out in the Shared Future Action Plan.
NI Executive's Children and young People's Strategy 2020-2030	This recently launched strategy (January 2021) is the strategic framework through which departments will work together to improve the well-being of all children and young people. It lists eight outcomes to be achieved for all children and young people. Outcomes which align most to Shared Education include children and young people **learn and achieve**; make a **positive contribution to society**; live in a society which **respects their rights**; live in a society in which **equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted**.
Stormont House Agreement (SHA) 2014 & A Fresh Start 2015: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan	SHA outlines commitments to promote equality and respect and to prevent discrimination; to **promote a culture of tolerance**, **mutual respect** and **mutual understanding** at every level of society, including **initiatives to facilitate and encourage shared and integrated education** and housing, social inclusion, and in particular **community development** and the advancement of women in public life; and to promote the interests of the whole community towards the **goals of reconciliation** and economic renewal. In the SHA, the financial support agreed included a contribution of up to £500m over 10 years of new **capital funding to support shared** and integrated **education** subject to individual projects being agreed between the Executive and the UK Government. To secure the full implementation of the SHA, a Fresh Start aimed to refocus efforts on consolidating peace, securing stability, enabling progress, and offering hope.
Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education (2015)	Sharing Works policy vision is "*Vibrant, self-improving **Shared Education** partnerships delivering educational benefits to learners, encouraging the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion".* The aim is "*To encourage and facilitate collaborative working across educational providers, on a cross sectoral basis, to **deliver educational and social benefits to learners**, promote equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion."* The objectives of the policy are to: • Provide all children and young people with an opportunity to participate in a programme of high-quality **Shared Education** on a continued and progressive basis. • Provide greater opportunity for leaders, teachers, youth workers and other non-teaching staff from different organisations to work collaboratively in the interests of all learners and their communities.

Strategy/Policy	Shared Education focus:
	• Improve access for learners to the full range of the curriculum, to high quality teaching, and to modern educational facilities. • Embed sharing into the ethos of every school. • Improve educational and reconciliation outcomes. • Contribute to the creation of a more harmonious society. The intended outcomes of the policy are: • Increase in the opportunity for young people to learn in a shared environment. • Increase in the number of children and young people participating in high quality **Shared Education** programmes. • Increase in the number of schools participating in **high quality Shared Education programmes**. • Increase in the number of schools **sharing facilities and resources**. Core principles underpinning the delivery of **Shared Education**: • Support of leadership, staff, children and young people, parents, and the wider community. • Clearly defined vision and outcomes for all experiences. • Effective planning and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation; (for schools this will be **embedded in the School Development Plan**). • Adequate **training for teaching** and support staff and youth workers. • Engagement with and support from the relevant Managing Authority. Key Actions relevant to SFTS/CASE are: **Promote engagement with parents, carers, and wider community**; **Promote engagement with children and young people**; **Equality of opportunity and good relations**.
Children and Young People's Strategy 2017 - 2027	In seeking to improve the wellbeing of children the draft Strategy contains eight high level outcomes, one of which is relevant to Shared Education - **"Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted"**. Shared Education provides the opportunity for children and young people from different community and socio-economic backgrounds to learn together and build positive cross-community connections and relationships.
Community Relations, Equality & Diversity in Education (CRED) Policy	The CRED policy aims to enable children and young people to **understand and deal with difference** in whatever form – religious, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or political affiliation – and is premised on equality, human rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). CRED is about working towards a society in which there is a sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar opportunities are open to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in schools, youth groups and the wider community. CRED policy is very much linked to the 'reconciliation' aspect of Shared Education.
Curriculum (NI)	
The Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA, 2007)	The Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced in 2007 and covers all 12 years of compulsory education. It is a curriculum that focuses on the learning process and learners' needs, as well as their knowledge, understanding and skills. It aims to provide learning opportunities for each young person to develop as: • **Developing as an individual:** to achieve personal fulfilment and individual well-being through living a successful life. Subjects: Personal understanding; Mutual understanding; Personal health; Moral character; Spiritual awareness. • **Developing as a contributor to society:** to be concerned for the well-being of others as well as themselves, in their own society and beyond it. Subjects: Citizenship; Cultural understanding; Media awareness; Ethical awareness. • **Developing as a contributor to the economy and the environment:** to appreciate how employment will impact on the economic choices they make and how they, in turn, impact individually and collectively on the environment. Subjects: Employability; Economic awareness; Education for sustainable development. Based on feedback from CASE participating schools, it is evident that Shared Education has provided opportunities for shared sessions to focus on one or more of these key subject areas.
Every School a Good School (ESaGS): A Policy for School Improvement (2009)	The ESaGS Policy outlines characteristics of a successful school as having effective leadership; child-centred provision; high quality teaching and learning; a school connected to its local community. The Shared Education framework is aligned to these pillars, where each Shared Education partnership is required, through joint self-evaluation, to identify its baseline position across the four development stages of the framework: defining, developing, expanding, or embedding (See Section 4.2 for details).

Strategy/Policy	Shared Education focus:
Learning Leaders Strategy (2016)	The Teacher Professional Learning Strategy document sets out a strategic vision for the future which is: *Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people.* Underpinning this vision there are three key strategic objectives: the development of an agreed Teacher Professional Learning Framework; the promotion of collaborative working and sharing of best practice through professional learning communities and networks; and the strengthening of leadership capacity in our schools. Two action points on Shared Education were included within the Learning Leaders Year 4 (2019/20 academic term) Action Plan: (i) Key Area: **Continue to learn lessons from the Shared Education** and Literacy and Numeracy Pathfinder projects. Action: Ongoing - Lessons from these projects are feeding into the development of the EA's School Improvement Strategy, which will include actions focused on Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). (ii) Key Area: Make effective use of technology, including webinars, videos and pilot a partnership to deliver resources for schools online via distance learning packages, supporting teacher professional learning in line with the Learning Leaders Strategy. Action: The ETI to deliver **webinars on** Primary ICT, Post Primary Literacy and **Shared Education** (November / December 2019).
Republic of Ireland	
Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020	Better Outcomes Brighter Futures vision is for Ireland to be one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected, and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future. The policy framework identifies six transformational goals that have the potential to improve outcomes: Goal 1: Support parents; Goal 2: Earlier intervention and prevention; Goal 3: Listen to and involve children and young people; Goal 4: Ensure quality services; Goal 5: Support effective transitions; Goal 6: Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination. Three of the defined outcomes align to Shared Education in terms **Outcome 1**: 'Achieving in all areas of learning and development'; **Outcome 2**: Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development and **Outcome 5:** 'Connected, respected and contributing' (includes aims that children are/have sense of own identity, free from discrimination).
A Programme for a Partnership Government 2018	In terms of Education, the Programme for Government outlines the following priorities: prioritising early years; tackling disadvantage; diversity and choice for parents; promoting excellence and innovation in schools; promoting creativity and entrepreneurial capacity in students; making better use of educational assets within communities; special needs education; meeting the skills needs of the future. Shared Education is closely aligned to help achieve '***strengthen diversity in the school system by considering new approaches to achieving this'***. Specifically, the Programme for Government outlines: *"We need a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of Twenty First Century Ireland. We will strengthen parental choice and diversity in our school system, reflecting the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and nondenominational education, while also safeguarding the right of parents to send their children to denominational schools that offer a distinct religious ethos, should they so wish".*
Diversity, Equality Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education	This Charter promotes the values of **diversity, equality and inclusion in early years and educational settings**. The purpose is to support and empower those working in the sector to explore, understand and develop inclusive practices for the benefit of children, their families and wider society. The document is in two parts: • Part A: Early Childhood Care and Education National Inclusion Charter – which sets out the sector's commitment to **diversity, equality, and inclusion**. All early childhood services are invited to sign up to the Charter by developing and implementing an **inclusion policy** for their own setting. • Part B: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector to be used as a reference and working document for early childhood managers and practitioners. Shared Education in the early years (delivered as part of the Sharing from the Start project) promotes the development of an inclusion policy within its settings. The focus is also closely aligned to the Charter's Statement that the sector will strive towards the following: • Respect all children equally, nurturing each child's **cultural identity** and **sense of belonging**. • Acknowledge that parents are the primary educators and experts on their child and support the smooth transitioning from home to the early childhood care and education setting. • In line with the Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide, implement a **curriculum that reflects the identities** of all children and recognises their abilities and interests.

Strategy/Policy	Shared Education focus:
	• Ensure that service planning and provision embraces the **needs of all children** and works to deliver an inclusive and accessible environment for all. • Enable all children to meaningfully participate in all aspects of the curriculum and extend learning to challenge and promote the individual child's abilities and development. • Ensure that children of all abilities have equal access to **culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based educational activities**, both indoors and outdoors, which develop their understanding, dispositions, skills, and holistic development. • Support children to **celebrate diversity** and feel **comfortable with difference**. • Support children to enjoy their early childhood service in an environment **free from bias, stereotypes, and discrimination**. • **Empower children** to stand up for themselves and others in difficult situations. • Guarantee the safety and well-being of all children as central to every aspect of children's learning, well-being, welfare, and development.
DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools	DEIS is an action plan for educational inclusion and focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education. The action plan is grounded in the belief that: every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education; each person should have the opportunity to reach her/his full educational potential for personal, social, and economic reasons; and **education is a critical factor in promoting social inclusion** and economic development. Importantly, the plan recognises that education not only reflects society but helps shape its future development, contributing to our **national identity, culture and values**, supporting citizenship and sustainable development, and **contributing to the growth of individuals, their families and their communities**. This is aligned to Shared Education's focus on promoting inclusion, and community engagement approach which seeks to ensure a shared ethos is connected through school, home and community.
Department of Education and Skills (DES) Statement of Strategy 2019-2021	This statement of strategy 'Empowering through learning' sets out six high-level goals for the DES. Most relevant to Shared Education is the focus on inclusion and diversity, and the goal to 'intensify the **relationships between education and the wider community, society** and the economy' by establishing an education system that welcomes and meaningfully includes learners from disadvantaged communities/backgrounds, and those with language, cultural and social differences.
The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020.	The aim of the National Youth Strategy is to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential, by respecting their rights and hearing their voices, while protecting and supporting them as they transition from childhood to adulthood. To achieve this aim, ten objectives have been set in relation to each of the five national outcome areas (as set in the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Framework). Three of these objectives align to Shared Education i.e. • Outcome 1, Objective 2: Young people benefit from involvement in recreational and cultural opportunities including youth work, arts, and sports. • Outcome 2, Objective 3: Young people's core skills, competencies and attributes are enhanced and promoted through accessible, responsive, formal, and non-formal education and learning opportunities. • Outcome 5, Objective 9: Young people are included in society, are environmentally aware, their equality and rights are upheld, **their diversity celebrated**, and they are empowered to be active global citizens.
First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children, and their Families 2019-2028	The First 5 Strategy vision is that all babies' and young children's early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period, which should be enjoyed. The five steps are: (1) Access to a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring; (2) A new model of parenting support; (3) New developments in child health; (4) Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system; (5) A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty. In the context of Shared Education, there is alignment to the vision, which emphasises **high-quality play-based early learning and care experiences**, **positive transitions** to primary school, and a **supportive, inclusive, wider community** context – all of which are strongly advocated by the SFTS project.
National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017 - 2021	The strategy takes a whole of Government approach to improving the lives of Travellers and Roma in Ireland. There are 149 actions in the strategy covering the themes of Cultural Identity, Education, Employment and Traveller Economy, Children and Youth, Health, Gender Equality, Anti-discrimination and Equality, Public Services, Accommodation and Traveller and Roma Communities. Key education-related actions proposed (with potential linkages to Shared Education) include: • Traveller and Roma should be supported in key areas including education. • The development of **education resources** on Traveller and Roma culture and history for use in primary and post primary settings.

Strategy/Policy	Shared Education focus:
	• Improved access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education to achieve **outcomes that are equal** to those for the majority population. • A **positive culture of respect and protection for the cultural identity** of Travellers and Roma across the education system.
Curriculum (RoI)	
Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009) & Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006)	Aistear (the Irish word for journey) is the national curriculum framework for the early years sector; and Síolta (meaning seeds) is a quality framework for early childhood care and education services. The development of each of these frameworks is an important milestone in early childhood care and education in Ireland. The purpose of *Síolta* is to enhance all elements of early years practice while *Aistear* focuses exclusively on children's early learning and development. Aistear outlines the content of children's learning and development using the four themes of Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking. Within each theme, aims and learning goals are presented followed by sample learning opportunities. Guidelines on good practice are also provided. These focus on building partnerships between parents and families; learning and developing through interactions; learning and developing through play; supporting learning and development through assessment. Aistear suggests ***'Nurturing equality and diversity is important in early childhood'*** and '***Diversity is about welcoming and valuing individual and group differences and understanding and celebrating difference as part of life'***. Síolta's handbook outlines the 12 principles, 16 standards of quality and the 75 components subsumed within the standards. Síolta also involves the quality assurance and developmental processes. Used together and supported by appropriate resources, *Síolta* and *Aistear* present significant potential to support the development of practice for all adults who care for and educate children from birth to six years in Ireland, and to ultimately benefit children. Shared Education can positively contribute to both frameworks i.e., Síolta's Standard 14 (**Identity and Belonging**) and Aistear's Theme (**Well-being, Identity and Belonging**). The focus on self-assessment is also important as part of Shared Education and key alignment is evident with Síolta's approach (See Section 4.3 for more details)
The Primary School Curriculum 1999 & Draft Primary Curricular Framework (2020)	The Primary School Curriculum (1999) outlines the contents of children's learning for their first eight years in school, from junior infants to sixth class. The curriculum aims to: develop each child's potential to the full; encourage a love of learning; help children develop skills they will use all their lives. Key subjects include: Language: Gaeilge and English; mathematics; Social, Environmental, and Scientific Education (SESE): history, geography, and science; arts education: visual arts, music, and drama; physical education; Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Based on feedback from CASE participating schools, it is evident that Shared Education has provided opportunities for shared sessions to focus on one or more of these key subject areas It is also important to note that the **Draft Primary Curricular Framework (2020)** is now out for public consultation. This Framework outlines eight overarching principles, one of which has direct linkages with Shared Education i.e., ***'Inclusive education and diversity****: Inclusive education provides for equity of opportunity and participation in children's learning. Inclusive education celebrates diversity and responds to the uniqueness of every child'*. There are other key linkages such as **promoting diverse learning** environments, building self-worth and identity to support transitions, and **partnerships and collaboration between schools, families, and communities**.
The Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015)	The Framework for Junior Cycle relates to the first three years of post-primary school and is underpinned by eight principles, one of which is '**Inclusive Education'** stating that the educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation, and outcomes for all. A second principle, **Well-being** states that **t**he student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being and resilience. Learning takes place in a climate focused on collective well-being of school, community, and society.
The Senior Cycle Key Skills Framework (NCCA, 2009)	The Key Skills Framework for Senior Cycle identifies five key skills as central to teaching and learning across the senior cycle curriculum. These are (1) information processing; (2) being personally effective; (3) communicating; (4) critical and creative thinking; (5) working with others. These key skills play an important part in all learners achieving their potential, both during their time in school and in the future. They also enable learners to participate fully in society, including family and community life and the world of work. 'Working with others' key skill has good alignment with that achieved by Shared Education /CASE shared classes. This skill highlights the role that working with others plays in learning and in reaching both collective and personal goals.

Strategy/Policy	Shared Education focus:
	In a broader context, pupils come to recognise that working collectively is important for **social cohesion** and for **engaging with diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious groups**. Elements within 'working with others' to which Shared Education can contribute include **working with others in a variety of contexts** with different goals and purposes; **developing good relationships** with others and a sense of well-being in a group; **acknowledging individual differences**, negotiating, and resolving conflicts.
Cosán: The National Framework for Teachers' (2016)	Cosán values teacher learning through a range of learning processes, including engagement in professional conversations, reading a relevant article, team teaching with a colleague and engaging in collaborative reflection afterwards, attendance at a professional learning event, or facilitating school-based learning. The Shared Education CASE Project aligns to this framework as part of the ongoing Teaching Professional Learning programme.

2.1 Chapter Summary

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 the Republic of Ireland, there is increasing recognition 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.

3 PEACE IV SHARED EDUCATION PROJECTS

3.1 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, which 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, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

3.2 Funded Projects

In September 2017, a total of €33.14m was awarded to two separate consortia (for delivery up to March 2022) – one focused on early years and the second on the primary/post-primary sector. These include:

Table 3.1: Overview of PEACE IV Funded Projects, Partners and Funding Award

Project Name	Lead Partner (LP) and Project Partners (PP)	Funding
Sharing from the Start (SFTS)	Early Years – the organisation for young children (LP) The National Childhood Network (PP) The Fermanagh Trust (PP)	€4,256,007 (13%)
Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE)	Education Authority (LP) Léargas (PP)	€28,890,790 (87%)
2 projects	**5 delivery agents**	**€33,146,797**

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 and Skills (DES) in the Republic of Ireland.

PEACE IV has a focus on pre-school settings and schools in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland[20] ('Border Regions') with no or limited previous experience of providing Shared Education opportunities to their children[21], thus increasing the overall number of schools and children that participate in Shared Education.

PEACE IV 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. Milestone target 19,200 by 2018).

[20] Counties: Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo.
[21] 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.

PEACE IV actions for delivering these outputs include:

- Partnerships between schools to create opportunities for contact between children.
- The bringing together of schoolchildren 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 wider collaboration with the local community.
- Increased opportunities for cross-border co-operation.

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.

In all aspect of the design and implementation of SFTS and CASE, Project Partners considered the PEACE IV horizontal principles of sustainable development and equality. The projects comply with the following strategies:

- European Council Sustainable Development Strategy (June 2006).
- Ireland's Framework for Sustainable Development.
- Northern Ireland's Sustainable Development Strategy.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998.
- Equal Status Acts (2000).

Please refer to Annex III for more details on how Shared Education meets the requirements of environmental, economic, and social issues under sustainable development, and equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

3.2.1 SFTS Overview

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 7th June 2018, and is intended to run until March 2022.

It 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. A team of Early Years Specialists (EYS) provides ongoing mentoring support to partnerships.

PEACE IV outputs:

- 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:

- 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.

Intended outcomes for pre-school educational practitioners:

- 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.

The SFTS Programme 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 will be supported to develop and 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 schools working together).

3.2.2 CASE Overview

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 21st March 2018 and is intended to run until March 2022.

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) project. Delivery is through the provision of direct, sustained, curricular-based contact between children and teachers from all backgrounds.

PEACE IV outputs:

- 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.

These outcomes are addressed through two main delivery streams:

1. **Shared Education delivery through school partnerships**: A comprehensive support package is provided to CASE schools including supporting schools in basic aspects of Shared Education, such as timetabling, action planning and transport issues. A team of Development Officers (DOs) provides ongoing mentoring support to partnerships.

2. **Practitioner professional learning**, including teachers, school leadership and Boards of Governors /management committees:
   - The CASE Project Implementation Team has directly delivered **Teacher Professional Learning (TPL)** workshops. TPL modules 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.
   - CASE has also supported TPL at 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. 26% of partnerships (43 out of 168) have been successful in applications for this funding.

4 SUPPORTING FRAMEWORKS & QUALITY STANDARDS

4.1 Introduction

SFTS and CASE adopted 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[22] and Early Years Settings[23] (NI); The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate's Quality Framework for Schools[24], and School Self-Evaluation (SSE)[25] (RoI); and The Síolta Standards[26] for early childhood care and education services (RoI).

4.2 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 (NI) 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'.

Figure 4.1: Shared Education Framework – stages of progression

4 Pillars of the Framework	Defining →	Developing →	Expanding →	Embedding
I Learner Centred • Participation in Shared Education. • Surmounting Barriers. • Educational & Reconciliation Outcomes.				
II High Quality Learning & Teaching • Planning for Shared Education. • Quality of Learning Experiences. • Assessment for, and of, Shared Education.				
III Leadership • Strategic Leadership for Shared Education. • Action to Promote Improvement in Shared Education. • Empowering and Supporting Staff in Shared Education. • Resources/Accommodation.				
IV Community Connections • Parents/Carers. • External Partners. • Community Access and Engagement.				
	Existing Provision	→		In-depth and high quality Shared Education

Source: ETI Framework

[22] Department of Education (NI): ETI Shared Education Framework for School Partnerships (2014): [Online] available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/developing-shared-education-framework-school-partnerships-november-2014
[23] Department of Education (NI): ETI Shared Education Framework in Early Years Settings: [Online] available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/developing-shared-education-early-years-settings-framework-collaborative-partnerships-2016-2017
[24] Department of Education (RoI) Looking at our School (2006) Quality Framework for Primary and Post-Primary Schools [Online] available at https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/743565-looking-at-our-school-2016/
[25] Department of Education (RoI) [Online] available at http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/ and http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/sse-2016-2020/
[26] The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education [Online] available at https://siolta.ie/about.php

ETI inspections now include 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 (See Section 7.3 for sample extracts from inspection reports).

Whilst there is no specific 'Shared Education' Framework in the Republic of Ireland, CASE primary and post-primary schools in the Border Counties of Ireland consider '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[27]. 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 in June 2019 progress had been made with more pre-schools/schools reporting 'Developing' and 'Expanding' – with a few at the 'Embedding' stage for some pillars of the Framework. By June 2020, whilst progress has been hampered by Covid-19, pre-schools/schools have retained the capacity and expertise to advance Shared Education in the future.

4.3 Síolta Standards (early years, RoI)

For SFTS pre-schools in RoI, 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[28]; 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.

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 4.1) 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 EYS monitoring data show year-on-year progress across each of the Síolta five standards.

[27] SSE 2016 – 2021 [Online] available at http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/sse-2016-2020/
[28] 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).

Table 4.1: Síolta Standards and Components for SFTS Baseline and Review

Standard (5 out 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.

4.4 Chapter Summary

PEACE IV Shared Education has helped to build capacity in cross-border working, to include between Department of Education (NI) and Department of Education and Skills (RoI); 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 three 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.

5 ACHIEVEMENT OF PEACE IV OBJECTIVE & INDICATORS

5.1 Introduction

The PEACE IV Co-operation Programme[29] and corresponding Performance Framework outlines the 'Specific Objective' for each 'Investment Priority' and expected results. Shared Education is one of four 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 indicators of Shared Education have been achieved.

Terms of Reference:
Comment on whether, how, and to what extent the actions funded have contributed to the achievement of the Specific Objective. Identify and comment on the extent to which other external factors have impacted on the achievement.

5.2 Key Achievements

5.2.1 Specific Objective

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.

The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as SFTS/CASE partnerships have completed three years of shared activity, and 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', and 'Expanding', and in some cases 'Embedding' where 'in-depth and high-quality Shared Education' has been achieved. There is also year-on-year progress across each of the Síolta five standards for early years settings.

On average, children have benefited from 23 hours each per year of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes, as per the table below:

Table 5.1: Shared hours (between children) achieved

Year	Period	No. of shared hours achieved per child
Year 1 – 2017/18	6 months activity from January 2018 to June 2018	20 hours
Year 2 – 2018/19	10 months activity from September 2018 to June 2019	30 hours
Year 3 – 2019/20	5 months activity from September 2019 to February 2020	18 hours
	Average	22.6 hours

In Year 3, pre-schools/schools closed for the final term (from early March to June 2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures, greatly inhibiting Shared Education activities. Overall, the net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers.

[29] SEUPB, PEACE IV Programme – Co-operation Programmes under the European Territorial co-operation goal [Online] available at https://seupb.eu/sites/default/files/styles/PEACEIV/20180726_PEACE_IV_Cooperation_Programme_V3.0.PDF

External factors that have impacted on the achievement of this Specific Objective include:

Delayed project approval presented challenges to implementation:
Project Partners commenced design and preparation from September 2017, upon award of funding. However, the project approval took longer than anticipated, with additional application requirements and evidence sought by SEUPB, therefore the launch and on-the-ground activity did not commence until January 2018 (instead of the start of the school year, September – four months behind schedule). The Year 1 output targets were reduced by SEUPB to 20 hours of shared class contact to accommodate the reduced time for project implementation. Despite this challenge, SFTS and CASE made good strides in progressing their respective projects throughout Year 1 and Year 2, with strong demand evident from the response to funding calls, and the recruitment and retention of pre-schools/schools throughout the implementation phase.

Global Covid-19 pandemic halted progress:
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 the last academic year (2019/2020), pre-schools/schools closed for the final term (from March to June 2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures, greatly inhibiting Shared Education activities. Adjustments were made to outputs due to premature closing meaning that the full 30 hours of shared class contact could not be completed, with an overall average of 18 hours achieved (unit costs per child/pupil and payment aligned to hours completed as of March 2020 i.e., 0-10 hours, 11-19 hours, 20-30 hours).

This year (2020/21) the unprecedented circumstances resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic have continued to hamper progress. Whilst pre-schools/schools were able to return to in-house learning from September to December 2020 (with an extended mid-term closure at Halloween) all shared classes with partner pre-schools/schools were postponed throughout this period. Further closures from January 2021 and plans to extend to at least March/April 2021 mean that children will work remotely, and as such the immediate future roll-out of SFTS/CASE remains unclear.

Despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive in supporting partnerships, to include:

- Telephone and virtual calls.
- Webinars.
- Newsletter updates with advice and support.
- Survey of pre-schools/schools to identify support needs and capture feedback on proposals to advance Shared Education.
- Continuation of training for early years practitioners and teachers (via online).

To motivate and continue to engage schools, there is evidence of SFTS/CASE Project Partners promoting good practice in helping partnerships stay connected. Pre-schools/schools have endeavoured to continue linkages, where feasible, by using technology as an enabler to maintain contact between partnerships, and there are good examples of this working in practice.

5.2.2 Output Indicators

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. Milestone target of 19,200 by 2018).*

SFTS and CASE have already exceeded 2023 output target for the respective number of pre-schools and schools participating, with remaining outputs on schedule to be met (pre- Covid-19) i.e., school/pupil participation began in early 2018 and by June 2020 there were:

- 482 pre-schools/schools taking part in Shared Education, exceeding targets (138% of target achieved).
- 1,409 early years practitioners and teachers having completed training and now have the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (67% achieved and on track to meet target).
- Almost 73,000 children have now benefited from shared class activity (51% of target achieved).

Table 5.2: PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (June 2020)

Output Indicators	Overall (CASE & SFTS)			CASE		SFTS	
	PEACE IV output (2023)	Achieved	% achieved	CASE Outputs*	Achieved	SFTS Outputs*	Achieved
Number of pre-schools/schools involved	350	482	138%	280	384 *(388 involved over 3 years)*	99	*99 (106 involved over 3 years)*
Number of trained teachers/ practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	2,100	1,409	67%	2,000	1,252	157	*145 (27 participating but who have yet to complete)*
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	144,000 (milestone target: 19,200 by 2018)	72,752	51%	135,000	65,830	9,914	*6,922*

NB. The combined CASE/SFTS outputs are slightly greater that the overall PEACE IV outputs to allow for non-achievement and/or pre-schools/schools not completing.

The above targets were achieved within 2.5 years (up until June 2020), therefore if project activity remains at the same pace it can be assumed that within the next 1.75 years for SFTS (21 months until March 2022) and almost 2.5 years for CASE (29 months until November 2022) the output indicator for the number of teachers/practitioners trained and children participating in Shared Education will be achieved (pre Covid-19).

The composition of participating pre-schools/schools is as follows:

SFTS: 99 pre-schools (46 partnerships)
- Size of partnerships:
  - 2 schools in partnership – 85%
  - 3 schools in partnership – 15%

CASE: 384 schools (168 partnerships)
- Size of partnerships:
  - 2 schools in partnership – 75%.
  - 3 schools in partnership – 18%.

- 4 schools in partnership – 6%.
- 5 schools in partnership – 1%.

The geographic spread of participating pre-schools/schools is as follows:

Whilst there are currently 482 pre-schools/schools involved in the projects, there have been a total of **494** involved over the last three years, since the beginning of funded projects. The geographic spread is summarised below, along with the GIS map overleaf (Figure 5.1) which showcases the extensive reach of PEACE IV Shared Education across the PEACE IV eligible area.

Table 5.3: Geographic spread of pre-schools/schools across PEACE IV eligible area

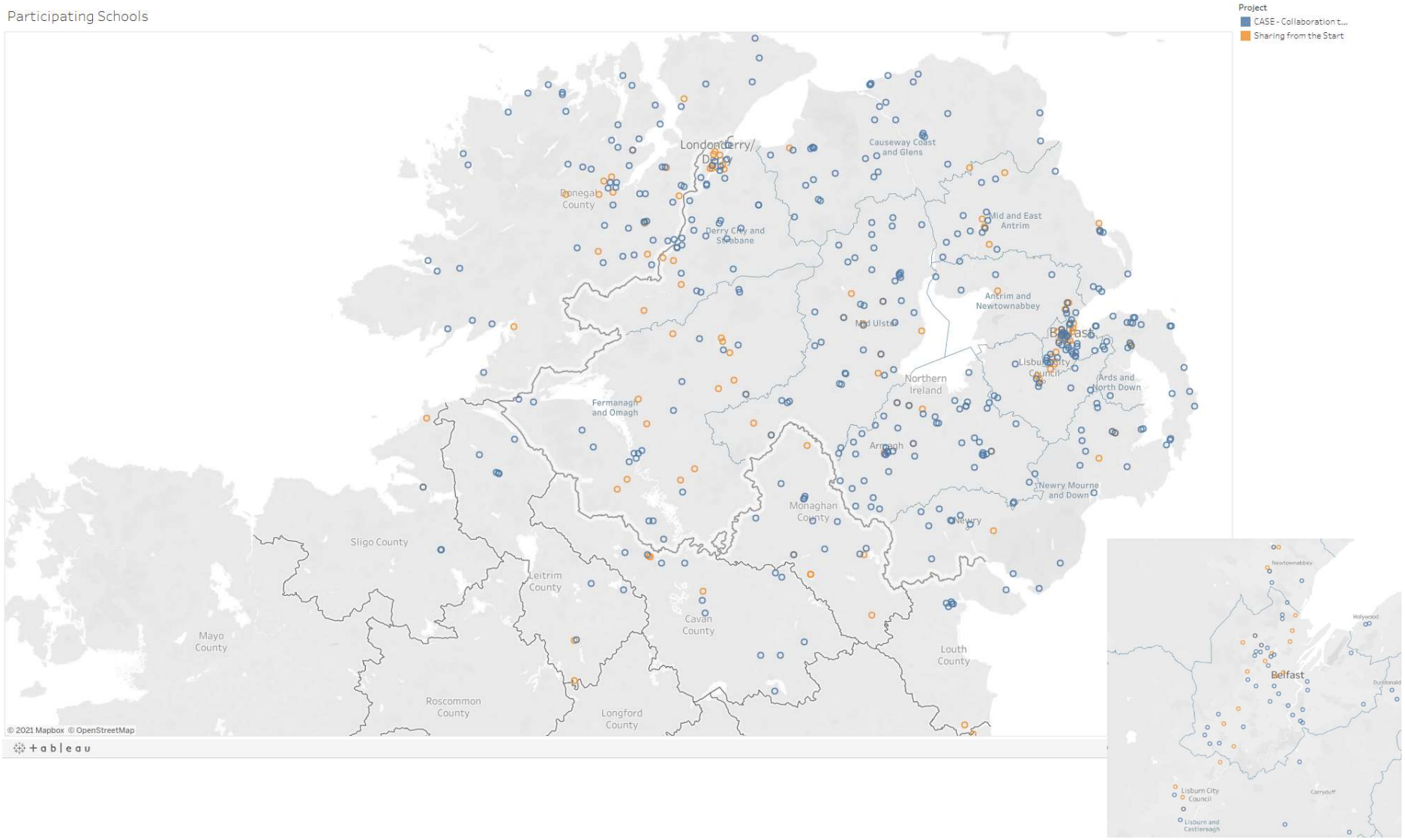
County	SFTS	CASE	TOTAL	%	NI/BC split
Northern Ireland					
Antrim	31	81	112	23%	368 (74%)
Armagh	5	38	43	9%	
Derry~ Londonderry	10	51	61	12%	
Down	7	58	65	13%	
Fermanagh	6	13	19	4%	
Tyrone	19	49	68	14%	
Border Counties in Ireland					
Cavan	3	12	15	3%	126 (26%)
Donegal	13	58	71	14%	
Leitrim	2	8	10	2%	
Louth	2	6	8	2%	
Monaghan	6	11	17	3%	
Sligo	2	3	5	1%	
Total	**106**	**388**	**494**	**100%**	

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. PEACE IV did not set a specific target with respect of the number of partnerships in each category, rather 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.

Table 5.4: Type of collaboration between Shared Education partnerships

Type of Collaboration		SFTS	CASE	TOTAL
Shared partnerships between schools within Northern Ireland.	North-North collaboration	67%	72%	**71%**
Shared partnerships between schools within the Border Counties of Ireland.	South-South collaboration	22%	20%	**20%**
Cross-border, shared partnerships between schools in NI and the Border Counties of Ireland.	North-South collaboration	11%	8%	**9%**

Figure 5.1: GIS Map showing location of SFTS pre-schools and CASE schools.



5.2.3 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.*

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 5.5). 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 5.5: 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 5.6: 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 (RoI)

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 shift in the overall proportion of schools involved in Shared Education, which will increase further, i.e., as of June 2020, a total of 482 schools are now participating 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 2021/22, and the School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, whist it has not yet taken place yet will be available prior to the end of the programming period.

Terms of Reference: Investigate barriers that non-participating schools may have regarding Shared Education.

The School Omnibus Survey (2018) indicated that 150 schools (in Northern Ireland) had not partnered in Shared Education with other school(s). The main reasons/barriers to uptake include unable to identify partner school(s) (41%); and other priorities preventing engagement in Shared Education (27%).

More recently (2019), the Education Authority (EA) commissioned a study to understand the reasons for non-participation in Shared Education. The barriers identified can be summarised into four main categories:

- Lack of awareness/understanding of Shared Education.
- Inability to access funding/resources available through existing Shared Education programmes.
- Practical difficulties to engaging in Shared Education e.g., difficulty, due to local demographics, in finding a local partner school that would meet the *'reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young people'*.
- Reluctance to engage in Shared Education.

This study will be used to inform the further roll-out of the DSC SESP in Northern Ireland. The study also noted that within those schools who, for a variety of reasons have not participated in Shared Education to date, there is a growing interest and appetite to become involved.

Over 200 'non-participating' schools registered to attend EA organised conferences designed to update schools on the current position and direct them to work they can undertake in preparation for becoming involved in Shared Education (via the DSC SESP project). Unfortunately, these conferences, scheduled for March 2020, had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Overall, there are disparities in the figures from various sources for schools not involved in Shared Education (Table 5.7) i.e., 'non-participating' with a range of 64 to 200 schools in NI (mid-point suggested as 132 schools), and 525 schools in the Border Regions. It is therefore estimated that there are approximately 657 'non-participating' schools across the PEACE IV eligible area (i.e., Northern Ireland and the Border Region). This could represent latent/unmet demand, and a potential pool of schools to recruit from for future EU funding linked to Shared Education interventions.

Table 5.7: Data sources for 'non-participating' Shared Education schools

Data source	Year	'non-participating' schools	Comment
School Omnibus Survey	2018	150 schools (in NI)	Figure is based on those that replied to the survey and is also now dated and perhaps not reflective of the current status. The next School Omnibus Survey (due 2021/22) will provide the required PEACE IV evidence to confirm 'participating' and those 'non-participating'. The School Omnibus Survey equivalent for the Border Region has not yet taken place.
Education Authority (NI) events for new recruits to DSC SESP	2019/20	200 schools (in NI)	This is a good source of current data, as 200 'non-participating' schools registered their interest in attending an event to find out how to become involved in Shared Education (DSD SESP). It is not clear if 200 represents 'unique' schools or if it is the number of individuals representing some of the same schools.
PEACE IV result indicators	2020	64 schools (in NI)	As per the PEACE IV Co-operation Programme (2016/17) there were 425 schools in NI eligible for funding. As of June 2020, there are 361 schools now involved in SFTS/CASE, therefore 64 schools remaining/not currently involved in Shared Education.
		525 schools (in RoI)	As per the PEACE IV Co-operation Programme (2016/17) there were 646 schools in the Border Region. 121 schools are now involved in SFTS/CASE, therefore 525 schools remaining/not currently involved in Shared Education.

5.3 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 remaining outputs on schedule to be met (pre- Covid-19). With a starting/baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact, there are now 482 pre-schools/schools actively involved in the PEACE IV Shared Education projects (74% located in Northern Ireland and 26% in the Border Regions), with almost 73,000 children having participated in shared classes, and 1,409 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to deliver and lead Shared Education activities.

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 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 for subsequent School Omnibus Surveys in Northern Ireland and the Border Region.

On average, children have benefited from 23 hours each per year of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes. Whilst the target of 30 hours was not achieved in Year 1 and Year 3, overall, the net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers. Extenuating external factors relating to Covid-19 greatly hampered progress in Year 3.

The extent to which progress can be made by SFTS/CASE in Year 4 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector and the move to remote working under Covid-19 restrictions. Despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive in supporting pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established. There is an appetite for this work to continue to allow partnership to complete their work, and to build on the educational and shared/reconciliation benefits achieved.

In terms of 'non-participating' schools i.e., those not involved in Shared Education, there are some disparities in the figures from various sources. It is estimated that there are approximately 657 'non-participating' schools across the PEACE IV eligible area (i.e., Northern Ireland and the Border Region). These could represent latent/unmet demand, and a potential pool of schools for future EU funding linked to Shared Education interventions.

6 BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

6.1 Introduction

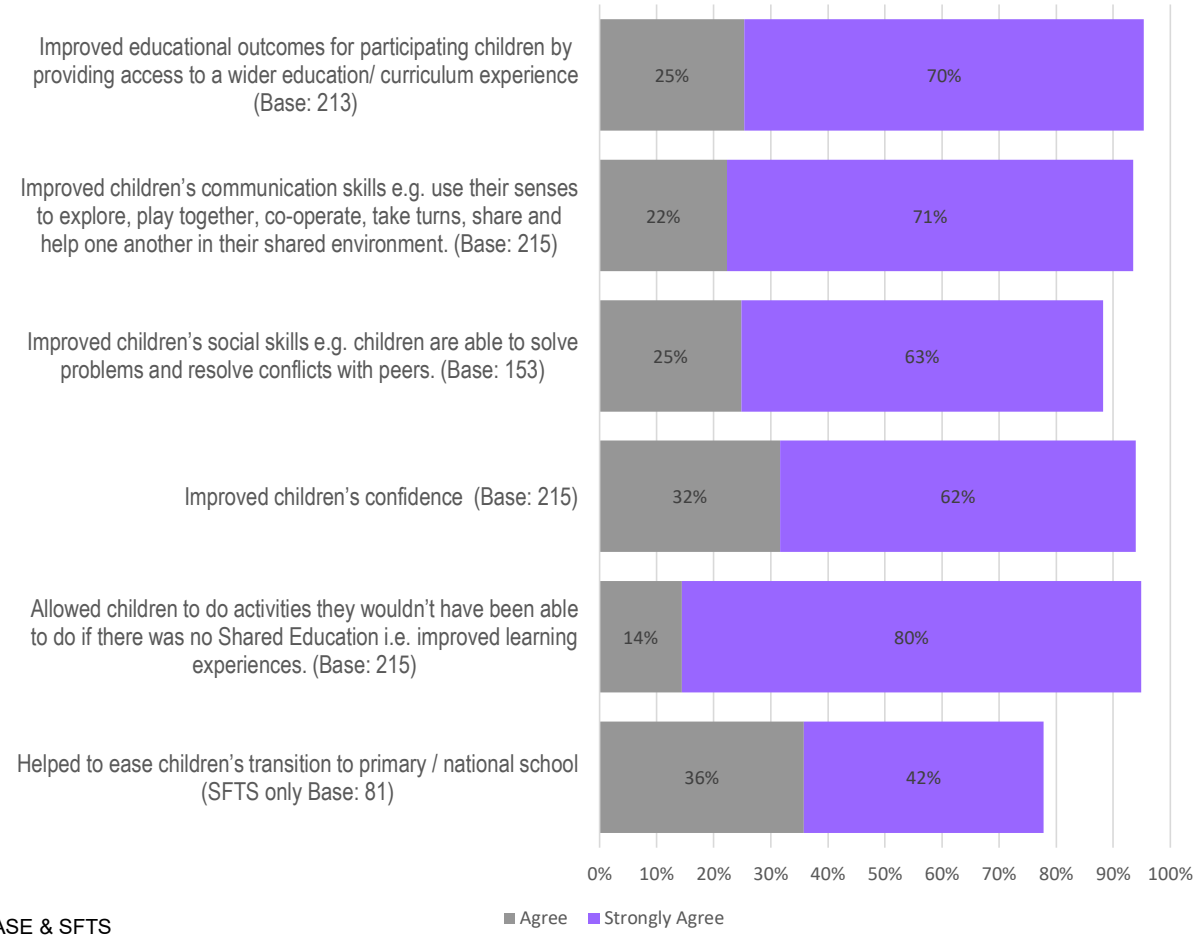
This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, highlighting the positive impact on children's education and the curriculum. Key findings are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., SFTS and CASE) to include quantitative data illustrated in graphs, and a summary of key themes emerging from qualitative feedback with illustrative quotes.

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.

6.2 Impact on Children's Education

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with almost **73,000 children having benefited from curriculum-based shared classes** (51% of target achieved). Most significant is that almost all (95%) of respondents agreed that SFTS/CASE has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children.

Figure 6.1: Benefits for Children - Educational Outcomes



CASE & SFTS

Shared Education provides access to a wider education/curriculum experience. For instance, in Northern Ireland pre-schools, Physical Development, Personal, Social and Emotional (PSE) Development, Arts, and the World Around Us (WAU) were featured in more than 60% of the shared classes. In the Border Counties, all four Aistear curricular themes featured in shared classes. Feedback was positive, highlighting that Shared Education has the potential to permeate throughout all aspects of the curriculum.

Table 6.1: Online Survey Results – SFTS Subject Areas

	Subject	NI	Border Counties/ RoI
NI Curriculum Themes	Physical	75%	
	Personal, Social and Emotional (PSE) development	70%	
	Arts	63%	
	World Around Us (WAU)	62%	
	Language	51%	
	Mathematics	30%	
RoI Aistear Themes	Well-Being		94%
	Identity & Belonging		94%
	Communication		94%
	Exploring & Thinking		100%

We have seen achievements in all areas! The Nursery Curriculum is a practical, resource-based curriculum so any experience will contribute to learning and achievement.

With the nature of the settings and the opportunity for engagements, social interaction, discussion, investigating, exploring the space and resources available we were able to capture learning in all areas of the curriculum.

For primary and post-primary schools, the learning areas of the curriculum in both jurisdictions provide the mechanism in which to roll-out and embed Shared Education. Shared class activities have been developed across wide ranging subjects, as per below:

Table 6.2: Online Survey Results – CASE Subject Areas

Subject	No. responses	%
Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM)/Engineering and Technology	52	39%
Art	46	35%
Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU)**	43	32%
Mathematics	36	27%
Physical Education (PE)	32	24%
English	31	23%
Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)*	31	23%
Science	28	21%
Music	27	20%
Drama/Dance/Theatre experience	18	14%
ICT/Digital Learning	11	8%
Learning through play/Activity based learning	8	6%
Outdoor Play	6	5%
Aistear*	6	5%
SESE – Geography*	6	5%
World Around Us (WAU)**	5	4%
Mental Health & Well Being	4	3%
History	2	2%
Gaeilge	1	1%
Faith within our Community	1	1%
Local and Global Citizenship** (Post-Primary)	1	1%
Learning for Life and Work (LLW)** (Post-Primary)	1	1%
Sharing in the Future	1	1%
**Border Counties/RoI only | **NI only* Total	**133**	

Practical based subjects such as STEM, PE, and Outdoor Play provide opportunities for children to interact to problem solve in groups, and art/music/drama/IT provide a vehicle for children to work creatively together. Other subjects such as PDMU, SPHE, LLW allow teachers to be flexible in the design of activities and for children to explore 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.

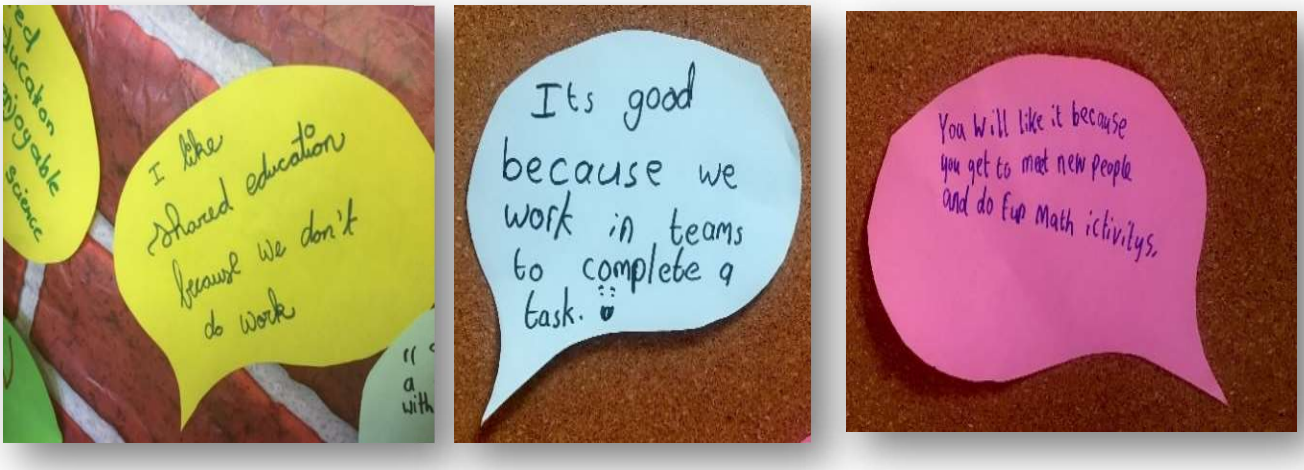
Problem Solving in Numeracy was a key area, and pupils benefited from a variety of practical STEM based activities to achieve educational objectives.

The shared use of Numicon resources in collaborative activities led to reinforcing, consolidating, and progressing numerical understanding of number and fractions especially.

Each child is benefiting in terms of an enriched learning experience, developing social skills, learning about communities. The pupils have gained such a wealth of knowledge via all the different activities they have participated in - this is immeasurable!

Outdoor play activities - shared use of both partnership equipment and equipment sourced through Shared Education funding provided a wider range of practical tasks to underpin all areas of learning.

Photo: Just after taking part in a maths class (using Izak 9 cubes[30]), the evaluator gave out speech bubbles and asked pupils to write down what they liked about shared sessions. The photo reflects only a few of the numerous pupils who reported that it felt like they were not doing work, or that they had so much fun, enjoyed teamwork, carrying out new tasks, and meeting new people.



[30] CASE pupils from both schools collaborating to solve a math puzzle using the Izak 9 math cubes. Questions are set via videos on the companion website (displayed to the class using an interactive whiteboard), and pupils work together to solve the problems using the cubes

Improved communication skills – 93%

93% of respondents agreed that SFTS/CASE has helped improved children's communication skills, in terms of using their senses to explore, play together, co-operate, take turns, share, and help one another in their shared environment. Respondents commented on the importance of children interacting and working closely together in shared activities which helped to encourage and improve language skills. For young children, arts and craft activities were noted by a few respondents as being best suited to enhancing communication skills by helping to promote sharing, as well as enhancing fine motor skills.

Some respondents mentioned that children can now introduce themselves to peers and have developed increased confidence because of engaging and communicating in larger groups. This was noted as being particularly advantageous for children attending small schools.

We have noticed that they are better at introducing themselves, finding out who others are and in general communicating with others.

The programme has given both of our schools the opportunity to learn in very practical ways and in a way that encourages problem-solving skills and communication. The cohort of pupils is engaged and more capable of logical reasoning than they were prior to the Shared Education experience as demonstrated in tasks carried out towards the end of the academic year e.g., picture trails etc.

Improved social skills – 88%

88% of 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 strong educational outcomes and meeting curricular objectives.

Improved social skills and confidence interacting between both groups of children through sport and wellbeing workshops which focused on teamwork etc.

All areas of development were enhanced through exploring the outdoor environments together, in particular the development of social skills and the positive impact to emotional wellbeing.

Improved confidence – 94%

Participation improved children's confidence, according to 94% of respondents, in terms of confidence interacting with both peers and adults within each setting and confidence taking part in new activities. The added dimension of travelling by bus to another school also provided a new experience for children and contributed to increased levels of confidence, and resilience to cope with new situations.

A few teachers reflected that the shared activities presented a new challenge to all, as this created 'a level playing field' to facilitate children learning new skills at the same pace as their peers, greatly contributing to enhanced confidence.

Personal, social, and emotional development was really supported by building children's confidence going to a new settling, meeting new staff and making new friends and also being introduced to new activities.

PDMU, the Arts and Health and Wellbeing. All the activities provided lots of opportunities to work together in each grouping and activity. The children responded well to all activities and developed the importance of dealing with negative issues and developing strategies to cope with difficult situations.

Enhanced learning experiences – 94%

According to 94% of respondents, SFTS/CASE has allowed children to do activities that they would not have been able to access in the absence of Shared Education funding. For example, children experienced using new resources, interacting in larger groups, travel and opportunities to engage with other adults. They also benefited from external visitors bringing new learning experiences – all of which contributed to improved educational outcomes for children.

Children have access to a wide range of resources and learning styles that they would never have been exposed to had they not been involved in CASE.

The children have been able to learn, adjust to change, trying out new experiences that they would not have had the opportunity to do so without SFTS. These all have helped support our children in growing, developing, and achieving outcomes for their pre-school year.

Eased transition process – 78%

Although not specified as a direct outcome of SFTS, 78% agreed that a by-product of being involved in the project was that it has helped to ease children's transition to primary school. The impact of pre-school closures in March 2020 (Covid-19 pandemic lockdown) was noted as one of the reasons why a small proportion (4%) disagreed and felt that the outcome of easing the transition process for children was less well developed this academic year.

A significant advantage of the links and shared sessions is that some of the children from each of the settings will be going to the same Primary 1 class. These children will already know each other, and this will make their transition to P1 much easier.

Because of lockdown the children were not able to complete their trips with their partner group which may have aided their transition experience this year, but in previous years the children did benefit from increased confidence and social skills.

6.3 Chapter Summary

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with almost **73,000 children** having benefited from shared class activity (51% of target achieved).

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 (RoI). Most significant is that almost all (95%) of respondents agreed that CASE/SFTS has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. For instance, 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 include improved communications skills (93%); improved social skills (88%); improved confidence (94%); enhanced learning experiences (94%); and eased transition process (78%).

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.

7 BENEFITS FOR PRE-SCHOOL/SCHOOL

7.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the benefits of Shared Education in helping pre-schools and schools address priorities in their respective Development Plans. A sample of extracts from inspection reports from participating SFTS/CASE pre-schools/schools is also provided. The extent to which pre-schools/schools have a defined Shared Education inclusion policy in place or if Shared Education contributes to meeting the aims and objectives of an existing inclusion policy is also summarised, along with the economic benefits of sharing.

7.2 Development Plans

SFTS:
88% strongly agreed (52%) or agreed (36%) that participating in SFTS has **helped to address priorities in their Pre-school Development Plan (SDP)**[31] or **Síolta Baseline Assessment**, noting the complementarity between both and how each informed and contributed to meeting the objectives of each of the settings' curricular focus learning outcomes and objectives linked to creating parental and community connections. Whilst 7% (5 respondents) 'strongly disagreed' with this statement comments are positive and suggest that these pre-schools welcomed SFTS and acknowledged that it has aligned to their strategic plans.

We always try to promote a positive and nurturing environment in our school, welcoming anyone who comes our way. Our Development Plan always accommodates this, however, SFTS has enabled and encouraged us to be more specific. We have incorporated curriculum objectives from our Development Plan into our Shared Education, but we have also incorporated pastoral objectives from our Shared Education projects into our School Development Plan - it is vital to recognise the importance of both.

CASE:
92% strongly agreed (25%) or agreed (67%) that participating in CASE has **helped to address priorities in their School Development Plan (SDP)**[32] or **School Self-evaluation (SSE)**. Teachers noted that Shared Education became intrinsically linked to the SDP and/or SSE, with both complementing each other.

We looked at the priorities identified on our School Development Plan and tailored our Shared Education Programme to enhance and develop the areas we wanted to address.

I completely tied it in with our SSE plan this year and I cannot over emphasise the benefits of doing this enough.

Based on feedback, 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.

[31] The School Development Plan is a strategic plan for improvement and provides the framework for the key outcomes and targets agreed by governors, senior leadership members and staff.
[32] SDP is a strategic plan for improvement and provides the framework for the key outcomes and targets agreed by governors, senior leadership members and staff.

7.3 Inspection Reports

Based on a review of inspection reports in NI and RoI, it is evident that inspectors have reviewed pre-school/school involvement in SFTS/CASE when assessing the impact/benefit for children – this is evidence that Shared Education is contributing to meeting existing quality standards in both jurisdictions. The extracts from inspection reports below highlight the benefits ranging from improved learning experiences, enhanced learning outcomes, development of relationships and friendships, and wider community connections.

Sample - Extracts from Inspection Reports:

SFTS: *ETI (NI); and Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) (RoI) Inspection Reports*
[Playgroup] Ballymena, County Antrim – October 2019
There are agreed priorities and effective action plans for the ***'Sharing from the Start'*** shared education programme that are leading to improved learning experiences for all of the children and staff, for example, the children benefit from visiting each setting, and staff share examples of good practice.

[Playgroup] County Tyrone, February 2018
The playgroup has good links with the parents, local schools, the community, and external agencies. Parental views are regularly sought, welcomed and acted upon and effective transitions are in place with the local feeder primary schools. The playgroup has recently joined the ***'Sharing from the Start'*** programme and has initiated a **cross-border shared education** link.

[Montessori], Co Donegal – March 2019
The children are developing a strong sense of belonging and achievement through the many displays that create a child-friendly space that is evidently dedicated to them. Their sense of identity is nurtured through many organised visits to various local places of interest as part of the '***Sharing from the Start'*** project. The children have the opportunity to develop relationships with children from a partner pre-school over a three-year project cycle.

[Pre-school] Sligo – September 2018
The practitioners positively nurture the children's sense of belonging. This is reinforced through the setting's involvement in the ***Sharing from the Start*** Project, visits from parents and involvement with the Catalysts group within the community hall. Children are developing their understanding of group identity and roles within the local community through experiences organised within the ***Sharing from the Start Project***. This enables them to meet peers from another pre-school and as a group, experience local amenities such as the train station, woodlands, and the library during planned outings.

CASE: *ETI (NI); and DES Inspection*
[Primary School] County Tyrone – January 2020
The children have access to an extensive range of extra-curricular learning experiences, which enhances their wider skills. They benefit well from learning with and from the children within the **shared education partnership**; for example, they have developed their investigative and problem-solving skills within their World Around Us topics…. The staff development programme is well-aligned to the [school development] priorities and there is a creative approach to professional learning through shared education and engagement with other local primary schools.

[Primary School] County Derry-Londonderry – May 2019
The children from key stage (KS) 2, who met with the inspectors, talked enthusiastically about their shared learning experiences with their peers within the **shared education partnership**. In particular, they enjoyed working to solve problems through their science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) projects. The children reflected on how they have developed a range of skills and deeper understanding of their social and emotional development through their engagement in 'Project Sparks'. They spoke with a clear and perceptive understanding of the importance of being respectful and supportive to those who are different to them.

There is limited reference to schools' involvement in CASE within DES Inspectorate's inspection reports. However, individual schools' 'School self-evaluation (SSE)' reports do consider the benefits of Shared Education to learners and teachers. SSE complements the external inspections carried out by DES Inspectorate and together, they can keep parents informed about the standards of learning in schools.

7.4 Shared/Inclusion Policies

The PEACE IV Programme did not set a specific output that partnerships should develop an inclusion policy in their pre-school/school. Whilst not a requirement, SFTS aimed to support Boards of Governors/Management Committees to develop and implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution as a mechanism in which to promote the sustainability of Shared Education in pre-school settings. This is based on differing results across the SFTS/CASE models, as below:

SFTS: Almost half (47%) reported that the setting has a standalone Shared Education policy in place. A further 36% have referred to Shared Education in their existing inclusion policy, with a few citing that there are opportunities to enhance given the experiences gained from SFTS. 15% reported that they do not currently have a Shared Education policy in place, but it is planned/in development. Only one individual/partnership stated that there is no Shared Education policy in place.

Our Equal Opportunities Policy refers to inclusion and states 'opportunities will be given to children in the pre-school to explore, acknowledge and value similarities and differences between themselves and others' however I acknowledge that we need to expand and begin to develop our policies to reflect new practice, procedures and connections and how the Shared Education programme promotes and has positive impact on learning and enhances these opportunities for children and adults in a very concrete way.

CASE: In comparison 6% of CASE respondents reported that their school has a standalone Shared Education policy in place, although 31% have referred to Shared Education in their existing inclusion policy. Over half (51%) reported that they do not currently have a Shared Education policy in place, but it is planned/in development. 12% stated that there is no Shared Education policy in place. For those respondents who did not have a specific Shared Education policy in place, this was due to it not being discussed within the school to have a set policy, whilst others felt it was not needed as inclusion is embedded within the ethos of the school.

It has fitted in perfectly with our ethos and given staff and children an opportunity to further develop their understanding of inclusion and diversity. Through fostering links with our partner school, it has made us more aware of the positive contribution that Shared Education has made in our efforts to make our school a more inclusive school.

It has become part of the fabric of our school in a non-intrusive but positive manner. As in too many other areas, this would be spoilt by a formal policy.

7.5 Economic Benefits

Feedback emphasises that pre-school/school budgets are restricted, with various competing priorities, therefore funding from PEACE IV has provided a much-needed boost to enhance and enrich the curricular experience for children and the professional development of practitioners/teachers. There is evidence of:

- 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.
- Shared practitioner/teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.

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

The funding has enabled us to purchase resources that we would otherwise have been unable to buy, thus broadening the experiences for our children.

It allows children a different experience and a different environment which builds on their social development and confidence. We have focused on English and Maths and this has led to an increased focus on these areas within our school which has been built upon through Shared Education and this whole school approach has had an impact on our outcomes alongside the training and resources made available through Shared Education funding.

7.6 Chapter Summary

Shared Education has had a positive impact on helping to address curricular priorities in relevant Pre-school Development Plans; Síolta Baseline Assessments; or School Development Plans. 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 strategically aligned to the agreed curriculum focus, recognising that they are intrinsically linked. A review of inspection reports provides evidence that Shared Education is recognised as a valuable intervention to improving teaching and learning.

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.

There are also economic benefits for participating pre-schools/schools. The evidence indicates that the aim to '*promotes 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 shared practitioner/teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.

8 BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, highlighting the **impact on practitioner/teacher training**. Key findings are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., including both CASE and SFTS).

8.2 Overview of Training Provided

For those pre-schools/schools participating in SFTS and CASE, support is provided in the form of ongoing mentoring from Early Years Specialists (EYS) or Development Officers (DO). EYS and DOs provide valuable support to partnerships and feedback has been very complimentary.

SFTS training and CASE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) offer a comprehensive training package for participants. Training includes a variety of formats such as one-day training events, training to cover a range of modules over the course of three-days (and subsequent learning in weeks ahead to embed learning), and more recently online training and webinars. The training offers a blend of research-based theory and practical classroom content.

SFTS developed Pre-school Clusters (2-4 schools working together) to aid wider collaborative working and sharing of good practice. CASE has also supported TPL at a partnership and cluster level.

As an additional offering CASE now offers Joint Practice Development (JPD) which uses an action-research/co-construction approach to achieve transformation of practice. 26% (43 out of 168) partnerships have availed of JPD.

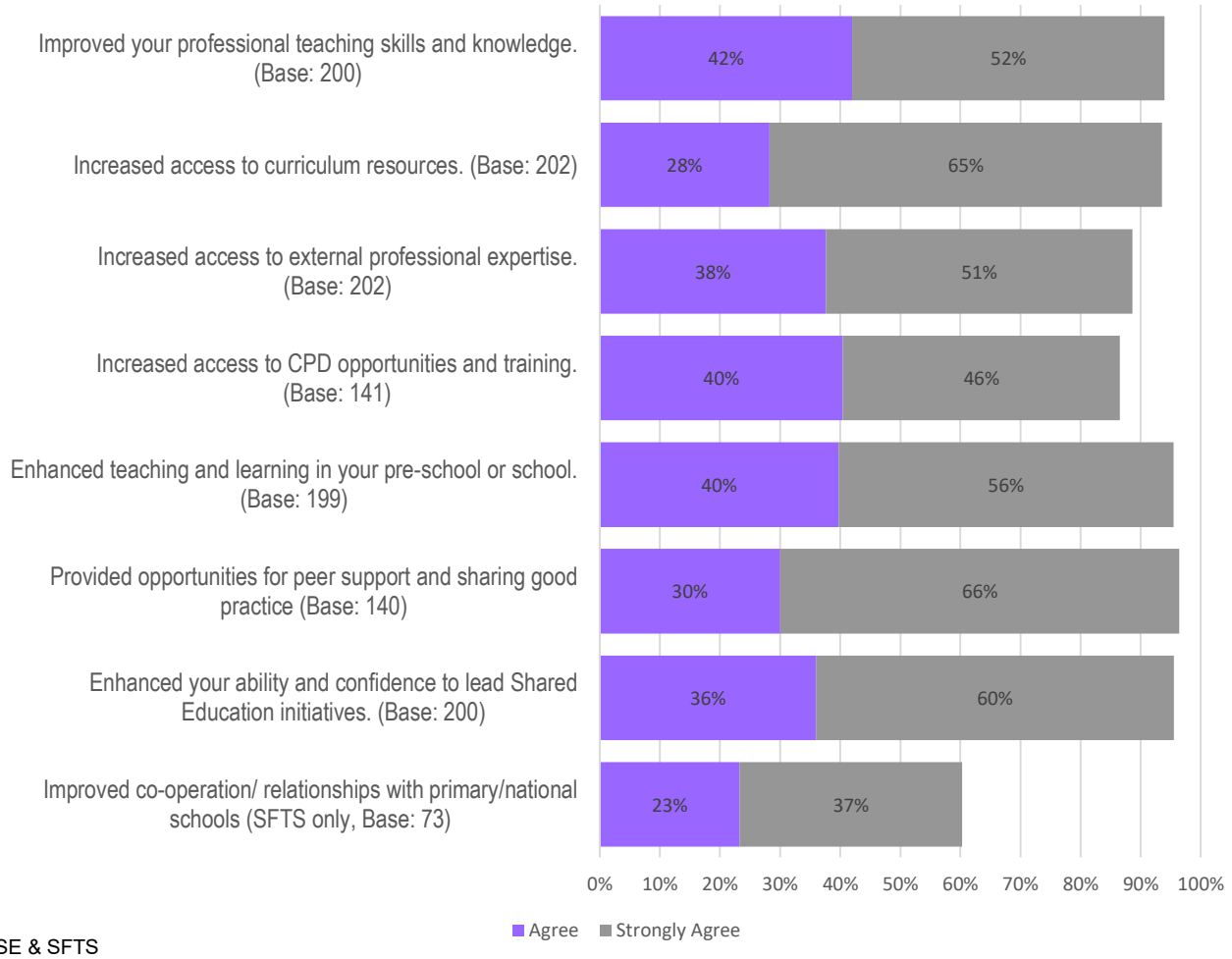
8.3 Key Findings

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.

One of the key outputs of Shared Education is the development and delivery of related teacher training and professional learning initiatives i.e., the PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is on schedule to be met with a total of **1,409 teachers trained to date**.

Key results – those that 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with statement:

Figure 8.1: Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers – Training/ Educational Outcomes



CASE & SFTS

Improved your professional teaching skills and knowledge – 94%

94% of respondents agreed that their professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved due to involvement in SFTS/CASE. Specific examples of increased confidence in working within a diverse classroom, and gaining experience delivering new subject areas, as well as using new resources/equipment to enhance core subjects were articulated as being advantageous to teachers' own professional development. Examples were given of teachers benefiting from training and extra responsibilities, which has led to a promotion in their career.

Throughout this we have shared good practice. We always left each other's settings with ideas that we would implement in our own.

Improved teaching skills and knowledge from collaborating with teachers from another school - sharing ideas, learning new strategies for teaching and learning.

Increased access to curriculum resources – 93%

93% agreed that Shared Education has increased access to curriculum resources, such as being able to purchase new equipment to support and enhance learning. For example, STEM equipment, Numicon resources, Lego, art activities, outdoor play equipment. It was noted that these resources would not have been purchased in the absence of funding, due to funding constraints within schools.

Thoughtful spending of the funding which allows children within each setting to benefit both during the projects and also in the longer term, e.g., outdoor play equipment for subsequent years, playground markings benefitting the whole school and Numicon equipment which can then be used by other year groups.

The funding has enabled us to purchase resources that we would otherwise have been unable to buy, thus broadening the experiences for our children.

Increased access to external professional expertise – 89%

In addition to the training and support provided by Project Partners, 89% of respondents also agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has allowed them to use funding to gain access other external professional expertise. Whilst the focus is on in-house delivery, gaining external tutors for specific subjects has been beneficial for children's learning and from a practitioner/teacher training perspective.

We have access to, and opportunities to experience things we would never have had without this programme. In current climate we would never have had the opportunity to go on trips, book buses and buy in facilitators.

I have gained valuable CPD through watching trained tutors deliver workshops to the pupils e.g. science experiments, hands on, working with Lego, using motors connected to science, gymnastics, safety procedures, mindfulness etc.

Increased access to CPD opportunities and training – 86%

86% agreed that participating in SFT/CASE has increased their access to continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and training. The additional benefit of collaborative working also helped practitioners to share ideas and signpost to other training not directly related to Shared Education.

Whole staff training has been possible to upskill staff in STEM subjects, PDMU and The Arts. Staff have been able to disseminate their skills and knowledge to further enhance teaching and learning.

I feel that the programme has enabled me to access lots of training opportunities to support my own professional development as well as meeting other practitioners who offer new ideas that I can use and benefit from in my service.

For CASE, 45 out of the 133 respondents (34%) stated that 'yes' they had attended TPL courses (2019/2020). Training courses delivered by CASE were reported as being effective by 82% of respondents, agreeing that it has helped them to gain new knowledge and skills to deliver Shared Education. As of June 2020, 27 schools (representing 22 partnerships) reported that they had applied for Stage 2 funding for JPD, which focuses on collaborative TPL and has a self-improving system at its core.

Enhanced teaching and learning in your pre-school or school – 95%

According to 95% of respondents, SFTS/CASE has enhanced teaching and learning across their entire school and wider partnership. Regular meetings and action planning sessions contributed to a sense of partnership working and close collaboration, with opportunities to share expertise and to explore new ways of working.

Having the benefit of being in a three-way partnership means that we have three times the staff (and brainpower!), three times the resources and three times the learning areas, even if we just stay within visitations between our settings. When we add additional visits to outside sites, it adds even more to the project.

The fact that the project allows staff time to meet, plan and share expertise has been extremely valuable. This has had great benefits to us and allowed us to share in many areas of our school to make both schools better learning environments.

Provided opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice – 96%

SFTS/CASE has provided opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice, as agreed by 96% of respondents. As a result, teachers have 'tweaked' and improved ways of working to enhance the learning experiences for children. A few partnerships also specifically mentioned the benefit of sharing expertise to support educational achievement for children with special education needs (SEN) and have very much welcomed the opportunity to share learning.

As colleagues we benefitted greatly from collaborating and reflecting critically on aspects of our own curricula and how it is delivered, assessed, and evaluated. We discussed SEN identification and support, planning, marking, compared curricula, finance, salaries. It was fascinating to be able to consider our system with 'outside eyes' to identify strengths and shortcomings.

The peer support and sharing of good practice is invaluable. We are continually observing routines, activities, play experiences, displays and interaction styles in the partner setting. These are discussed in staff meetings and have led to tweaks and additions to our own practice

As time progressed, the levels of co-operation have increased and developed into strong partnerships, where staff feel at ease to routinely engage and share learning, not only about shared sessions but beyond this scope to include daily activities within/across the pre-schools/schools (sharing good practice ideas, teaching strategies, resources).

For SFTS, 91% agreed that participating in Peer Learning Clusters provides opportunities to share learning and gain advice on best practice. Practitioners enjoyed and welcomed the opportunity to come together to discuss planning and ideas on how to implement shared sessions, and to provide general peer support.

Enhanced your ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives – 96%
96% 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. Specific examples of increased confidence in working within a diverse classroom, and gaining experience delivering new subject areas, as well as using new resources/equipment were articulated as being advantageous to teachers' own professional development.

My own confidence has grown, and I have been pushed out of my comfort zone which has been very good for professional and personal development.

The support of CASE development officers, whilst not being overbearing, has allowed me to develop as lead teacher of Shared Education, whilst feeling supported if I needed any help.

Improved co-operation/relationships with primary schools – 60%
Linkages between pre-schools and primary schools were reported by SFTS partnerships as improved co-operation to support transitions. However, 30% stated 'neutral' and a further 8% disagreed with this statement, citing that the barrier to developing relationship was due to the programme being prematurely cut short from March 2020 (due to Covid-19 restrictions).

8.3.1 Suggested Training Needs

Additional training and support needs suggested by respondents include:

<u>SFTS/CASE – common training needs</u>
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.
- Advice on how best to set up a shared classroom and how to mix children – considering factors that need to be put in place and how to overcome obstacles such as clashes in school calendars.
- Support in sourcing outside agencies/facilitators who work in schools, providing workshops to both staff and children.

IT support
- Training to complete monitoring spreadsheets.
- Advice and training on how to use and take advantage of virtual learning opportunities (particularly in the current climate of Covid-19 restrictions on contact).

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

Special Education Needs
- Advice on how to ensure inclusion in a shared setting and a focus on how other SEN schools involved are managing the process, to help share good practice ideas.
- Courses/topics based around delivering the programme with children with SEN.
- Workshops specifically for parents of children with SEN and how they can benefit from SFTS.

<u>SFTS (only)</u>
- Supporting and managing wellbeing and emotional intelligence, including the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

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.
- Advice on how to use Sports Development – as team-based activities to help create bonds and friendships.
- Support to complete application for JPD funding (Stage 2 funding).

8.4 Chapter Summary

The PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is on schedule to be met with a total of **1,409 teachers trained to date**.

Shared Education has had a positive impact on practitioners'/teachers' continuous professional development. **96%** reported that they are **more confident in their ability to lead Shared Education activities**, consequently adding to the sustainability of such activities in the future.

Other key benefits include improved professional teaching skills and knowledge (94%); increased access to curriculum resources (93%); increased access to external professional expertise (89%); increased access to CPD opportunities and training (87%); enhanced teaching and learning in your pre-school or school (95%); provided opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice (96%).

Additional training and support needs suggested by respondents include general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support accessing expertise/external tutors; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; support using IT in the delivery of shared classes (particularly important during Covid-19 restrictions on contact); incorporating mental health into activities; and increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs.

9 SHARED/RECONCILIATION BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

9.1 Introduction

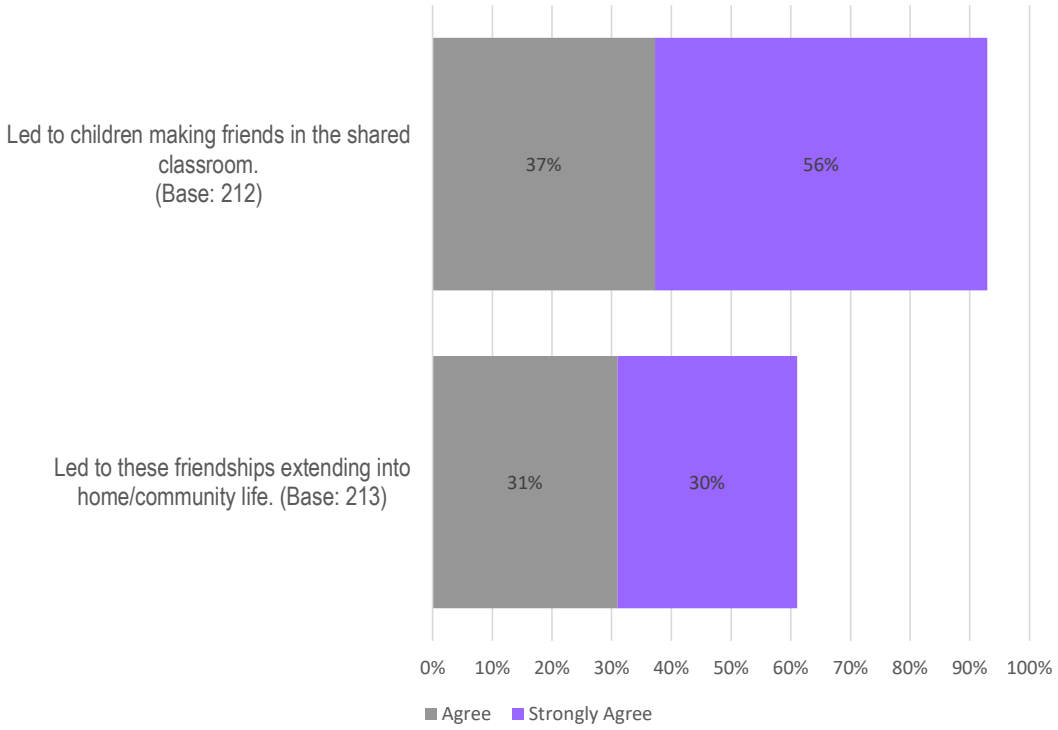
This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, on the shared/reconciliation (societal) impact for children in terms of the extent of cross-community friendships formed and ability to deal with differences. Key findings are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., CASE and SFTS).

9.2 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.

The Programme aims to create opportunities for children to have sustained contact with peers from another community background within the existing educational structures. This should facilitate new and increased friendships and contacts on a cross-community basis.

Figure 9.1: Benefits for Children – Societal Outcomes (Friendships)



CASE & SFTS

93% agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, with practitioners/teachers observing social development and many close relationships emerging over the duration of the various shared activities. 61% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**. Connections were easier to establish and maintain for older children, who have had more opportunities to meet outside of school. It was also noted that these types of interactions are reliant on parents being engaged and facilitating opportunities for children to meet.

Societal benefits occurred via formal models of mixing through set curricular activity, but importantly practitioners/teachers recognised the importance of 'ice-breakers' and 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.

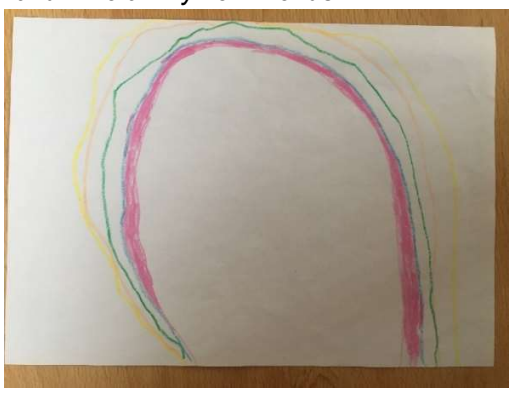
Photos: SFTS - Children's drawings representing what they like about Shared Education, and their explanation of their drawing.

"Having great fun with our friends"

Nursery is really the first time that children make friends so giving them the opportunity to make more friends outside their nursery class is invaluable.

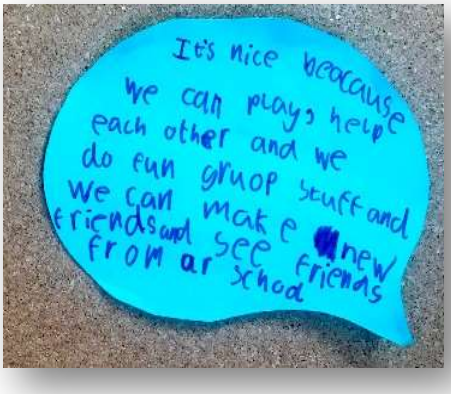
The shared sessions were brilliant. The children had the opportunity to share normal daily activities such as story time, song time, play time, snack time and news time together. Sharing these activities which the children were already comfortable with allowed the children to be more open to make new friends.

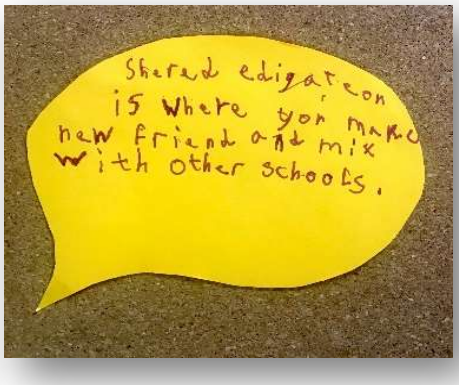
"I like to play with the toys in [Partner pre-school] *and I like all my new friends"*



"We went on a big bus with our new friends'

Photo: CASE - Feedback received from primary school pupils during the evaluator's activity.



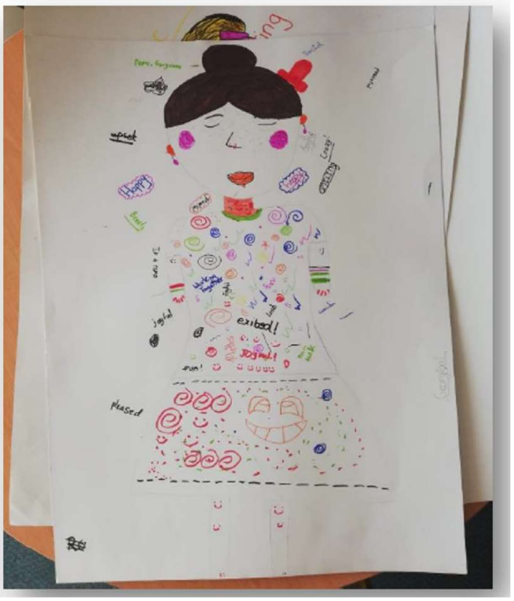


Pre-school children in Border Counties have a second pre-school year so benefit from sustained contact over a longer period to help build friendships. Primary/post-primary school children involved in CASE for more than one year also reported sustained friendships being developed.

Pupils who have been partnering for three consecutive years have developed strong friendships which has had a very positive impact on them and their understanding of children from different religious backgrounds.

Due to the nature of play-based learning friendships naturally developed. No pressure on pupils, informal approach worked well to develop connections.

Photos: Pupils from both schools working together on an exercise for the evaluator. They were asked to draw a 'person' to represent their Shared Education experience, including words to describe how they feel about the shared sessions, and what they like/do not like about the activities they take part in. The group reflected that they felt happy and excited when they took part in shared sessions, and that they particularly liked to play games in class, play sports, and go on trips together.



9.3 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.

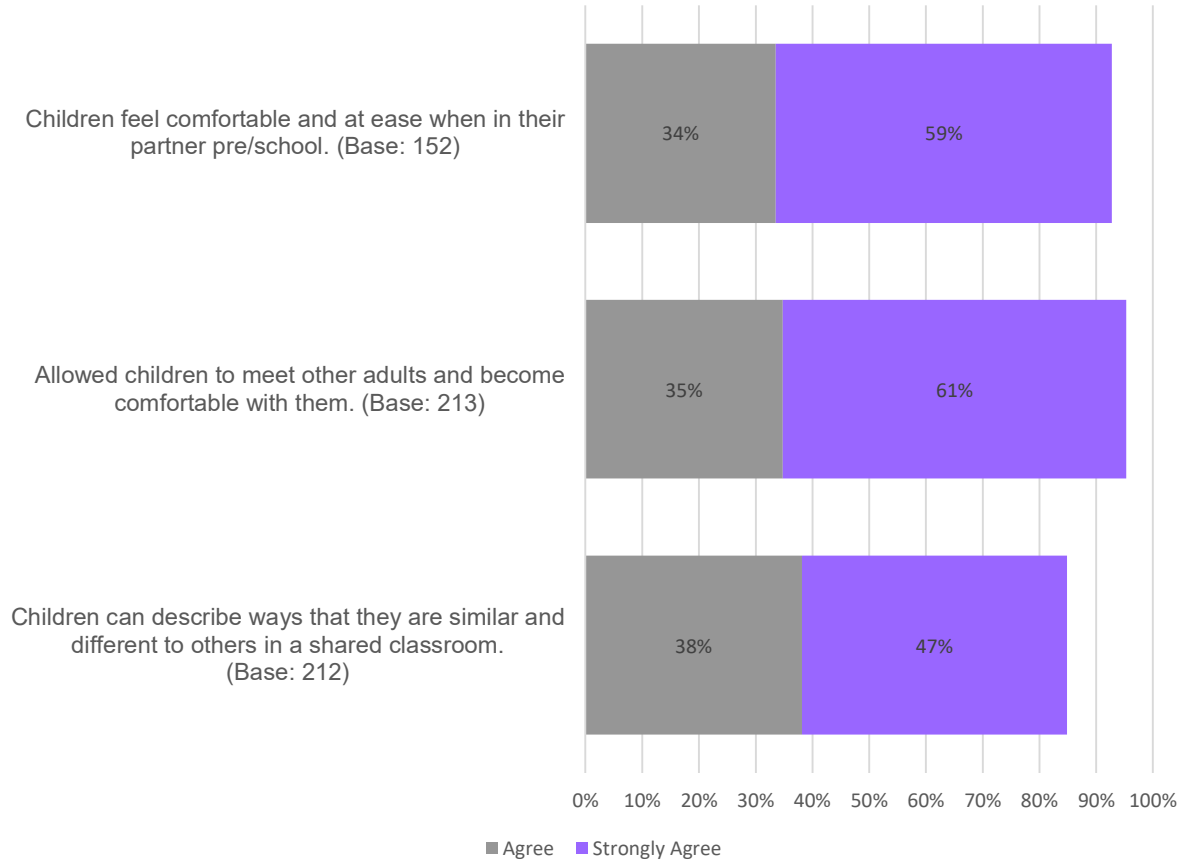
The contact facilitated by Shared Education aims to have positive impacts on intergroup attitudes and behaviours, including a reduction in prejudice and promotion of more harmonious intergroup relations by being able to understand and deal with difference in whatever form it occurs.

9.3.1 Children

The positive starting position of children was noted as a contributing factor to the success of SFTS/CASE projects with children's willingness to engage in shared activities; stereotyping and negative attitudes were not (or less) apparent among young children. 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.

Key results – those that 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with statement:

Figure 9.2: Benefits for Children – Societal Outcomes (Acceptance of Differences)



CASE & SFTS

Children feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner pre-school/school – 93%

93% of respondents agreed that children feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner school(s), with many commenting that, over time, children become so familiar that the partner setting has become an extension of the children's own environment.

Children love to talk about what they see in each other's school and how things are done. When working on STEM topics and in mixed school groups, children are very comfortable working together and have grown in confidence with every visit.

My pupils referred to their partner nursery as their 'other classroom' or their 'other teachers' or their 'other friends'. They see it as an extension of their own environment.

Travelling to and being a part of another school - children were completely comfortable in different surroundings.

Allowed children to meet other adults and become comfortable with them – 95%

SFTS/CASE allowed children to meet other adults, with evidence that they are now comfortable and at ease. Many commented on how well children adapted to meeting new people in different environments, recognising that it has pushed their boundaries and enhanced learning experiences. It was also reported that the range of learning experiences will help children better adapt to transitions from pre-school to primary, and primary to post primary school and beyond.

This project has taught them tolerance much more than we could in our individual settings - they have learned to share space, time, and resources like they have never shared before, they have learned to adapt to new surroundings when we visit each other, they have learned to cope with changes in routines and boundaries during visits and they have learned how to tolerate A LOT of different people.
Amazing achievements for 3-year-olds!

The course gives them the opportunity to meet different adults from different backgrounds with different interests or careers - artists, pilots, musicians, facilitators - this allows them to learn new skills.

Having a wide range of activities that included teacher led as well as facilitator led meant that pupils felt increasingly comfortable with all staff members and led to a real feeling of a 'shared ed' family which bonded our pupils and staff.

Children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others in a shared classroom – 85%
According to 85% of respondents, children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others in the shared classroom setting, demonstrating that children are comfortable in each other's company. Practitioners/teachers adopted activities such as icebreakers, 'circle time', group work, and curricular subjects such as PDMU, SPHE, Music, and WAU to explore similarities and differences, as well informal exchanges.

Differences mainly focused on uniform, routines within school, with conversations encouraged during formal group work activities or as part of informal exchanges. The result was that the children could see and talk about many similarities and importantly were accepting of differences.

Photo: SFTS - the children recognise that the other school wear a different jumper colour.

This programme allows children and their parents at this very young age to realise that uniforms do not make us any different, we all experience the same activities and interactions, and all of our schools are warm and welcoming environments for everyone regardless of age, culture, religion etc.

Discussions which arose naturally during mixed sessions about the similarities and differences in the environment in both settings, similarities and differences in routines, similarities and differences in shared rhyme, story, and music sessions.

Any shared experience that we discussed, for example school, exams, sport, social life made a huge contribution towards reconciliation - pupils realised that they were so similar and had shared interests.

Photo: SFTS - St Patrick's Day celebrations underway, with activities and costumes celebrating both cultural traditions.

Through delivery of the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC)[33] SFTS partnerships were able to provide opportunities for children and their parents to explore wider culture and diversity. The MIFC is a curriculum-based model focused on engaging children, teachers, parents, and governors in building respect for difference. This is based on research demonstrating the need to intervene from an early age to prevent sectarian and racist attitudes and behaviours manifesting in childhood. The MIFC proved extremely popular and offered techniques for practitioners to explore similarities and differences using puppets and storytelling, which the children enjoyed. The parent workshops were also well attended and positive feedback provided as to the importance of such initiatives to develop a sense of identity and respect for others. Practitioners also welcomed the opportunity to learn new skills and techniques to support learning in a diverse classroom.

Through the media initiative resources we were able to explore similarities and differences very naturally as they arose in our classrooms or as a situation warranted it. The puppets and resources were also introduced and used as another tool to explore or teach specific concepts/messages becoming a familiar part of the classroom.

Media Initiative Training resources are pitched at exactly the right level for our children and always get a great response from our children. The training has given us a bank of ideas on how to use these with our classes. A very useful course!

Children have had the opportunity to experience diversity. For example, we have a Chinese child in our class. We celebrated Chinese New Year. The children became fully involved in the dragon dance and there was lots of discussion around Chinese New Year for days after. We also participated in 'Green Day' where children experimented with different types of musical instruments and listened to traditional Irish songs.

For older children, feedback highlighted that they are more aware of differences between schools in terms of religious symbols, which sparked conversations with their peers and teachers. Feedback given to practitioners/teachers from parents has been positive, and from observations of children's interactions and conversations, it was evident that children developed a better understanding and respect for differences, with examples provided of children changing their behaviour to better connect with others and form cross-community friendships.

For a series of 'first time' meetings in different school settings, the children osmotically absorbed understandings of similarities and differences without it being an obvious focus. They became acutely aware of some differences, impacts of faith on participation in different activities such as music and dancing. They [children] made micro adjustments to their own behaviours so that they could maintain and grow friendships and not disrespect their peers.

Parents have spoken highly of children's Shared Education. It is vital in allowing communities to feel secure in their own faiths and traditions whilst developing relationships and partnerships that will in time form a much better-connected society in Northern Ireland. Thank you for making this possible.

[33] 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

The involvement of Special Schools has 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. Importantly for parents of children with special needs it has allowed them to create community connections and they now benefit from an extended support network.

9.4 Chapter Summary

Cross-community Friendships

Involvement of children in Shared Education as part of their overall education has contributed to positive behaviours and attitudes towards different communities, with evidence of connections and friendships made. 93% agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, with practitioners/teachers observing social development and many close relationships emerging over the duration of the projects. 61% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life.** This experience will positively influence children's behaviours in the future in terms of building cross-community links and friendships. Opportunities for children to meet outside of school (with support from parents) will contribute to the longer-term benefits of sharing.

Dealing with Difference

Societal benefits in terms of enhanced mutual understanding and tolerance is also evident. For example, participants reported that partnership enabled children feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner pre-school/school (93%); to meet other adults and become comfortable with them (95%); describe ways that they are similar and different to others in a shared classroom (85%), as well as having increased empathy for others with different needs/abilities.

The positive starting position of children was noted as a contributing factor to the success of SFTS/CASE projects with children's willingness to engage in shared activities; stereotyping and negative attitudes were not (or less) apparent among young children. 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. For older children it has helped to reinforce the importance of accepting differences to help positively influence attitudes and behaviours, thereby contributing towards a shared society.

10 SHARED/RECONCILIATION BENEFITS FOR WIDER COMMUNITY

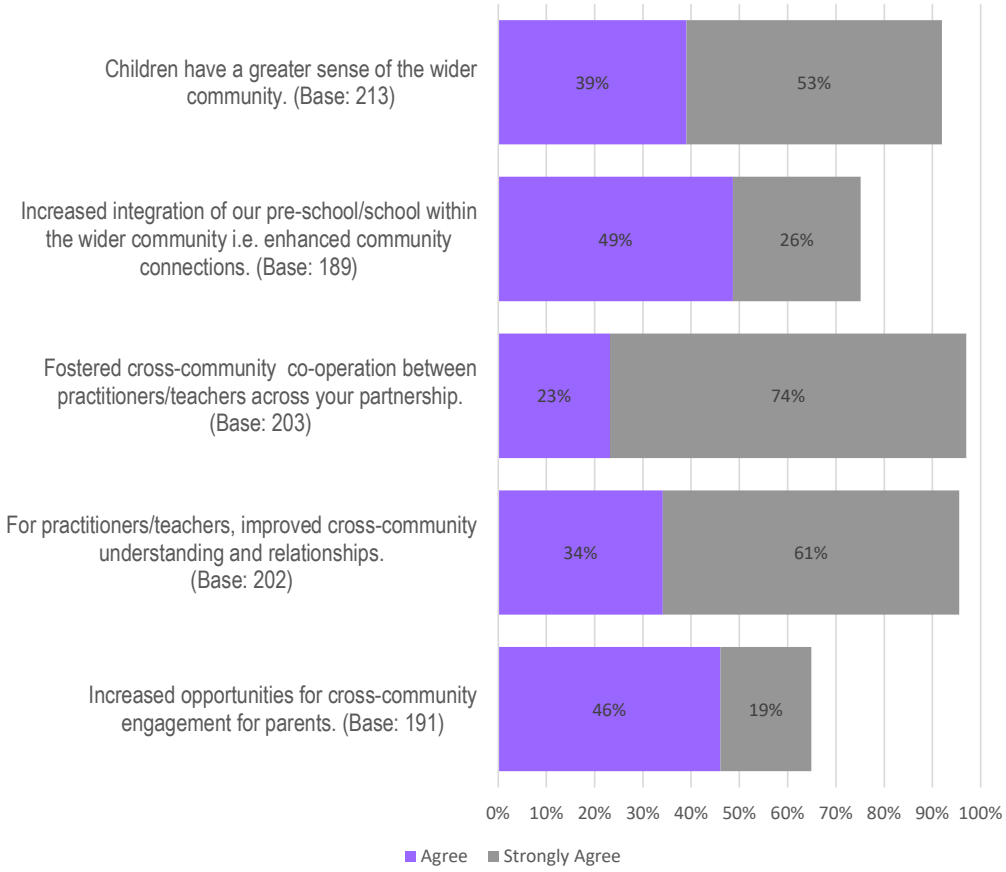
10.1 Introduction

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 result in 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.

Key results – those that 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with statement:

Figure 10.1: Wider Community – Societal Outcomes



CASE & SFTS

10.1.1 Children and their connection to the wider community

92% of respondents strongly agreed (39%) or agreed (53%) that **children have a greater sense of the wider community**, for example, via 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.

We had opportunity to visit both villages; see and discuss similarities and differences. It gave a greater understanding of each area's culture and broke down misunderstanding and incorrect knowledge they had gleaned from other sources.

I think the overall programme has had a positive impact on both the teachers and the pupils - enabling them all to see outside of their own bubble and widen their horizons is a life changing experience.

Through the programme the children had the opportunity to have a greater sense of the wider community, people, traditions, children from different backgrounds, travelling on buses, respect for others, rules in society etc.

10.1.2 Pre-school/School integration to the wider community

75% strongly agreed (49%) or agreed (26%) that due to Shared Education there has been an **increased integration of the respective pre-school/school within the wider community**. Results vary between SFTS and CASE, with 82% of SFTS and 71% of CASE agreeing with this statement.

Respondents outlined a range of examples whereby their pre-school/school has become more visible, from 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.

Parents love their children being involved in the programme. This year bringing the P6 children into different churches without parents being worried about it was our biggest success and results from a well-planned programme run over the years before.

We have involved the various members of the community with the programme, shared use of the local community centres/halls and therefore raising awareness, increasing confidence that they can go to these places, even though they are not in their local community.

Some respondents also specifically noted the benefit of visiting other schools in an area previously felt as being predominately one community, therefore helping to bridge divides and helping to extend the pre-school/school community.

Wider inclusion benefits have also been reported, such as welcoming newcomer families and helping them to feel connected within the community and form friendships.

Parents are generally delighted that their children are involved in this project. Apart from all the extra experiences that the project affords them, parents are also delighted that their children are part of a project that supports the joining of different communities. In particular, our Newcomer parents find it an excellent way to access friendships and support.

Some of our Polish parents have reported that they found it difficult to 'break into' the local community but now that they have met through the project, they have made some good friends and often socialise with 'local' families.

10.1.3 Community Connections established via cross-community and/or cross-border working

97% strongly agreed (74%) or agreed (23%) that Shared Education has fostered **cross-community co-operation** between practitioners/teachers across their partnership. 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 school routine.

Having taken part in the project, I have learned a lot about different faiths through chit chat with my partner teachers and I have made two very good friends out of the project. I have encountered lots of parents/grandparents throughout our visits and it is clear to see that we have much more in common with 'other sectors' than we have different - something everyone needs to hold onto.

Enjoying real and meaningful friendships with staff in partner school. We can support each other in practical ways. Getting to know better each other's faith and culture.

The staff's relationships with their partner setting was enhanced and as staff become more relaxed with each other, there was a great willingness to work together, support each other's settings and share ideas for moving forwards.

Having the opportunity to meet and plan and share ideas and experiences with another teacher working within the same class level has been very positive and helpful as working in a two-teacher school can be quite isolating.

95% of respondents also strongly agreed (34%) or agreed (61%) that Shared Education has improved **cross-community understanding and relationships**. CASE and SFTS training offered a range of opportunities for education providers to become more aware of their own identity, as well as diversity and difference issues, and positively change attitudes and behaviours.

The training gave me a better understanding of other religions, it created good relationships between practitioners and improved our skills and knowledge of other cultures

I have developed a wonderful relationship with my partner principal which is very important to me both professionally and personally.

Friendships and connections between early years practitioners/teachers across the partnerships have also been established and can continue to flourish post funding.

Partnerships involved in cross-border linkages have the added dimension and benefit of children experiencing a wider sense of community, outside their own jurisdiction. There are 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.

Through SFTS the children had the opportunity to take part in cross border curricula thus providing a wider early years education learning and experience.

Having a cross border collaboration added an additional dimension to the experience. Pupils were able to gain a better understanding and awareness of similarities and differences in their own school experiences.

Prior to Shared Education I was totally unaware of and had no knowledge of the curriculum in the South of Ireland, so I have become more aware of this and the similarities/differences to our Northern Ireland curriculum. It gives us an insight into the Síolta curriculum.

It has been great to become involved in a project that has a cross border element as well to learn about their curriculum and how it is implemented and incorporating that alongside ours has enhanced our practice as practitioners.

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.

The fact that we are a three-way cross-border partnership means that our children do begin to have a sense of the wider community having to travel some distance on a bus for each shared session.

The children availed of the many opportunities to explore the wider community particularly cross border communities through this wonderful programme.

10.1.4 Impact on Parents

Overall support from parents is evident as they have given their consent for their child/ren to be involved in SFTS/CASE shared classes, with increased visibility of parents at various shared events – showing a tangible support for Shared Education.

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 91% agreeing that feedback was 'very positive' (40%) or 'positive' (51%). Results vary between SFTS and CASE, with 97% of SFTS and 84% of CASE agreeing with this statement.

Firstly, every child in the school has been granted permission to participate and continue to attend meet ups which I believe is great evidence in itself. Verbal feedback from parents has been very positive.

All feedback we have received from parents, since the beginning of this project, has been very positive. They are very appreciative of the opportunities it affords to their children and also they like that the children are meeting new friends or, in some cases, they are meeting up with children they already know from the other setting.

Support at Celebration Events has been excellent with informal feedback stating how much their children have enjoyed and benefited from the activities. Formal questionnaires have provided further evidence of how they appreciate the opportunities given and also the friendships made.

Most significant are comments that SFTS/CASE has positively contributed to changing attitudes and behaviours of parents. Examples were provided of how parents were reluctant to become involved at first but as time progressed, they fully embraced the shared sessions and supported their child/ren's involvement.

Excellent, cannot believe the outcomes. Even the most entrenched parents came on board……out of the mouths of babes… the children led the way. The children educated the parents in reconciliation. One parent said, 'I'd never have thought I'd step inside your school'.

The parents were a bit reluctant at first to engage and a bit suspicious, and a few refrained from joining in the first few sessions but then wonderfully at the end the parents were hugging and saying how much they are going to miss meeting and some continued to meet after the programme in the local park, coffee shops…so the parents' education and appreciation of SFS and their role in developing identity and breaking down barriers of 'Them and Us'.

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', where previously this would not have been the case.

According to 65% of respondents there were **increased opportunities for cross-community engagement for parents**. However, there are notably differences between the SFTS and CASE models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project i.e., **85%** strongly agreed (35%) or agreed (50%) that SFTS increased opportunities for cross-community engagement for parents, compared to CASE where **56%** strongly agreed (12%) or agreed (44%) with this statement.

CASE

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, with parental engagement linked to ad-hoc or one-off events such as launch or celebration events. This is a developmental point to support wider community impact and sustainability of Shared Education benefits.

SFTS

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. As such, 98% of SFTS respondents reported that they '**facilitated the active involvement of parents**' for example parents volunteered to attend/support shared sessions. In addition, 31% reported that parents volunteered to facilitate demonstrations e.g., fitness, preparing food, 'show and tell'. There were other more passive forms of parental engagement, involving parents attending shared events such as: launch event, concerts, sporting events, celebration event/showcasing children's work.

Overall, there has been good attendance at, and support for SFTS shared sessions, with family members enjoying the opportunity to observe children taking part and benefiting from educational and shared experiences. This is particularly important for young children as educational outcomes are more likely to be achieved with parental engagement.

Our children were able to explore/share travelling to a different village, somewhere where I know most of our community would not have visited as a norm, being that the families who use the playgroup come from a predominately Catholic background, where as our partner playgroup is located in a predominately Protestant area. This gave the children and their families a platform to go and see that our partner group was in a different area to us, different beliefs, different customs/culture, but that was ok, and they respected that.

Children enjoyed learning about difference and acceptance... were able to embrace learning opportunities and parents commented on how this approached the subject for them to continue conversations at home as it was something they found difficult to approach and talk about age appropriately.

The involvement of family, both parents and grandparents, allows the children opportunities to talk about their experiences at home.

In June 2019, SFTS Project Partners distributed a parent survey to eight pre-school settings, with feedback gained (from 122 parents) on the benefits for their child and themselves, with parents stating '**very positive**' or 'positive' impact on the following:

- Knowledge of your child's activities in pre-school and of the curriculum – **48%**, 44% (92%).
- Relationship with staff in your child's pre-school – **48%**, 36% (84%).
- Relationship with other parents from your pre-school – **29%**, 44% (73%).
- Relationship with parents from the partner pre-school/s – **11%**, 27% (38%).
- Cross-community relations/awareness and respect for diversity – **47%**, 44% (91%).

I would definitely recommend SFTS. It brings together children of different cultures, abilities and religions and gives them a chance to accept each other at an early age. Great Work!

This is a fantastic programme for children who wouldn't normally mix with other children from different areas or backgrounds. My son had lots of fun and will miss his friends.

We very much enjoyed this experience and would highly recommend other families to participate. It was a great experience and very fulfilling and a great bunch of people to be along with learning about your child and interacting with parents you never normally meet or talk to.

Enjoyed having the opportunity to take part in the project. Also pleased that my daughter through shared project became familiar with a new community and made new friends, which is an important step at encouraging cross community relations at an early stage.

Suggestions from parents on how they and other parents can be more involved in shared sessions include: providing more notice/information; provision of activities for parents and children outside of school hours; parents themselves making more of an effort to be involved, although some unable to attend because of work/other commitments.

10.1.5 Impact on Governors

Boards of Government/Management Committees have also relayed feedback as to the wider benefits of CASE/SFTS, in terms of generating support for cross-community activities and creating a shared future. 89% described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as 'very positive' (41%) or 'positive' (48%). Results were comparable for both SFTS and CASE.

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 with governors volunteering at shared sessions and/or attending joint SFTS meetings/events with partner settings; and/or attending SFTS training. 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.

The Board of Governors and Management have reported positive feedback in relation to shared education. They are kept well informed throughout the year and can see the positive contribution it makes to our children, school, and community.

Our Board of Governors are interested and enthusiastic when Shared Education is on the agenda, and always willing to support ourselves and partner schools with initiatives.

Particularly parent governors, all spoke highly of what their children had learned and how enriched the children's curricular learning was through the practical experiences gained.

10.2 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. Results are positive with 92% agreeing that children now have a greater sense of the wider community; 75% agreed that due to Shared Education there has been an increased integration of the respective pre-school/school within the wider community; and 95% agreed that Shared Education has improved cross-community understanding and relationships.

Respondents described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as 'very positive' (41%) or 'positive' (48%). This positivity extends to parents with 91% of respondents agreeing that feedback from parents was 'very positive' (40%) or 'positive' (51%).

Support from parents is evident as they have given their consent for their child to be involved in SFTS/CASE shared classes, with increased visibility of parents at various shared events – showing a tangible support for SFTS/CASE.

There are differences between the models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project i.e., **85%** agreed that SFTS increased opportunities for cross-community engagement for parents, compared to CASE where **56%** agreed with this statement. 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. 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 the longevity of the outcomes achieved.
- Creates a ripple effects 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.

Connections with the wider community can provide an important vehicle in which to build a shared and cohesive society.

11 IMPLEMENTATION - SUCCESS FACTORS & CHALLENGES

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

11.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines feedback on the **key success factors and challenges** 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 EYS, interviews with DOs; focus groups with teachers; review of monitoring information; seven case studies and associated consultations.

11.2 Key Success Factors

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

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

11.2.1 Alignment to Curriculum

When Shared Education activities **align to existing curricular areas** and pre-school/school development plans it positively contributes to meeting quality standards in teaching and learning. Therefore, the model is most successful when there is a focus on quality contact where shared classes are complementary and actively contribute to meeting existing learning outcomes. This is a more efficient and productive use of time, rather than Shared Education being regarded as an 'add-on' or additional burden to pre-schools/schools.

11.2.2 Effective Leadership

The model relies on **effective leadership** from pre-school/school management, senior leadership teams, and being able to generate whole-school buy-in. Therefore, investment of time and commitment to lead by example and communicate across all levels of the school community is key to success.

11.2.3 Engaged Children

Shared Education requires **children to be fully engaged** in shared sessions, with opportunities provided for them to enjoy activities and reap the educational and societal benefits. For long-term benefits to be realised in terms of peace and reconciliation outcomes, children need to feel that sharing is part of their daily lives in pre-school/school and is 'normalised'.

11.2.4 Training & Support

Professional Development Opportunities

- The CASE/SFTS projects provide a good balance of support to allow time to plan shared activities, access to teaching resources to enrich the learning experience, as well as opportunities to avail of training to deliver Shared Education.
- Funding for sub cover allows practitioners/teachers to allocate dedicated time for joint collaboration and planning with their partner pre-school/school, which is regarded as instrumental to the successful delivery of SFTS/CASE. Committing sufficient time to adequately plan shared sessions is one of the primary factors to achieve successful implementation, according to practitioners/teachers.
- Access to a comprehensive training programme to include timely introductory sessions on the concepts underpinning Shared Education, followed by more practical sessions on implementation help to support the effective roll-out of projects.
- The opportunity for formal and informal networking, and the space to acknowledge, celebrate and reflect on key successes is important to partnerships, who welcomed workshops to engage and disseminate key learning.
- The importance of building expertise within schools so it can be retained/sustained in the future, with a focus on classroom-based activities (rather than trips/outings) to embed sharing in everyday learning. There is evidence that as partnerships progressed each year, they became more confident in a self-delivery model.

Access to Guidance, Support & Mentoring

A further key success factor is the ongoing guidance and support provided by Project Partners, as well as mentoring from SFTS EYS and CASE DOs, acting as both a mentor and 'critical friend' to encourage progression of shared activities.

SFTS partnerships provided positive feedback about the informal and formal support provided by Project Partners (i.e., Early Years; The National Childhood Network; and The Fermanagh Trust). 97% agreed that guidance and expertise provided by Project Partners has been valuable in helping early years practitioners to implement the SFTS project. Related to this statement is the continuous mentoring support provided by the EYS, which 96% either strongly agreed (45%) or agreed (51%) has helped to build practitioners' capacity to deliver Shared Education.

One of the key success factors in this project was the support of the allocated EYS. She quickly established positive relationships with both settings and encouraged and supported our plans. Areas that were identified as possible professional development opportunities were addressed and provided for.

Mentoring, support, and training have been fantastic. Couldn't have done it without the excellent support from all the team delivering the Sharing from the Start. The team are brilliant, so supportive, helpful, and great guidance.

I want to thank everyone within SFS especially our early years specialist. You all do a wonderful job. We have had a wonderful year being part of this programme and really do hope that this is something that we can continue with in the future.
It is so important in helping us meet the needs of our children.

CASE partnerships provided positive feedback about the informal and formal support provided by Project Partners (i.e., Education Authority and Léargas). 66% agreed that guidance and expertise provided by Project Partners has been valuable in helping teachers to implement Shared Education. 18% stated neutral and 18% strongly disagreed/agreed, this was largely due to individuals not having direct contact with Project Partners, and instead liaison was primarily via CASE DOs.

86% either strongly agreed (39%) or agreed (47%) that continuous mentoring support provided by DOs has helped to build teachers' capacity to deliver 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.

I want to thank Léargas and EA for providing these days to come together to reflect, review and plan together. This is key to ensuring we can enjoy the experience and lead from the top.

Our CASE Development Officer has been on hand to help with any difficulties we have. She is always there for communication when necessary and has built up a good rapport with our school. If I ever feel under too much pressure or unaware of how to do things as she is only a phone call / email / text message away and guaranteed a quick response which is invaluable.

11.2.5 Effective Partnership Working

- Successes were also due to developing a strong partnership ethos by engaging in ongoing communication and collaborative working. To share learning and adapt/be flexible to suit the needs of each partner are also important contributing factors.
- Partnerships made up of pre-schools/schools located within close proximity are generally more likely to be easier to manage and more sustainable, as this negates/reduces time and costs of travel and allows for increased levels of planning and interaction among staff.
- Partnerships made up of three or more schools, with greater complexity to manage and coordinate timetables, benefited from having a dedicated Shared Education coordinator to manage and oversee planning of activities.

Key success would be developing ongoing relationships with partner school and in addition to this, teachers developing positive relationships and being able to work together to provide resources and plan for lessons together.

Whole school involvement and commitment from all stakeholders. Strength of partnership permeating to all areas of school life. Excellent working relationships.

11.2.6 Effective Implementation

Learning curve

- It is important for partnerships to appreciate that the first year will be more challenging in terms of time and effort required to acquaint all staff to SFTS/CASE content and format, which becomes easier as time progresses. There is also a need for flexibility in approach to adapt and meet the needs of the individual partnership.

Format of shared classes – practical examples of what works well

- Staff leading by example, demonstrating to children that they can all enjoy new experiences and be confident in different pre-schools/schools.
- Introducing initial ice breakers and less structured play i.e., 'free play' allowed children to explore and more easily build connections.
- Focus on in-house delivery (rather than an over reliance on external venues) created a more relaxed atmosphere for children over time as they became familiar with each other's settings.
- A consistent approach and delivery via a condensed 'block' of shared sessions created opportunities to build familiarity and friendships. It also gave staff the opportunity to build on their experience by maintaining consistency in the programme design and delivery, therefore adding to the smooth running of activities.
- A consistent approach in creating small groupings and pairing children for a set duration/block of shared sessions will better help build relationships, rather than continually changing group compositions where sustained contact is reduced.
- A simple measure such as using name badges proved to work well, both for practitioners to recall names of children across settings, and for children to become familiar with names/symbols used to generate conversations and connections.

Sharing resources

- Some respondents reflected that due to the partnership arrangements they can now avail of better facilities in their partner school, to the benefit of their children.
- Access to outdoor play facilities for shared sessions proved to be a popular way in which children benefited from the shared sessions as it gave them the freedom to play and explore in the natural environment.

11.2.7 Community Connections

Creating time and space for **building community connections i.e.,** parental/wider community engagement – opportunities for parents to meet and build relationships in an informal manner will also positively impact on the children's experiences of Shared Education.

For SFTS Project Partners, one of the key success factors is having a focus on community engagement, which has the potential for longer-term benefits and sustainability of the project outcomes. Feedback form SFTS parents has been positive and there is a desire for partnership working to continue for the benefit of the community and longer lasting peace and reconciliation.

11.2.8 Dedicated Time to Reflect & Promote Benefits of Shared Education

Providing the time and space for partnerships to reflect and celebrate achievements will contribute to sustaining and building motivation to sustain 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.

It is evident that Project Partners captured benefits achieved through the development of case studies and producing newsletters, utilising respective websites[34] and social media platforms to promote the benefits of Shared Education.

SFTS

There is a clear strategy and focus on promoting the benefits of Shared Education with the aim of embedding Shared Education in current settings and promoting mainstreaming of this work across the pre-school sector. There is strong evidence of utilising the SFTS website 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 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 have continued to be proactive during the Covid-19 lockdown by providing ongoing support and guidance to pre-schools to reassure them and to help nurture partnerships developed throughout the project.

CASE

CASE Project Partners disseminate impact data and key learning via the CASE website and social media channels. There is good evidence of communicating with schools with various news updates and content within the quarterly newsletters. There is a strong focus on teacher training via the TPL programme with evidence of this continuing by virtual means throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. To motivate and continue to engage schools, there is evidence of CASE Project Partners promoting good practice in helping schools to stay engaged and connected by continuing their Shared Education using technology for remote working between schools.

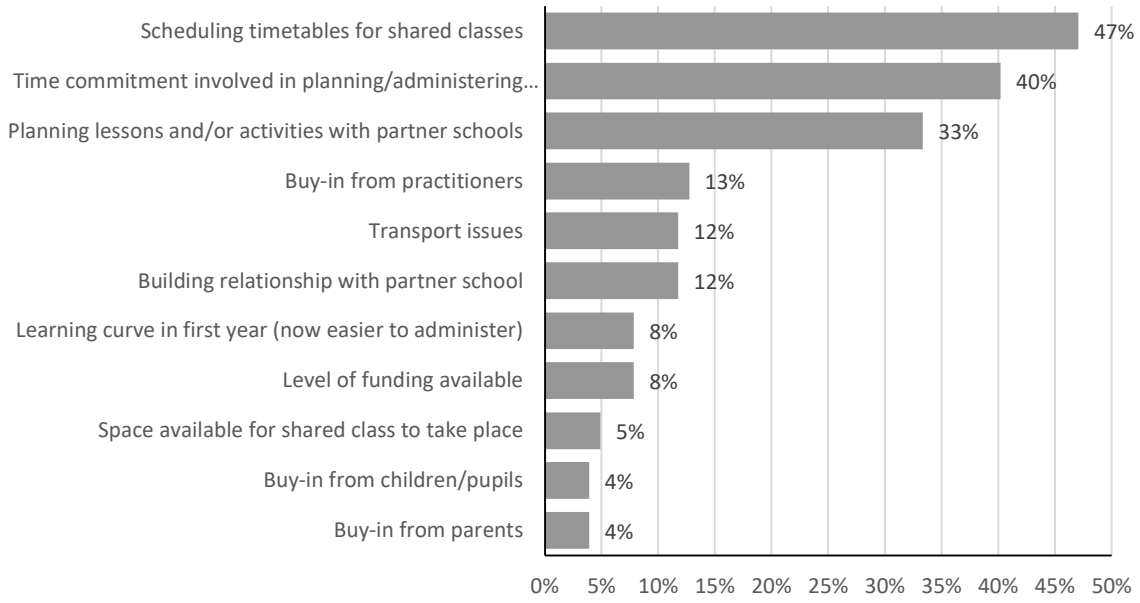
[34] Websites: Sharing from the Start https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/ and CASE https://www.sharededucation.org.uk/

11.3 Challenges

In terms of challenges, practitioners/teachers were asked to provide feedback based on pre Covid-19 conditions. Results (Figure 11.1) highlight that challenges related to general administration and planning, rather than issues underpinning the actual model and cross-community dimension of SFTS/CASE. Overall, the challenges outlined have not inhibited pre-schools/schools achieving their objectives (pre Covid-19).

The main challenge was the **time commitment** involved in planning and administrating shared classes (50%), 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. Results vary for SFTS and CASE, with 71% vs 40% citing time commitment for administration as the biggest challenge. The biggest challenge for CASE was 'scheduling timetables' for different year groups.

Figure 11.1: Implementation - Challenges



CASE & SFTS

SFTS practitioners and CASE teachers were asked approximately how many hours (per month) they spend working on Shared Education. Some found this question difficult to answer, noting that the time commitment varied per month and so provided an approximate, which equated to 16.2 hours per month for SFTS and 18.4 hours per month for CASE, as per the below breakdown. Therefore, the time commitment is comparable across both projects.

Table 11.1: Hours (per month) dedicated to Shared Education administration

Administrative tasks	SFTS	CASE
	Per month	Per month
General administration of Shared Education (e.g., claims process)	3.7 hours	4.5 hours
Delivery of shared classes	6.5 hours	6.2 hours
Partnership working/action planning	3.9 hours	4.6 hours
Networking/training events	2.1 hours	3 hours
Total	**16.2 hours**	**18.4 hours**

Examples of activities/tasks listed by respondents:

SFTS and CASE (common tasks)

- Researching types of shared activities to undertake.
- Action planning.
- Completing termly monitoring returns and reflections.
- Sourcing quotations for transport and activities.
- Carrying out risk assessments.
- Informal meetings and 'chats' with partner school.
- Capturing evidence such as photographs (for portfolio).

SFTS (only)

- Devising letters/questionnaires for parents.
- After each session - observing, staff and parent feedback.
- Creating displays in setting, recording evidence from sessions, creating scrapbook, writing evaluations, updating parents.

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, 80% either strongly agreed (28%) or agreed (52%) that 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.

5% stated 'neutral' and 11% disagreed that the time spent on Shared Education is proportionate to benefits gained. Some respondents felt that it was difficult to comment on benefits for this academic year as the shared classes were cancelled due to school closures related to Covid-19 restrictions.

Other challenges (pre Covid-19) raised by practitioners/teachers as part of online survey include:

- 47% - Almost half reported that scheduling timetables for shared classes proved to be challenging. 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.
- 32% - Almost one-third noted that planning lessons and/or activities with partner was challenging, especially as pre-schools/schools had no/limited interactions prior to SFTS/CASE. Planning lessons for large and sometimes mixed age groups was noted as challenging by a few respondents. Planning whilst noted as the main challenge 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.
- 18% - Transport was raised as a challenge. Issues such as gaining the required number of quotes to evidence claims also proved problematic, as well as time taken to travel between schools.
- 13% - Building relationship with partner school was noted as sometimes problematic, mainly as this is the first time the schools have collaborated, and relationships need time to develop.
- 12% - 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, by ensuring good communication and buy-in from all.

- 10% - 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.
- 9% - 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.
- 5% - Learning curve in first year. 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.
- 3% - 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.
- 3% - Gaining buy-in from children in the early stages of the programme can be a challenge, but one that has been overcome by encouragement from peers and teachers.

Respondents reflected that good communication and partnership working has helped to resolve any issues encountered.

Further specific challenges (pre Covid-19) raised by stakeholders via interviews, focus groups, and/or case studies, include:

- Travel (evidencing spend):
  - Logistics such as travel/transport prove to be an ongoing challenge for schools in terms of planning, coordination and the administration burden surrounding gaining the required number of quotations (and evidence) to meet procurement requirements. Travel remains as one of the biggest costs, and consequently a potential barrier to sustaining Shared Education activities.
  - Some respondents asserted that it was difficult to find time to complete paperwork due to competing demands and believe paperwork to be excessive at times. The need to secure three quotes for transport costs, and in some instances having to extract evidence from previous years to support claims, is time consuming.
- Training:
  - Timing of the introductory training was too late for some partnerships, who were well progressed in their first year before this training was available.
  - A few respondents commented that demand for training courses was so high that they were unable to secure a place, with courses booking out immediately upon notification of same.
  - Three-day courses, whilst beneficial, were difficult for some teachers to access due to location and/or clashes with other responsibilities.

  - Access to training for those working in SEN schools was reported to be an issue for some partnerships, with suggestions that sub-cover also be available for special needs assistants (SNAs) and the children they care for, to get the most benefit.
  - Training sessions were felt to be sometimes overly focused on NI i.e., terminology adopted with NI focus rather than making connection with the RoI context. Individuals felt this could be improved to include a better balance of facilitators representing both NI and the Border Regions (possibly co-presenting).

- Cross-border differences:
  - Shared Education is a statutory priority in NI, with basis in legislation. In RoI, whilst there are clear linkages with government policies (as per Section 2) there is not a legislative focus, which, at times, means that cross-border partnerships have different priorities. For example, a focus on other statutory initiatives in RoI has resulted in competing pressures facing partners in the Border Regions.
  - Differences in procurement – NI partners experienced delayed payments due to e-procurement issues, with payments made upon evidence of quotations/receipts, whereas RoI partners received advanced payments which greatly aided planning and cash flow.
- Partnership size:
  - Large partnerships (three or more partners i.e., 27% of all partnerships[35]) can become increasingly complex to coordinate in terms of competing diaries and timetables – this has resulted in some schools coming together in larger groups, therefore minimising opportunities for quality contact/relationship building activities.
- Different size (number of children) of partnering schools:
  - Whilst there are good examples of large schools helping smaller schools in terms of capacity and resourcing, when schools of disproportionate sizes come together it is more difficult to mix children, and sometimes has resulted in one child being placed with a large group of other children from a different school. This format of sharing has limited opportunity for mixing or sustaining any developing relationships.
- Partnership breakdowns:
  - In a minority of cases, there have been some partnership breakdowns due to difference in approach and/or priorities. In some instances, partners have severed ties and created a new partnership or joined an existing one.
- Staff (DO) turnover:
  - In the early phases of CASE there were some delays in securing staff and issues of staff turnover, however these issues were resolved in subsequent years with adequate and consistent support now in place.
  - Other comments provided reflected on changing DOs allocated to them, this lack of consistency proved to be difficult for some partnerships as they would prefer contact with one individual to build a relationship. This issue has been resolved with resourcing now in place to maintain consistency of contacts.

[35] 15 partnerships in SFTS comprise of three partners; 42 partnerships in CASE comprise of three or more partners. 57 partnerships in total are consider large partnerships (out of 214 partnerships).

11.3.1 Impact of Covid-19

The biggest issue facing SFTS/CASE currently relates to the continuing uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 restrictions and timing of when pre-schools/schools can return to normal working, which will impact on the immediate sustainability of activities.

Whilst the focus of the survey was on pre Covid-19 conditions, some respondents did provide context of working in partnership with their partner SFTS/CASE school during lockdown (March – June 2020).

Partnerships have shown resilience and are endeavoring to sustain relationships throughout the pandemic.

One respondent noted that an unexpected benefit of 'lockdown' was their increased use of technology for curricular planning, which they will take forward in the future as a means of collaborating. It is important that motivated pre-schools/schools are supported to take advantage of means in which to sustain activities.

Since lockdown we have switched to online distance contact, but this is working successfully much to our delight. We would never have thought of this…. But as a consequence, we will do more online preparation sharing resources, ideas. We will certainly think about using this medium more e.g., virtual walks around our settings, playgrounds etc. maybe without children, maybe just with staff to start with.

We have a strong partnership. Shared Ed has placed us in a good place to meet the demands of our current situation with regards Covid-19 as staff have had access to training that other schools do not have. Even though schools are closed physically and open virtually we are looking as a partnership about how we can continue our shared journey in the virtual world - nothing however can replace the face to face human interaction. Moving completely online is not a solution or a way forward - this is also the same for training as it lacks human interaction.

Practitioners/teachers are keen to work with the respective SFTS/CASE Project Partners and would welcome support and training as to how best to deliver Shared Education in the current climate and to maximise the use of technology/virtual classrooms to maintain linkages with children and staff.

In the current crisis of Covid-19 this will also obviously impact the way we are able to work together with other settings and so it is going to require some planning in order to achieve this.

11.4 Sustainability of SFTS/CASE Projects

SFTS practitioners and CASE teachers were asked to reflect on the sustainability of their partnership and shared activities in the absence of funding, with the majority agreeing that a reduced level of activity would be possible.

Table: 11.2: Sustainability of projects post PEACE IV funding

Will partnership continue beyond the funding?	SFTS		CASE		TOTAL	
	No. responses	%	No. responses	%	No. responses	%
Yes, we will continue with our partner school(s) at the same level of activity	8	13%	10	17%	18	15%
Yes, but at a reduced level of activity e.g., use of video conferencing, ad hoc events	38	59%	36	62%	74	61%
No, our partnership cannot continue beyond funding	18	28%	12	21%	30	25%
Base	64		58*		122	

*smaller base, as this question was not included in the paper survey completed at the dissemination events, but later added as an extra question to the online survey.

One-quarter felt that they could not sustain their partnership beyond funding received to deliver SFTS/CASE. 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.

As a legacy of PEACE IV Shared Education, the majority (61%) 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. Importantly, the experience of SFTS/CASE means that contact will be sustained at a staff level, where practitioners/teachers will keep in regular contact to share learning, and where possible, engage in joint training and CPD. 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 ensure that individuals have the knowledge and skills to ensure that sharing is sustainable once PEACE IV funding ends.

Due to funding, schools are limited to what they can achieve within their budget. However, we would like to maintain our professional working relationship as we have a similar outlook and would like to continue to progress our vision in the Early Years.

Without funding it is very hard to have that frequent face to face contact as schools' budgets are too tight to provide extra transport. Despite this we have a great relationship with SLT & teachers from our partner school and will definitely work out how to keep that going.

Importantly, 15% believe that they will be able to sustain the same level of activity, relating to pre-schools/schools that are located nearby, therefore making contact more accessible with less reliance on funds for travel - and will provide ongoing benefits for those involved.

We hope to continue our partnership beyond the funding providing as high a level of activity as possible depending on school budgets.

We are in a very lucky position to our partner school as we are in close proximity, which means there are little to no transport costs. Although our partnership could continue, we would have no funding for future resources which I believe is a big part of the learning experiences.

11.5 Chapter Summary

In achieving educational and shared/reconciliation impacts a range of key success factors were determined, to include:

- Aligning shared class activities to the existing curriculum meant that practitioners/teachers were able to embed Shared Education into normal planning and curricular delivery.
- Effective leadership generates whole-school buy-in and helps support implementation.
- 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'.
- Professional development opportunities and access to support for practitioners/teachers leads to effective implementation of Shared Education.
- Effective partnership working between pre-schools/schools, involving ongoing communication and a collaborative approach to planning, and delivering shared activities, leads to better outcomes.
- Effective implementation practices, such as sharing resources; focus on in-house delivery; format of shared classes to encourage natural mixing; delivery of blocks shared sessions and consistency in mixing to allow for friendships to develop, are all practical examples of what works well.
- 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.
- Building community connections has the potential for longer-term benefits and sustainability of the project outcomes.
- 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.

The challenges (pre Covid-19) related to general administration and planning, rather than issues underpinning the actual model and cross-community dimension of SFTS/CASE. The main challenge is the **time commitment** involved in planning and administrating shared classes (50%), although many appreciate that this is necessary to ensure the success of the programme. Overall, the challenges outlined have not inhibited pre-schools/schools achieving their objectives (pre Covid-19). Importantly, 80% agreed that the time spent working on Shared Education is proportionate to the benefits/outcomes achieved.

As a legacy of the PEACE IV funding, 15% reported that 'yes, we will continue with our partner at the same level of activity' in the absence of funding – this is due to connections established via SFTS/CASE and will provide ongoing cross-community benefits for those involved; a further 61% agreed that a reduced level of activity would be possible, mainly involving ongoing practitioner/teacher contact (informal and formal) and ad-hoc events for children.

12 CONCLUSIONS

12.1 Conclusions & Recommendations

Improved cross-community relations

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*'.

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, and as such has positively contributed to meeting this Programme aim. Based on the impact data, there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, as well as between practitioners/teachers in partner schools. This coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established will create a legacy of the funding.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with partnerships highlighting the significant benefit to those involved. There is an appetite for this work to continue to allow partnership to build on the educational and shared/reconciliation benefits achieved.

Thoroughly enjoyed being part of the Sharing from the Start partnership/project. It has been of a great benefit to our pre-school children and staff. It has given us adults confidence and the opportunity to extend our skills and training, for the children learning about the wider community, shared education cross border curricula. This all-in turn has had positive outcomes for the children in our pre-school and our communities.

We have absolutely loved being part of this project! We have witnessed huge benefits for our children, parents, staff, school, and community. We hope that this may continue in our normally divided society.

Participating in PEACE IV/CASE has been one of the most rewarding educational experiences of our entire school community.

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of Shared Education. Our school community has benefited in so many ways personally and professionally, in practical and emotional terms also. We are much better off from having had the opportunity to engage with such a fantastic programme. I feel we had the best partnership and made sure we did not waste a penny of the funding that was allocated. It was valued and appreciated by all.

We have thoroughly enjoyed our Shared Education journey and the opportunities it has brought to our pupils, staff, and wider community.

Achievement of Aims & Output Indicators

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, there are now 482 pre-schools/schools actively involved in PEACE IV Shared Education projects. These projects currently involve almost 73,000 learners from all backgrounds joining for curriculum-led shared classes. Based on the achievement to date, SFTS and CASE have met or are on target to meet output indicators, therefore these benefits will continue to evolve, with building the capacity for partnerships to be sustainable a key focus of Project Partners.

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

This aim has been achieved as there are 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) involving 482 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors. 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.

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

Impact data on the educational benefits, economic benefits, and shared/reconciliation benefits provides the evidence that this aim has been achieved. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact, to include:

- Enhanced cross-community and cross-border collaboration at a strategic and operational level.
- Improved quality standards in teaching and learning.
- Enriched the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (RoI) offer, with subsequent benefits for children in improved educational outcomes.
- Contributed to meeting objectives in Pre-school/School Development Plans and Inclusion/Shared Policies.
- The efficient and effective use of resources through adopting a shared model (sharing equipment, resources, joint training).
- Developed cross-community friendships and supported children's ability to acknowledge and promote differences.
- Increased opportunities for parents to generate cross-community connections.
- Increased community connections with and across the wider community through the involvement of parents and use of local facilities/community venues.

What a fantastic initiative. Children and staff alike love it. It gives the opportunity to meet other children whom might not otherwise meet. It builds friendships. Children have access to lessons they wouldn't otherwise get. Great for staff to visit other schools and share ideas with others from different communities. All look forward to PEACE IV days.

Myself and my team have all really enjoyed participating in Shared Education. It has given us the confidence in providing new experiences to our children, encouraged more parental partnership and involvement with the community, that we would not have been able to experience had we not signed up to the programme.

A brilliant programme with benefits and advantages for our school community and the schools we are partnered with. We are constantly learning every day and are very grateful to have the opportunity to be part of such a programme. Thank you!

PEACE IV – to shift the focus to a more outcomes-based approach

The PEACE IV Programme defined output indicators focused on the numbers participating (children, pre-schools/schools and teachers/practitioners trained), and therefore SFTS/CASE project data focused on measuring these outputs.

Recommendation: There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcomes in the future programming period, and how the intervention contributes to the overall PEACE Programme aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, the survey results provide evidence of the types of outcomes achieved and should be considered as indicators for any future Shared Education interventions.

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. A parental/community engagement model should be more widely adopted as a means of embedding the ethos of Shared Education – by promoting the benefits and allaying the concerns of those not receptive to the premise of Shared Education this will aid the sustainability of activities and will result in longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes. It is noted that some partnerships were beginning to develop these school-community links in Year 3 of the projects, however progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the move to remote working.

Recommendation: For any future Shared Education intervention, for SEUPB to consider the inclusion of an indicator to capture parental/wider community involvement, which is desired to have longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes.

Addressing implementation challenges

PEACE IV incorporated a range simplification measures to reduce administration for beneficiaries, to include the introduction of simplified costs. For Shared Education this related to the adoption of flat rates for staff costs, and unit costs per child participating. However, pre-schools/schools have raised issues relating to the administration burden of travel costs, for example sourcing quotes from several bus providers, and if the date/duration of travel changes having to source updated quotes.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that challenges relating to the administration burden are monitored by Project Partners to gain a better understanding of the time spent on tasks. This will allow Project Partners to understand any issues and work with pre-schools/schools to minimise the impact.
- Going forward, it is important that SEUPB and Project Partners ensure that this burden is reduced/not transferred to project beneficiaries, and the focus remains on achievement of outputs and outcomes. This could be achieved by introducing a unit cost for travel.

SFTS training and CASE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) offer a comprehensive training package for participants. Furthermore, EYS and DOs provide valuable support to partnerships and feedback has been very complimentary. Whilst feedback was positive, suggested recommendations to improve training delivery include:

Recommendations:

- For Project Partners to endeavour to meet training demand and that content considers the context of both jurisdictions in both design (terminology used) and delivery (locations to cover spread across both jurisdictions).
- Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e. guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support accessing expertise/external tutors; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; support using IT in the

delivery of shared classes (particularly important during Covid-19 restrictions on contact); incorporating mental health into activities; and increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs.

- 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.

Quality cross-community contact is fundamental to the success of the projects, and there is evidence from the impact data this has been achieved in terms of educational and societal benefits gained. However, some feedback suggests the need for further guidance on how to mix children in instances where class sizes vary across schools within a partnership.

Recommendation: Guidance for partnering pre-schools/schools of disproportionate size (in terms of number of children) on how best to mix children so they can develop quantity contact and relationships.

Impact of Covid-19

The emergence of Covid-19 (from March 2020) has 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.

This phase of the evaluation reflects project activity from January 2020 to June 2020 (three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures). Since reporting, the effects of the pandemic have continued for another nine months and are having a considerable impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes. This poses a risk to achievement, as the extent to which progress can be made by SFTS/CASE in Year 4 and Year 5 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector under Covid-19 restrictions. Furthermore, prolonged lockdown presents a risk to the sustainability of relationships developed between partnering pre-schools/schools.

Despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive to help support pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established.

The SFTS/CASE Project Partners have submitted respective proposals to SEUPB outlining a blended learning approach to shared sessions to ensure that SFTS/CASE targets are met, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the educational and societal benefits that have been achieved to date.

Practitioners/ teachers have endeavoured to use technology to maintain contact between partnerships, and there are good examples of this working. They are keen to work with the SFTS/CASE Project Partners and would welcome support and training as to how best to deliver Shared Education in the current climate and to maximise the use of technology/virtual classrooms to maintain linkages with children and staff.

Subsequent evaluation reports will focus on the extent of this impact and how projects have adapted to Covid-19 conditions to meet objectives.

Recommendation: The immediate sustainability of activities is dependent on when pre-schools/school can resume normal routines, in a post Covid-19 environment. Timely guidance is required from SEUPB/European Commission on the model/likely future roll-out of Shared Education.

13 ANNEX I: APPROACH

A mixed-method approach was adopted to deliver the impact evaluation:

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Approach</th></tr>
<tr><td>Project Board convened</td><td>The Project Board was firstly convened to include representatives from: SEUPB, Evaluation Team (SJC and NCB); Sharing from the Start (SFTS) Project Partners; CASE Project Partners. The Project Board convened six times: 20th May 2019; 20th August 2019; 25th August 2020; 5 October 2020; 13 November 2020; 14th January 2021.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Orientation (June – Sept 2019)</td><td>During early discussions held at the Project Board meetings, it became apparent that SFTS/CASE had already engaged in a wide range of data gathering to include both monitoring and impact data (Annex II). Therefore, it was agreed that the evaluation team should spend the first phase identifying and reviewing the various strands of research already underway, with the view of mapping this against our terms of reference and identifying research gaps. Our revised approach complements existing research activities and ensures adequate coverage across both SFTS and CASE and therefore provides a comprehensive Impact Evaluation. The Project Initiation Document and Evaluation Framework were signed off in September 2019.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Literature Review (Oct – Dec 2019)</td><td>To aid our understanding of how the outcomes are impacted by the different policy frameworks in both jurisdictions, we carried out a review of the key legislation, strategies, and policies. The team was already familiar with this context, having worked in the field of Shared Education for many years, however it was important to ensure that our knowledge was up-to-date and considered the strategic fit of PEACE IV funding.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Desk Research (Oct – Dec 2019)</td><td>Desk-based review of documentation to include:
Interrogation of progress reports issued to SEUPB.
Review of Lead and Project Partners' monitoring information.
Critique of SFTS and CASE existing research instruments and recommendations for improvement.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interviews (Nov - Dec 2019)</td><td>Interviews with CASE Development Officers and a focus group with SFTS Senior Early Years Specialists (SEYS).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Workshops (January 2020)</td><td>Attended two workshops in January (Monaghan and Letterkenny) with over 60 partnerships represented from CASE (mainly RoI schools); these were speed networking and sharing best practice workshops, so acted as mini focus groups, with rich qualitative data gained by the evaluation team.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Case Studies (Visits: Feb – June 2020)

(Reporting: July – Aug 2020)</td><td>A total of seven Shared Education partnerships were invited to host a case study visit. Case study partnerships were identified by SFTS and CASE Project Partners.
<table>
<tr><th>School type</th><th>Location</th><th>School name</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Nursery</td><td rowspan="2">Co Tyrone</td><td>Ardstraw Community Playgroup</td></tr>
<tr><td>Little Flower Playgroup</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Co. Cavan</td><td>Krafty Kidz Community Pre-school</td></tr>
<tr><td>Clever Clogs Childcare Service</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Co. Down</td><td>Loughinisland Playgroup</td></tr>
<tr><td>Glasswater Pre-school</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="10">Primary</td><td rowspan="2">Co. Sligo</td><td>Ardkeeran National School</td></tr>
<tr><td>Taunagh National School</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Co. Antrim</td><td>Moyle PS</td></tr>
<tr><td>St MacNissi's PS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Whitehead PS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Olderfleet PS</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Co. Tyrone</td><td>Gaelscoil Eoghain</td></tr>
<tr><td>Donaghey PS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lissan PS</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Co. Donegal</td><td>Donoughmore NS</td></tr>
<tr><td>St Safan's NS</td></tr>
</table>
The specific objectives of the case study visits were:
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.
Case study visits aimed to include the following research activities:
An in-depth interview with the manager of each partnership school or setting.
Observation of a Shared Education session.</td></tr>
</table>

	Approach
	• One creative engagement exercise with a group of children who have taken part in shared classes. • A review of existing partnership documentation, to include monitoring information and photographs of a range of shared class activity. While all case study visits were scheduled for February and early March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions meant that only three were able to be completed face-to-face as planned, while the remainder were undertaken partially or fully via remote methods (telephone or video call). Please note that **seven standalone case studies** are available for each of the identified partnerships. The case study reports considered the following elements: background to the partnership; previous experiences of Shared Education and motivations for getting involved; model of sharing; benefits: for the child, setting, parents and wider community; what has worked well and why; challenges and barriers; looking forward: sustainability and future plans; and conclusions.
Online Survey of Schools (June 2020)	Based on the findings from the literature review and the key stakeholder consultations with the Project Board, an online questionnaire for schools was devised. The Project Board members worked closely with the researchers to agree the structure and wording of the survey. The survey link was emailed to *all* participating pre-schools, primary schools, post primary schools and special schools. **Output:** 216 survey responses. Please note that **two standalone reports** are also available (1) SFTS findings; (2) CASE findings.
Conference Preparation	SEUPB required that two major conferences on Shared Education be held in 2020 and one in 2022, to involve a range of stakeholders including schools participating in the PEACE IV Programme, education authorities and policy makers. The evaluation team had initiated conference planning by exploring venue options and format, 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 in January 2021, with input from keynote speakers, participating case study pre-schools/schools, as well as reflections from Project Partners. Given ongoing Covid-19 related challenges facing the education sector, the virtual conference was cancelled. In its place, a week of focused social media activity was agreed (scheduled for April 2021). This will provide an opportunity to share the evaluation resources and develop a range of short creative inputs from partners to highlight key messages coming out of Shared Education.

14 ANNEX II: PROJECT DATA

Terms of Reference: Comment on the quality and robustness of project data as an evidence base in support of the delivery of project objectives

SFTS monitoring and impact data

Based on a review of SFTS project data, it is evident that there are robust monitoring processes in place and a good range of quantitative and qualitative data captured from across all participating pre-schools and associated stakeholder groupings using a variety of methods.

SFTS	Practitioners	Children	Community (Parents, Governors)
Monitoring Data			
Monitoring data for each year to include partnership/pre-school list, number of children participating, breakdown by male/female and number of shared hours achieved.		√	
Monitoring of numbers of practitioners trained and facilitating shared curricular activity.	√		
Numbers of parents/carers who attended/volunteered in the shared sessions with their children.			√
Numbers of parents engaged in shared workshops (MIFC).			√
Quarterly monitoring of numbers of Boards of Governors and management committees trained.			√
Monitoring of the number and increase in pre-schools with a Shared Education/Inclusion Policy in place.			√
Impact Data			
Pre-school Practitioner Survey (Year 1 and Year 2)	√	√	√
Training Survey - monitoring of confidence, skills, attitudes and behaviours of pre-school practitioners towards participation in shared activity/facilitating Shared Education (rating before and after training).	√		
Baselining of Partnerships and Year 1 Review (against ETI Framework for Collaborative Partnerships/Síolta Standards) – informed by Early Years Specialist (EYS) monitoring visits and review of pre-school self-assessment reports.	√	√	√
Portfolio of evidence – photos of shared class activities, parental 'linking to home' feedback forms to capture 'voice of the child'.		√	√
Six case studies developed – short vignettes developed by SFTS practitioners (some used as content for publicity newsletter). Focused on implementation issues.	√	√	
Peer Learning Clusters x4 – three post meeting review documents – outlining achievements, challenges, and evaluation of Cluster.	√	√	√
Parent survey (Year 2) monitoring of confidence, skills attitudes and behaviours of parents towards participation in shared activity.		√	√
Parent/Governors interviews and focus groups conducted (Year 2) with x8 NI and 3 RoI pre-school settings.		√	√
Year 1 (2017-18) Outcomes Report	√	√	√

CASE monitoring and impact data

CASE captures a good range of project data on schools and children participating, as well as teachers engaged in training (via the TPL Programme). CASE did not focus on delivering activities specifically for parents or governors/boards of management, and as such did not carry out monitoring in these stakeholder groupings. However, some schools did capture qualitative data as part of their portfolios of evidence in support of progress reports.

CASE	Teachers	Children	Community (Parents, Governors)
Monitoring Data			
CASE Database - monitoring data to include partnership/school list, number of schools per partnership, type (primary, post-primary, mixed), county, jurisdiction, category (N-N, S-S, N-S) approved and actual number of pupils participating, breakdown by male/female, cost.		√	
Monitoring of numbers of teachers trained and facilitating shared curricular activity.	√		
Impact Data			
Development Officer monitoring visits and review of school self-assessment reports (based on ETI Framework).	√	√	√
CASE commissioned QUB to conduct pupil survey to measure the change in attitudes and behaviours of children towards participation in shared activities (pupils to be tracked for duration of funding within 10% of partnerships). To include a control group within non-participating school.		√	
Portfolio of evidence collated by schools.	√	√	
Some partnerships use methods of own choice to collate evidence from parents and retain in 'Portfolio' of evidence.			√
Parental feedback captured by some schools and reviewed by DOs – but not formally collected.			√
Three case studies to include interviews and focus groups with the following: teachers, pupils, parents, governors/boards of management.	√	√	√
SEUPB's baseline survey of Teachers, June 2018	√		
SEUPB's baseline survey of Pupils, June 2018		√	
DES Survey of Schools in Border Region (Dec 2018) - snapshot of the extent of Shared Education in the Border Counties (participating and non-participating schools).	√	√	

15 ANNEX II: HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

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

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 of the respective SFTS and CASE projects.

- **Environmental sustainability:** The project will have a limited adverse environmental impact, as capital development is not eligible under the funding. The main source of pollution will be transport (of children) and the development of materials and resources. This negative impact will be limited as most of the project activities will 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 will have 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 will 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 will also promote the efficient and effective use of resources. SFTS/CASE will 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 i.e., it 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, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

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

SFTS/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.

End.