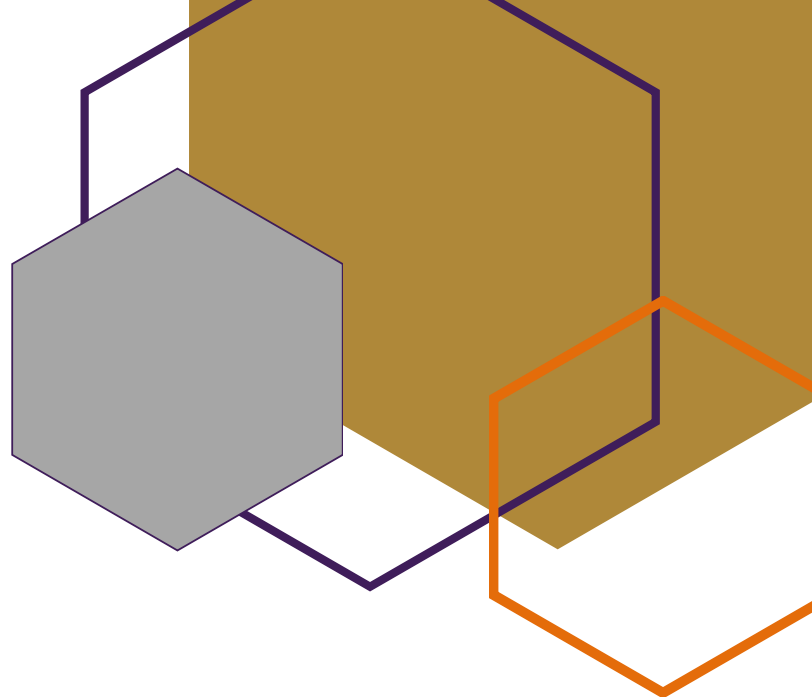




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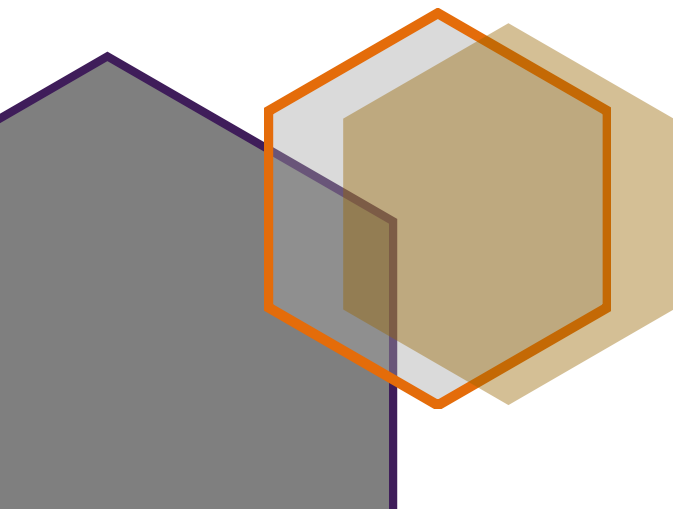
# Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Year 4)

PEACE IV Programme – Specific Objective 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**NATIONAL  
CHILDREN'S  
BUREAU**



## I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### I.1 Key Findings

- *The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as ‘Sharing from the Start’ (SFTS) and ‘Collaboration Through Sharing in Education’ (CASE) partnerships have completed four years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing from a baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact i.e. ‘Defining’ stage to subsequent stages of ‘Developing’, and ‘Expanding’, and in some cases ‘Embedding’ where in-depth and high-quality Shared Education has been achieved.*
- *Over the last four years (up to June 2021), 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) have been funded, involving **494 pre-schools/schools** representing different sectors (141% of 2023 target achieved); **2,093 teachers** are now equipped with the skills and capacity to deliver Shared Education (99.7% of 2023 target achieved) and **92,288 children** have benefited from an enriched curriculum through shared class activity (64% of 2023 target achieved).*
- *Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with partnerships highlighting the significant benefit to those involved. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on the following areas: cross-border collaboration; and educational outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, and practitioners/teachers, as well as societal outcomes for children, parents, and the wider community.*
- *Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Project Partners and partnerships demonstrated resilience and perseverance to sustain Shared Education by adopting the use of IT. Project Partners supplied and installed IT equipment (webcams, laptops, data projector, TV/Stand, Broadband) and upskilled practitioners/teachers in its use and the benefits of virtual connections in the absence of face-to-face contact.*
- *Without the use of IT as an enabler, and the ongoing tailored training and mentoring provided by SFTS early years specialists and CASE Development Officers, Shared Education could not have continued during the pandemic, instead the PEACE IV targets are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools.*
- *However, it is important to recognise that understandably outcomes were not as well developed this year when compared to pre-Covid levels, and it is evident from feedback that educational and reconciliation outcomes are better achieved through face-to-face contact.*
- *Overall, there is an appetite for shared activities to continue and to build on the educational and reconciliation benefits achieved to date. Project activity in pre-schools is due to end in June 2022 with SFTS project closure by September 2022, and project activity in primary/post-primary will complete by March 2023 with CASE project closure by June 2023.*
- *A wider consideration is therefore the sustainability of connections and outcomes achieved as a legacy of PEACE IV funding and how key lessons can be considered for the future PEACE Plus programming period.*

## I.1 Introduction

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

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

**Result Indicator:** *The percentage of schools in the last academic year that have been involved in Shared Education with another school. The baseline value was 76% [later revised to 58%<sup>1</sup>]. The target value for 2023 was 88% [later revised to 69%]. For the Border Region of Ireland, the baseline value is 0% and the 2023 target value is 7.5%.*

**Output Indicators:**

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

Shared Education aims to:

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

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

Table I.1: Shared Education Projects funded

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%)
<b>2 projects</b>	<b>5 delivery agents</b>	<b>€33,146,797</b>

Funding is targeted at pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools that have not previously participated in Shared Education<sup>2</sup>. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of pre-schools/schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background working in partnership to deliver shared classes.

<sup>1</sup> The original baseline used the 2013 School Omnibus Survey figure of 76% for NI, which adopted a wider definition of Shared Education to include curricular and extra-curricular activities; compared to 2015 (59%) and 2016 (58%) 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. In May 2018, the SEUPB made a formal request to the EC to modify the baseline from 76% to 58% and the target value from 88% to 69%.

<sup>2</sup> Schools in Northern Ireland may have been involved in various pilot Shared Education Programmes, and/ or involved in the current Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC ESP) delivered by the Education Authority. Details available at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>. PEACE IV specifically targets schools which have had **no experience** of these interventions.

Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2022 (SFTS) and 2023 (CASE) as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018: September 2017 to June 2018.
  - September 2017: Funding awarded by the SEUPB.
  - September 2017 to December 2017: preparation and recruitment of first cohort of pre-schools/schools.
  - January 2018: commencement of project activity in pre-schools/schools.
- **Year 2** – 2018 to 2019: project activity from September 2018 to June 2019.
- **Year 3** – 2019 to 2020: project activity from September 2019 to June 2020 – impacted by Covid-19 (March 2020 onwards).
- **Year 4** – 2020 to 2021: project activity from September 2020 to June 2021 – impacted by Covid-19.
- **Year 5** – 2021 to 2022: project activity from September 2021 to June 2022 – SFTS to complete by June 2022<sup>3</sup>.
- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity from September 2022 to June 2023 – CASE to complete by March 2023<sup>4</sup>.

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children’s Bureau, was commissioned by the SEUPB to assess the impact of Shared Education. The findings for the Year 3 Impact Evaluation, to include short video animation as well as an infographic, videos showcasing SFTS and CASE shared class activities, and case studies, can be accessed using the following link [\[click here\]](#). This executive summary reflects the Year 4 Impact Evaluation for project activity from **September 2020 to June 2021**.

## I.2 Approach

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

- Interviews with the SEUPB staff.
- Interviews with SFTS and CASE Project Partners.
- Review of Project Partner monitoring data and partnership progress reports.
- Interviews with senior early years specialists (EYS) and CASE Development Officers (DOs).

In addition, an online survey of SFTS early years practitioners and CASE principals/teachers was carried out in June 2021 (deadline extended to the end of September 2021). A total of 69 responses, representing 65 unique partnerships were received. This is a lower response rate than last year (37% compared to 59%) and is reflective of the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenging times in which settings and schools are working. Despite the lower response rate, detailed feedback was provided by the 65 unique partnerships. This data was supplemented by monitoring data held by CASE and SFTS Project Partners across all 178 partnerships engaged in Year 4.

Table I.2: Online survey response rate

	Year 3 survey (pre-Covid)			Year 4 survey		
	SFTS	CASE	Total	SFTS	CASE	Total
No. of individual survey responses	83	133	216	24	45	69
No. of partnerships represented	40	86	126	20	45	65
<i>TOTAL number of partnerships engaged*</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>214</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>178</i>
Response rate (based on no. of partnerships)	87%	51%	<b>59%</b>	63%	31%	<b>37%</b>

\*36 less partnerships in Year 4 due to partnerships opting to temporary withdraw/pause activity during Covid-19.

<sup>3</sup> SFTS was originally contracted to run until December 2021 and project closure by March 2022. In August 2021, the SEUPB granted an extension for project delivery to continue to June 2022 and project closure to take place by September 2022.

<sup>4</sup> In December 2021, the SEUPB also granted permission for an extension to the CASE for project activity in schools until March 2023 and project closure to take place by June 2023.

### I.3 PEACE IV – achievement of indicators

#### Output 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.

School/pupil participation began in January 2018 and by June 2021<sup>5</sup> there were:

- 494 pre-schools/schools taking part in Shared Education, exceeding targets (141% of 2023 target achieved).
- 2,093 early years practitioners and teachers having completed training and now have the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (99.7% of 2023 target achieved).
- 92,288 children have now benefited from shared class activity (64% of 2023 target achieved).

Table I.3: Output indicators – target and achieved (up to June 2021)

CASE/SFTS combined Output Indicators	SFTS			CASE			TOTAL		
	SFTS Output Target	Total	% achieved	CASE Output Target	Total	% achieved	PEACE IV output (2023)	Achieved (up to June 2021)	% achieved
Number of pre-schools/schools involved	99	106	107%	280	388	139%	350	494	141%
Number of trained teachers/ practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	157	216	138%	2,000	1,877	94%	2,100	2,093	99.7%
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	9,914	9,221	93%	135,000	83,067	62%	144,000	92,288	64%

Source: Participation figures are self-reported by SFTS and CASE Project Partners. Year 4 participation figures are pending verification by the SEUPB's Joint Secretariat.

NB. The combined CASE/SFTS outputs are slightly greater than the overall PEACE IV outputs for 2023 to allow for non-achievement.

The output indicators for the number of pre-schools/schools and the number of teachers trained have been achieved within 3.5 years (up until June 2021), which is a testament to the commitment of SFTS and CASE Project Partners, as well as participating pre-schools and schools.

Participation levels for children is on target to be met by the end of the programme period. To mitigate any issues towards achievement of targets due to Covid-19 restrictions, the SEUPB agreed an extension for SFTS to continue project delivery until June 2022 (from December 2021). An extension has also been granted for CASE to continue project delivery in schools until March 2023. CASE participation levels for children will continue to be closely monitored by Project Partners in the final phase of funding.

It is noted that the PEACE IV Programme output indicators focuses on the numbers participating (children, pre-schools/schools and teachers/practitioners trained), and therefore SFTS/CASE monitoring focuses on capturing project data for each of these outputs to report back to the SEUPB.

**Recommendation:** There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcome/impact indicators (rather than solely outputs) in the future programming period (PEACE Plus), and how the intervention contributes to the overall aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, our survey results and evaluation findings provide evidence of the types of educational and societal outcomes achieved and should be considered as indicators<sup>6</sup> for any future Shared Education interventions, with a focus on research capturing attitudinal and behavioural change.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that the that achievement recorded is based on partnership declarations, some of which were not available until recently and therefore were not included in the SEUPB reporting during 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Sample indicators are listed in the main report (page 43)

### **Result Indicator**

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

### **I.4 Impact of Covid-19**

The emergence of Covid-19 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. From the latter stage of Year 3 (March – June 2020) and Year 4 (Sept 2020 – June 2021) partnerships have experienced closures, restrictions and staff shortages resulting from the pandemic and it is having a continued impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes. This poses a risk to achievement, however despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive to help support pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established.

Project Partners have demonstrated resilience and perseverance to ensure the sustainability of activities, and as such agreed with the SEUPB new proposals to advance shared activity in Year 4 (Sept 2020 – June 2021). This involved re-allocation of funds towards IT equipment (webcams, laptop, TV stand, data projector, broadband) to facilitate virtual training and shared classes, as well as an extension of activities to meet original PEACE IV targets, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the educational and societal benefits that have been achieved to date.

Partnerships have generally adapted well to Covid-19 conditions, and whilst some settings/schools withdrew or 'paused' shared sessions in Year 4 due to feeling overwhelmed by the pandemic (14 SFTS and 22 CASE partnerships), the vast majority continued their Shared Education projects (to varying extents). Many of the partnerships that withdrew/paused activity in Year 4 have re-engaged in Year 5 (from September 2021).

The general format of online shared classes involved a combination of pre-recorded and live 'virtual' shared session, for example each partner worked in parallel on the same activities in their respective class, with the results shared with partner setting/school via an online shared class session and/or recording of each class that was shared with the partner setting/school. There was also an exchange of work such as photographs, videos and cards between children in partner schools. A few SFTS settings were able to meet up outdoors (socially distanced) for a forest walk, contributing to outdoor play. Also, the CASE 'Share the Walk' initiative led to some primary schools being about to meet outdoors, with one partnership meeting at a local beach. These opportunities for face-to-face contact were rare (given restrictions), but very much enjoyed by participating settings/schools.

Overall, IT has acted as a significant enabler to allow Shared Education to continue, this along with the support of Project Partners and the willingness of partnerships to engage in extraordinary circumstances is a positive testament to the SFTS and CASE projects and recognition of the importance placed on continuing Shared Education. Partnerships will continue to use IT to its best effect, until face-to-face contact can resume upon lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. The extent to which progress can be made in Year 5 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector working under Covid-19 conditions.

## I.5 Implementation Support

The CASE and SFTS projects provide a good balance of support to allow partnerships 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. Access to a comprehensive training programme to include the concepts underpinning Shared Education, followed by more practical sessions on implementation help to support the effective roll-out of projects.

Furthermore, support is also provided in the form of ongoing mentoring i.e., for SFTS, five Early Years Specialists (EYS) support approximately 20 settings each; and for CASE, eight Development Officers (DO) support approximately 50 schools each. The EYS and DOs play an instrumental role in helping their respective SFTS and CASE partnerships to identify strengths and areas for development to enable corrective action to be made, where relevant, and to enhance the self-evaluation process and consequently the impact of the Shared Education activities.

During these exceptional times, the EYS and DOs have worked extensively to tailor their support and training to address any issues in the continued delivery of Shared Education throughout Year 4 to ensure a smooth transition to a virtual Shared Educational model during the pandemic. EYS and DOs have developed close working relationships with staff to empower them in their use of technology. Similar to last year, 88% of respondents either strongly agreed (47%) or agreed (41%) that continuous mentoring support provided by EYS and DOs has helped to build early years practitioners and teachers' capacity to implement Shared Education.

**Recommendation:** Given the variation in resource support between the different SFTS and CASE models (five EYS supporting 20 settings each vs eight DOs supporting 50 schools each), it would be interesting to explore the levels of support required in the development, co-ordination, management and implementation of Shared Education – to inform any future programming activity.

## I.6 Evidence of Impact – Key Findings

Feedback from participating settings and schools acknowledge that the level of impact decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic, however despite challenges encountered the feedback of delivery during this period is still strongly positive. There is an appetite for this work to continue to allow partnerships to progress and complete their shared activities. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on the following areas: educational and/or reconciliation benefits for children, practitioners/teachers, parents, and the wider community; as well as enhanced cross-border collaboration.

Project Partners regularly capture benefits achieved by partnerships through the development of case studies and producing newsletters, utilising respective websites<sup>7</sup> and social media platforms to promote the benefits of Shared Education.

The below describes how each of the three Shared Education aims have been met.

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<sup>7</sup> Websites: Sharing from the Start <https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/> and CASE <https://www.sharededucation.org.uk/>

**Aim 1: Meet the needs of, and provide for the education together of, learners from all backgrounds and socio-economic status.**

The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as SFTS and CASE partnerships have completed four years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing (as per ETI's Shared Education Framework<sup>8</sup>) from a baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact i.e. 'Defining' stage 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 Sólta five standards for early years settings<sup>9</sup>.

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 Northern Ireland 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.

**Aim 2: Involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.**

Over the last four years, there has been 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) involving 494 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors, therefore this aim has been achieved. The geographic spread reflects a split of 74% within Northern Ireland and 26% in the Border Region of Ireland. The majority (71%) of partnerships are comprised of a North-North collaboration; 20% of partnerships are comprised of a South-South collaboration; and 9% relate to cross-border partnerships. Shared Education is based on a partnership between schools that are predominantly associated with one community (Catholic) joining with another community (Protestant) with the aim of building sustained cross-community relationships as well as contributing to improved educational outcomes.

**Aim 3: (a) Deliver educational benefits to learners, (b) promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and (c) promote equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.**

Based on the impact data over the last four years, there is strong evidence of improved educational outcomes as well as 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.

Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact, to include:

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<sup>8</sup> 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>

<sup>9</sup> The Sólta Standards - the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education outlines 12 principles and 16 standards of quality, details available online at <https://soltta.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.



**(a) Educational benefits**

- Shared Education has enriched the CCEA Curriculum (NI)<sup>10</sup> and NCCA Curriculum (RoI)<sup>11</sup> offering and 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<sup>12</sup> for teaching and learning that enable its values to be embedded into practice in pre-schools and schools. A review of inspection reports provides evidence that Shared Education is recognised as a valuable intervention to improve teaching and learning.
- One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with almost **92,288 children** having benefited from shared class activity (64% of target achieved).
- Over the last four years, on average, children have benefited from 20-21 hours per child per year of contact via curriculum-led shared classes, from a baseline position of no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers.
- In Year 4, 71% of respondents agreed that CASE/SFTS has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. This is a reduction from 95% from the previous year (pre Covid-19).
- Importantly, 70% of respondents stated that educational and shared outcomes achieved in Year 4 (Sept 2020-June 2021) were *'less than last year i.e., outcomes not as well developed this year when compared to last year'* (Sept 2019-March 2020) prior to pre-schools closures, therefore whilst SFTS and CASE could not have continued without the use of IT, it is evident from feedback that educational and shared outcomes for children are better achieved through face-to-face contact.
- A key output of Shared Education is enhancing the capacity of practitioners/teachers to deliver Shared Education i.e., the PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is almost met with a total of **2,093 teachers** now experienced in delivery 20+ hours of shared classes.
  - Overall, Shared Education has had a positive impact on practitioners'/teachers' continuous professional development. Using the self-evaluation frameworks and standards, pre-school and school leaders engage in reflective practice to assess educational and shared outcomes achieved against their Action Plan. As a result, the capacity of pre-school and school leaders has developed through Shared Education, with increased confidence in the use of quality frameworks to self-evaluate teaching and learning.
  - In Year 4, 61% of respondents agreed that involvement in SFTS/CASE has **enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives**. This is a marked decrease from findings from Year 3 (pre-Covid), which indicated that 96% agreed with this statement, again highlighting the impact of the pandemic on school leaders.
  - CASE and SFTS provide ongoing training and professional learning initiatives. For example, as part of CASE's Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) training package in Year 4 a total of 3,026 teachers attended various courses (for example, 'Online Collaboration'; 'Sharing through Play'; 'Understanding and

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<sup>10</sup> CCEA – The Northern Ireland Curriculum [Online] available at <https://ccea.org.uk/about/what-we-do/curriculum>

<sup>11</sup> 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/>

<sup>12</sup> 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.

supporting emotional well-being'). For SFTS, training opportunities included the Media Initiative for Children (56 attendees, representing 27 settings), and Virtual Connections (56 attendees, representing 27 settings) and Networking/Catch up session (41 attendees, representing 36 settings).

- 69% of respondents agreed that their **professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved** due to involvement in SFTS/CASE, compared to 94% in Year 3 (pre Covid). Specific examples given of increased confidence in using ICT equipment, as well as benefiting from training and extra responsibilities around planning and coordination of Shared Education.
- It is evident that practitioners/teachers gained new experiences in delivering new subject areas, as well as using new resources/IT equipment, however challenges linked to Covid-19 and the move to online shared sessions and training has somewhat hampered professional development for some individuals, as they have missed opportunities for networking and sharing good practice.
- As the turnover and changes of staff is more apparent due to the outworking's of the Covid-19 pandemic, this has resulted in the need for an uplift in the level of support required by partnerships to sustain Shared Education. Time pressures and competing demands has meant that it is not always the lead practitioner or principal attending the training, which can sometimes limit buy-in from other staff. Turnover in staff has also meant that training cycles have been repeated to ensure adequate coverage and that individuals feel confident in the Shared Education delivery model.
- Suggested recommendations to improve training delivery include:
  - **Recommendation:** The model relies on effective leadership from pre-school/school management, senior leadership teams, and being able to generate whole-school buy-in. Therefore, it is suggested that training is strongly encouraged for school leaders (e.g., principals, representative from Management Committee / Board of Governors, lead coordinators etc.).
  - **Recommendation:** Ensure that all staff involved in Shared Education take part in at least one information session and initial training to ensure 'whole-school' buy-in. Consider extending training to include support staff/classroom assistants, and special educational needs coordinators, as these individuals play an important role in the logistics and delivery of shared classes and would value training in Shared Education.
  - **Recommendation:** Continually upskilling will be required in instances of staff turnover/changes to ensure that virtual classes are delivered to best effect in current operating context (Covid-19).
  - **Recommendation:** Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e., general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support using IT in the delivery of shared classes; leadership training, opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; advice on how to incorporate mental health and well-being into activities. Other suggestions made by practitioners/teacher related to ideas on how to deliver shared classes on subjects such as: animation/video production, computer coding, reading/literacy, building resilience, play-based learning, outdoor learning in the context of Covid-19; and a refresher course on setting up IT equipment for large virtual classes.

**(b) Promote the efficient and effective use of resources**

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

**(c) Promote equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion**

- There is evidence from SFTS and 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.
- A wide range of **shared/reconciliation outcomes** have also been achieved over the last four years, to include: enhanced cross-community and cross-border collaboration at a strategic and operational level; cross-community friendships developed, and supported children’s ability to acknowledge and promote differences; increased opportunities for parents to generate cross-community connections; and increased community connections with and across the wider community through the involvement of parents and use of local facilities/community venues.
- 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. In Year 4, 44% of respondents agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, although this is a significant reduction when compared to 93% agreeing with this statement in Year 3 (pre-Covid) highlighting the importance of face-to-face contact in the achievement of reconciliation outcomes.
- One of the key success factors in developing friendships in previous years (non-Covid-19) was opportunities for children to engage in more informal, natural mixing during leisure time (break/lunch and travel to joint outings) as a means of creating and sustaining friendships. Team working tasks and informal interactions were regarded as the optimum approach for nurturing friendships. However, these opportunities were stifled in Year 4, with only a small number of partnerships being able to see each other face-to-face from a distance, with mixing only occurring via virtual means.
- Opportunities for children to meet outside of school (with support from parents) will contribute to the longer-term benefits of sharing. 19% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**, compared to 61% in Year 3. This reduction is a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions, removing opportunities for children to interact outside of their immediate family ‘bubble’.
- Reconciliation benefits in terms of enhanced mutual understanding and tolerance is also evident from evaluation findings. For example, participants reported that Shared Education enabled children to feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner pre-school/school (84%); and 82% agreed that **children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others** in a shared classroom. The positive starting position of children was noted, with children’s willingness to engage in shared activities and that 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.

- **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.
  - For Year 4, practitioners and teachers reflected on the method(s) that worked best to engage/communicate with parents, governors, and/or the wider community. Parental engagement was ongoing with updates and exchanges using applications such as Seesaw/Tapestry. Governors engaged via emails and meetings (largely by zoom). The wider community communication methods are a more passive form of information, with updates provided on Settings/School Facebook/Twitter pages and/or newsletters and local newspapers (where relevant).

#### *Governors & Parents*

- 94% of respondents described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as ‘very positive’ (64%) or ‘positive’ (30%).
- 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*’. SFTS monitoring records indicate that 90+ pre-school governors/management committee members have engaged to date. This has helped to build support for Shared Education and to develop the capacity of leaders and management.
- This positivity extends to parents with 96% of respondents agreeing that feedback from parents was ‘very positive’ (64%) or ‘positive’ (32%). Interestingly, a number of partnerships commented that parental engagement has actually improved and increased this year (Year 4), as online methods are easier for working parents to engage via mobile apps and zoom meetings.
- There are differences between the models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project. The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement, whereas CASE did not focus on delivering activities specifically for parents. The involvement of parents has the potential for greater impact and achievement of PEACE IV peace and reconciliation aims as parents’ support or otherwise is an important influencing factor on their children, and with their support can continue to drive forward Shared Education and contribute to the longevity of the outcomes achieved.

#### *Wider Community*

- In terms of the wider community 70% agreed that feedback was ‘very positive’ (34%) or ‘positive’ (36%) with the remaining 30% stating that they did not know. Connections with the wider community can provide an important vehicle in which to build a shared and cohesive society.
- School-community linkages gained momentum in Year 3 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic with a greater use of local facilities/community venues. Children had opportunities to explore their local area through shared learning activities (e.g., nature trails and various team building excursions within their locality), 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. Unfortunately, progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 and the move to remote working at the end of Year 3 and all of Year 4.
- Whilst wider community involvement was limited in Year 4, there were a few good examples of cases where community groups, or services (such as Fire Service) engage in a ‘virtual’ tour of their premises to engage children, which worked well and was welcomed by partnerships in the context of face-to-face restrictions.

## I.7 Key Success Factors

SFTS practitioners and CASE teachers were asked to reflect on success factors that have underpinned the delivery of the respective Shared Education models, these include:

- Effective leadership generates whole-school buy-in and helps support implementation.
- 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 partnership working between pre-schools/schools, involving ongoing communication and a collaborative approach to planning, and delivering shared activities, leads to better outcomes.
- Professional development opportunities and access to support for practitioners/teachers leads to effective implementation of Shared Education.

Success factors in previous years (pre Covid-19) also highlighted the importance of effective implementation practices, such as encouraging natural mixing in shared classes; delivery of blocks of shared sessions and consistency in mixing to allow for friendships to develop; as well as building parent and community connections. However, these practices were not possible during the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to virtual collaboration. Furthermore, opportunities for networking and face-to-face contact were significantly reduced. Despite the various restrictions, settings and schools have shown resilience and a desire to sustain Shared Education within this new operating context, with many citing that their partners have offered a further line of support in difficult times.

Without the use of IT as an enabler, and the ongoing tailored training and mentoring provided by SFTS and CASE Shared Education could not have continued during the pandemic, instead the PEACE IV targets are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools.

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

## I.8 Sustainability

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 EYS and 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.

Reflecting on when Covid-19 restrictions come to an end, practitioners/teachers were asked which of the below methods (i.e., face-to-face only, online only, blended) would they use to continue Shared Education. Given the experience of using IT to facilitate sharing, there is recognition of the benefits of a 'blended approach' to include a combination of face-to-face and online/virtual contact as part of the delivery model, as per Table I.4. The context of this finding is important, as qualitative data suggest weighting towards face-to-face contact as preferred method for children to achieve desired reconciliation outcomes. A future 'blended model' discussion will be a focus of the next evaluation to explore these findings in more detail.

Table I.4: Future approach to implementing Shared Education

Methods	Face-to-face only	Online only	Blended approach
Partnership working (e.g., action planning)	12%	4%	84%
Shared classes	16%	9%	75%
Training	7%	10%	83%
Meetings with Boards of Governors / Management Committees	32%	8%	61%

In considering a future ‘blended model’, it will be important to reflect on the benefits and challenges/limitations of using IT in the implementation of Shared Education and the achievement of educational and shared outcomes. The table below summarises the key points made by respondents based on Year 4 delivery, which will be explored further in the Year 5 evaluation.

Table I.5: Benefits and challenges of using technology to implement Shared Education

Benefits of using IT	Challenges of using IT
<b>General</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided a welcome distraction from the face-to-face restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.</li> <li>• Helped maintain connections between partnering settings/schools.</li> <li>• Facilitated spontaneous/ad-hoc communication between practitioners/teachers.</li> <li>• Transport costs and travelling time to and from partnering settings/schools removed/reduced, as contact was via virtual connections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unreliable internet signal / poor internet connections reported by some partnerships.</li> <li>• Delays in internet connections can, at times, result in shared sessions being ‘stilted’.</li> <li>• At the outset, some partnerships had limited confidence and competence using IT, with many not having equipment to progress virtual shared activities.</li> <li>• Time required to set up/prepare equipment and resources to facilitate interactive virtual shared sessions.</li> <li>• Ongoing upskilling required due to staff shortages and turnover.</li> </ul>
<b>Educational</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved ICT skills for both staff and children.</li> <li>• Increased experience and confidence in the use of technology.</li> <li>• Allowed training/professional development to continue during the pandemic.</li> <li>• Promoted new ideas for educators in the use of technology.</li> <li>• Facilitated sharing of resources and work (e.g., use of shared networks such as Google Drive).</li> <li>• Virtual tours proved to be beneficial, and many will use this format in the future to help prepare children for when face-to-face visits resume.</li> <li>• Some children more confident communicating while in their own setting via a virtual class, and for these children learning outcomes improved.</li> <li>• The virtual classes allowed partnerships to use external tutors to facilitate shared sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer Shared Education hours completed as shared sessions were shorter due to virtual delivery, limiting educational benefits.</li> <li>• Learning outcomes achieved through individual class work as opposed to shared classes. Often classes worked on projects separately and only came together at start and end to share/compare / discuss.</li> <li>• Shared sessions not always ‘live’ as settings/schools opted to pre-record and exchange recordings with partner activities of activities carried out in parallel.</li> <li>• More difficult to engage children, in particular pre-school and younger primary school children were sometimes disengaged from virtual meetings and limited attention spans for this form of delivery.</li> <li>• Some children were uncomfortable and ‘self-conscious’ whilst taking part in virtual classes.</li> <li>• Some practitioners/teachers found online training more restrictive and difficult to form wider relationships with other partnerships, as well as limited opportunity to network and share good practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Shared</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the pandemic, virtual classes provided an opportunity for children and practitioners/teachers to ‘meet’ that would not have happened otherwise –</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some partnerships did not wish to take part in ‘live streaming’ of shared sessions as this is discouraged for child protection reasons, therefore classes exchanged pre-recordings of their</li> </ul>

Table I.5: Benefits and challenges of using technology to implement Shared Education

Benefits of using IT	Challenges of using IT
<p>therefore the use of IT has been as a positive enabler of Shared Education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some children were able to form bonds and friendships with their peers and have worked positively together on shared projects and exchanged letters and cards.</li> <li>• Staff relationships and friendships have been maintained and many welcome the use of virtual meetings as an efficient use of time.</li> </ul>	<p>respective work – limiting shared outcomes that could be achieved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst children recognised each other and worked on tasks, forming of friendships was not as evident in Year 4, as these bonds/connections are more difficult in virtual shared classes. In many cases, the format of the class meant that children interacted as a wider class rather than individually.</li> <li>• Children missed the opportunity to interact and ‘play’ with their peers from their partner setting/school. These informal and natural interactions are often the basis of forming friendships.</li> <li>• There were no/limited opportunities for children to form friendships outside of the Shared Education virtual shared classes, therefore the extent to which friendships extended into the community is difficult to gauge but given restrictions across the community there were no opportunities for children or parents to build relationships outside of setting/school environment.</li> </ul>

The recent launch of the **PEACE Plus (2021-2027) Programme** overview outlines the direction of travel for Shared Education under a new ‘Shared Learning Together’ Programme (€51.3m). Importantly this outline references a broader participant base to include the **wider community** and following principles with the SFTS model with a focus on the wider family. The use of **digital based approaches** is also referenced as a means of developing and sustaining Shared Education partnerships.

For any future Shared Education intervention under PEACE Plus, the following recommendations are made:

**Recommendation:** The SEUPB to consider the inclusion of an output and outcome indicator to capture parental/wider community involvement, which is desired to have longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes.

**Recommendation:** There is a need to further explore various models of ‘blended’ delivery i.e., combination of face-to-face contact and digital based solutions – considering the pros and cons of each delivery approach for stakeholders (i.e., partnerships, children, teachers/practitioners, parents, wider community), as well as considering the weighting of face-to-face and virtual contact for each stakeholder and the extent to which educational and shared/reconciliation outcomes can best be achieved to ensure meaningful and sustained contact.