ADVANCING SHARED EDUCATION

4th Report
to the
Northern Ireland Assembly

May 2024

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MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

I am delighted to lay before the Assembly, the fourth report on Advancing Shared Education, in accordance with the requirements set out in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. This latest report covers the period April 2022 to March 2024.

As Northern Ireland emerges from its troubled past, we have made enormous strides forward over recent years towards achieving a more united and shared society in Northern Ireland. It is clear to see how far we have all come in the past twenty-five years and it is with a renewed sense of hope and optimism that we look again to the future but also mindful of the distance still to travel.

Shared Education has been pivotal in those efforts, underpinned by the *Sharing Works* policy and associated legislative framework, and supported through large scale investment programmes such as the Shared Education Signature Project (2015-20) and PEACE IV projects (2017-23). The contributions made by external funders in support of those programmes has been invaluable. We have seen significant growth of Shared Education, enabling participating schools and other educational settings to work together in partnership, bringing crucial opportunities for children and young people across different religious, cultural and social backgrounds to learn with, from and about each other, thereby building trust, connections and friendships which can extend into family and community life.

This collaborative approach to education is leading to a wide range of educational, social and economic benefits, as evidenced in a wealth of evaluation data, and is something my Department is keen to build on to ensure that such opportunities can exist for every child on a sustained, progressive and inclusive basis throughout their educational journey.

A key development during the period covered by this report has been the publication of the Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy, designed to realise a vision for the delivery of Shared Education whereby it is normal and accepted practice and fully embedded right across the education system.

The first tranche of experienced Shared Education partnerships has successfully made the transition to a mainstreamed environment as of September 2022 to accompany the launch of the Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy, supported with core Department of Education funding. Initial results are encouraging as we continue efforts to support a return to pre-pandemic levels of pupil engagement.

My officials, working collaboratively with a range of sectoral and stakeholder bodies, are progressing tangible actions, outlined in associated delivery plans, which will support implementation of the Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy over the short, medium and long term. A commitment to this work is afforded prominence in my Department's Corporate Plan 'Every CHILD' published last year which sets out the strategic priorities for 2023-2028.

In my short time as Minister of Education, I have had the honour of visiting schools of all types and sectoral identities, many of which are currently or have previously been involved in Shared Education. I have heard directly from principals and school governors about the positive impact it is continuing to have, not least on enhancing the educational experiences and curricular outcomes for our children and young people, but also on the schools themselves, aiding the professional development of teachers, practitioners and leaders, as well as strengthening links with and between the broader communities they serve.

Of particular note, I had the recent privilege of attending the opening of the very first Shared Education Campus in Limavady and had the chance to see not only the wonderful new facilities but also the passion and enthusiasm on show. I must again commend all those involved for the innovation, vision and collaborative spirit which has brought this to a reality. Progress is also continuing on other shared campus projects including the flagship Strule project in Omagh.

It is evident that there is a desire to further advance Shared Education, including reaching those educational providers who have not, as yet, had the opportunity to engage in sharing.

The cross-border PEACE PLUS programme, which officially opened for calls in 2023, provides a vital next step forward in this regard offering access to significant investment to expand, enhance and amplify shared learning opportunities, building

on the successes of the previous PEACE IV programme and addressing any gaps in provision where they might exist. This includes, for example, interventions aimed at tackling educational disadvantage, North South civic exchange programmes and new and exciting ways to explore the use of digital technologies to help enhance learning and relationship building.

There remains much untapped potential across the system to realise the benefits of sharing, including further development in pre-schools and also extending across youth settings. I am convinced of its transformative capacity to effect real and lasting change in Northern Ireland, allowing us to embrace difference, respect one another and helping to secure a peaceful and prosperous future for us all, regardless of who we are or where we come from.

Our learning and experiences in Northern Ireland can offer much to other societies and countries across the world and vice versa. A recent highly positive visit from the Prime Minister of Kosovo, for instance, highlighted how an adapted Shared Education model could be transferred to that region.

We have much to be proud of in terms of the progress made to date, but we must also not rest on our laurels. As we move forward in our efforts towards further embedding a shared approach across wider society, it is recognised that this is a continuing process and one not without its challenges. It will take work. What is clear, is that everyone has a role to play to help overcome any such obstacles. By working collectively we can ensure that Shared Education continues to be a success and enable our children and young people to have the best start in life.

For my part, I will show my support by continuing to impress upon my Ministerial, Assembly and Westminster colleagues the importance of Shared Education and the need for appropriate funding, both resource and capital, over the coming years.

PAUL GIVAN MLA
Minister of Education

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALB	Arms Length Body
APWG	Area Planning Working Group
CASE	Collaboration through Sharing in Education
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CDG	Cross-Directorate Group
CnaG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
CRED	Community Relations, Equality and Diversity
CRIS	Community Relations in Schools
CSI	Controversial and Sensitive Issues
CSSC	Controlled Schools' Support Council
CSTS	Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
CUOS	Community Use of Schools
DSC SESP	Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project
DE	Department of Education
DE (RoI)	Department of Education (Republic of Ireland)
EA	Education Authority
EOTAS	Education Otherwise than at School
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EU	European Union
EYO	Early Years Organisation
FBC	Full Business Case
GBA	Governing Bodies Association
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRCS	Human Resources and Corporate Services

IM	Irish Medium
IST	Integrated Supply Team
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KLT	Kids' Life and Times
MSE	Mainstreaming Shared Education
MSEOG	Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group
NCN	National Childhood Network
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
OBA	Outcomes Based Accountability
OD & L	Organisational Development & Learning Service
PDMU	Personal Development and Mutual Understanding
PPE	Post Project Evaluation
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RoI	Republic of Ireland
SECRT	Shared Education and Community Relations Team
SEC	Shared Education Campus
SESS	Shared Education and Sectoral Support
SEUPB	Special European Union Programmes Body
SfS	Sharing from the Start
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer
SSEC	Strule Shared Education Campus
SSST	Specialist Setting Support Team
T:BUC	Together: Building a United Community
TEO	The Executive Office
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
YCNI	Youth Council for Northern Ireland
YLT	Young Life and Times

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) The Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) places a requirement on the Department of Education (DE) to lay a report before the Northern Ireland Assembly on the operation of the Act every two years. This is the fourth such report and covers the period April 2022 to March 2024.

(ii) This report sets out the extent to which DE, the Education Authority (EA) and other bodies impacted by the Act have complied with or exercised their respective duties and powers. The report also addresses levels of participation, and the extent to which the purpose of Shared Education has been achieved.

(iii) To inform the report DE gathered information from internal policy teams, the EA and other relevant bodies.

(iv) Over this reporting period, investment in Shared Education has continued to be provided by the Department and its funding partners. Resource and capital funding has been made available through the Shared Education Transition Phase; the Mainstreaming Shared Education (MSE) funding models; PEACE IV Shared Education projects; the Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC) and the Shared Education Campuses (SEC) Programme. The extension of the Shared Education Transition Phase to June 2022 allowed for the continued strengthening of capacity of the education workforce to engage in and deliver Shared Education in existing partnerships previously supported by the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Programme (DSC SESP).

(v) The Shared Education Transition Phase also provided the opportunity to finalise the development of the long term delivery arrangements for Shared Education, using the lessons learned from funded programmes. The MSE Strategy was officially launched in September 2022 with the aim of embedding Shared Education across our education system, so that it becomes a core feature of education provision.

(vi)   A core component in the development and implementation of the MSE Strategy has been the recognition of the importance of relationships and meaningful collaborative working across the whole education system. Significant progress has been made in this area over the reporting period, with the establishment of various cross-organisational groups to support the delivery of the MSE Strategy. The Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group, the MSE Communications Group and the MSE Stakeholder Forum include representation from a range of stakeholders, including the organisations named in the Act, with specific remits to oversee the delivery of the MSE Strategy, promote Shared Education and to coordinate the support provided to Shared Education partnerships by education and sectoral bodies.

(vii)   Shared Education, like all other aspects of the education system, has continued its recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In acknowledgement of the benefits of and the value placed on Shared Education, schools and other educational settings have maintained and built on their relationships, engaging pupils when funding and Covid-19 restrictions allowed.

(viii)   Pupil and setting participation in Shared Education is largely dependent on the availability of funding and a supportive education system. The PEACE IV programme and Department-funded MSE funding stream have driven participation over the two year period of this report. Whilst we have seen a small reduction in the number of settings involved, there has been a four-fold increase in the number of pupils with nearly 70,000 children and young people, one fifth of pupils in the Northern Ireland education system, able to learn with and about their peers from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

(ix)   The partnerships supported by the MSE funding models have been able to re-start pupil engagement following its suspension due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the 2022/23 academic year, the Department was able to provide the funding to meet the inescapable additional costs of sharing, with over 41,000 pupils engaged. Subject to the availability of funding, the Department will seek to continue this support over the coming years to allow this cohort to return to pre-Covid levels of participation.

(x)   The pandemic also continued to impact on partnerships and pupil to pupil activity supported through PEACE IV projects. Despite the challenges presented the projects were able to reassess and adapt delivery utilising alternative delivery mechanisms to ensure the continued implementation, albeit at a reduced rate.

(xi)   As a direct impact of Covid-19, and in recognition of the challenges faced, extensions were awarded to both PEACE IV projects to facilitate the delivery of the shared programmes of activity in order to maximise the achievement of their outputs. Both projects reported that despite the impact of the pandemic and the associated school closures, they exceeded their original output targets.

(xii)   In line with the MSE Strategy, the EA continues to play a key role in the advancement of Shared Education, providing a range of support through its various services to Shared Education partnerships and the wider system. Over the two year period the EA has continued to embed its statutory duties in relation to Shared Education throughout the organisation, and their input to this report highlights the significant work undertaken across many areas of the Authority's directorates. Examples include the embedding of Shared Education across the spectrum of EA-led professional learning and development for all of the education workforce, the ongoing work around area planning, community use of schools and school improvement and the operational support provided to the major capital programmes of the SECs.

(xiii)   Work has continued during the reporting period on the development of the cross border co-operation programme PEACE PLUS, officially launched in 2023, which under Investment Area 3.1, will provide a range of opportunities to further develop Shared Education and allow more children and young people to access its benefits. In doing so, the Department has engaged closely with colleagues in the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) and departmental colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. This collaboration will continue as we move forward into the implementation phase where Shared Learning Together projects will become operational, subject to the final conclusion of the associated assessment process which remains ongoing as at March 2024.

(xiv)   Over the two-year period work has also continued on the capital infrastructure programme to support Shared Education delivery. In regard to the Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC), located in Omagh, following Executive endorsement a Ministerial Direction was issued in July 2021 which has enabled the programme to progress to the next phase of construction. Following an extended procurement process, construction is scheduled to commence during the fourth quarter of 2024, with completion in 2028 and campus opening planned for September 2028.

(xv)   Within the Shared Education Campus (SEC) Programme, work is continuing on three projects approved to proceed in planning from the first two Calls, with capital funding secured under the Fresh Start Agreement.

(xvi)   The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) continues to advise, provide objective observations, and exercise a challenge function on the development of Shared Education through their participation and representation on a number of groups such as the Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group and the MSE Stakeholder Forum. Through extensive ongoing consultation with the education and training systems around the development of inspection, ETI is developing the quality of inspection and reporting for Shared Education in schools.

(xvii) All of the named bodies in the Act have complied with their duties and exercised the powers provided by the Act. There is evidence that all have taken an active role in advancing Shared Education, by promoting its benefits to the groups and sectors they represent. All of the bodies are represented on the MSE Stakeholder Forum, with the primary purpose of co-ordinating the support provided by member organisations in relation to Shared Education to the wider system.

(xviii) Latest survey and evaluation findings, alongside previous findings on funded programmes, continue to show that Shared Education provision is impacting positively with schools reporting that pupils continue to benefit from their involvement in Shared Education, despite the difficult operating circumstances over recent years. There is strong evidence for instance of Shared Education supporting the development of cross community

friendships between children and young people, improving collaboration and relationships between teachers/practitioners in partner schools, as well as enhancing educational outcomes. Shared Education has contributed positively in terms of making more efficient and effective use of resources, promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, and respect for identity and diversity.

(xix)   Over the reporting period, despite the many challenges faced by Shared Education partnerships, including the lingering impact of Covid-19, school leaders and teachers/practitioners have remained committed to developing and delivering Shared Education The support offered by DE and delivery partners has focused on supporting pupils and schools and developing opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively on shared topics. This has resulted in the strengthening of relationships already built through Shared Education partnerships. However, it remains a priority for DE to address any current gaps in provision where they exist and to tackle any potential barriers which may be impacting on the participation and/or uptake of Shared Education by schools and other education providers, working with relevant stakeholder and sectoral bodies as appropriate.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1   The important role played by the education system in helping to progress a more shared and united society in Northern Ireland has been recognised by the Northern Ireland Executive in successive Programmes for Government and in the 2020 *New Decade, New Approach* document. The Northern Ireland Assembly remained in suspension throughout most of the reporting period of this report, from February 2022 to February 2024. However, Ministers continued in post in a caretaker capacity until the end of October 2022, which enabled the launch of the Mainstreaming Shared Education (MSE) Strategy to take place in September 2022.

1.2   Throughout the reporting period, the Department of Education (DE) continued to give effect to its statutory duties to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education and take forward the Shared Education commitments included in the draft Programme for Government, the Children and Young People's Strategy and the Department's Corporate and annual Business Plans.

1.3   This work has been set against a backdrop of continued recovery across the education system following the significant disruption caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Information on the work taken forward over the reporting period will be covered in later sections of this report.

Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 ("the Act")[1]

1.4   The Act defines and sets out the purpose of Shared Education. It also sets out the responsibilities of DE, including the requirement to report to the Assembly, and those of the Education Authority (EA) and the various arms-length bodies.

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1   http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/contents

1.5   The Act provides a consistent definition of Shared Education, setting out the core components that are regarded as the minimum essential for the delivery of Shared Education as:

Shared education means the education together of –

a)   *those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and*

b)   *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.

"Relevant providers" may be pre-school settings, schools, or youth work settings. A single educational establishment that can demonstrate a mix of religious belief and socio-economic status **would not** satisfy the definition of Shared Education.

1.6   The Act places a duty on both DE and the EA to *"encourage, facilitate and promote shared education"*. It also confers the power to *"encourage and facilitate shared education"* on other educational bodies[2].

1.7   In addition, the Act places a duty on certain education bodies[3] to consider Shared Education when (a) developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans; and (b) designing and delivering public services.

1.8   The Act places a requirement on DE to lay a report before the Assembly no more than two years following Royal Assent and on a biennial basis thereafter.

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2   These are the CCMS, YCNI, CCEA, and any sectoral body (one recognised by DE as representing the interests of grant-aided schools of a particular description and to which grants are paid under Section 4 of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014).

3   Relevant education bodies are defined as DE, EA, CCMS, CCEA and YCNI

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1.9   The Act stipulates that the report must detail the extent to which DE, the EA and other bodies impacted by the Act have complied with their respective duties and powers. The report must also address levels of participation, efficiency in the use of Shared Education resources, the educational benefits to children and young people and the impact on good relations. This reporting requirement is set out in detail in Section 2 below, referencing the applicable provisions of the Act.

Sharing Works Policy

1.10   The Act is underpinned by *"Sharing Works – A Policy for Shared Education"*,[4] which includes a description of how Shared Education is expected to work in practice.

1.11   The policy sits within a broader education policy framework designed to improve educational outcomes for children and young people and tackle the significant tail of educational under-achievement that has characterised our education system. Together, the Act and policy provide a framework for advancing Shared Education.

Mainstreaming Shared Education (MSE) Strategy

1.12   The MSE Strategy[5] was launched in September 2022. Built on the lessons learned from previous Shared Education programmes, the Strategy is the product of a co-design process with key educational stakeholders and practitioners. It sets out the long-term vision and plans for embedding Shared Education throughout the Northern Ireland education system and is being implemented via phased delivery plans. The Strategy aims to create the conditions to enable partnership working across religious and socio-economic divides and establish Shared Education as a core feature of educational provision in Northern Ireland that is affordable, sustainable and accessible to all. Extending the reach of Shared Education will help to provide opportunities for all children and young people to benefit from those

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4   https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sharing-works-policy-shared-education
5   https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/mainstreaming-shared-education-strategy

shared learning experiences. The key work areas to be taken forward via the delivery plans over the next couple of years will be covered later in this report.

PEACE IV

1.13   The PEACE IV Programme continued to support both Shared Education projects following the Covid-19 pandemic. Extensions to both projects enabled pupil activity in Collaboration through Sharing in Education (CASE) to continue until March 2023, with flexibility to June 2023 for some partnerships, with final closure of the project in October 2023. Sharing from the Start (SfS) pupil activity ended in June 2023 with final closure of the project in September 2023.

PEACE PLUS

1.14   The welcome significant investment to be made available through the PEACE PLUS programme, officially launched in 2023, will support the further development of Shared Education over the coming years. The associated 'Shared Learning Together' programme being supported will seek to build upon the success of the previous PEACE IV Shared Education programme by enabling greater levels of participation of pre-school settings and schools, whilst also extending Shared Education across youth settings, and providing vital opportunities to address a range of other complementary or enabling policy areas. Further detail on PEACE PLUS can be found later in this report including in particular Chapter 3 paragraphs 3.69 - 3.83.

2.   REPORTING REQUIREMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Reporting Requirement

2.1   Section 7 of the Act requires DE to lay a report on the operation of the Act[6] before The Assembly *"at intervals of not more than two years"*.

2.2   Section 7(3) of the Act lists the areas which must be included in the report, as follows:-

(a)   *the extent to which the Department of Education has complied with its duty under Section 3;*

(b)   *the extent to which the bodies listed in Section 4(2) have exercised their powers under that Section;*

(c)   *the extent to which the Education Authority has complied with its duty under section 2(3) of the 2014 Act;*

(d)   *the level of participation in shared education and the extent to which there has been any increase or decrease in participation;*

(e)   *the extent to which the purpose of shared education set out in Section 1(2) has been achieved.*

2.3   DE and EA's duty at Section 3 of the Act[7] and Section 2(3)[8] of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 respectively is to *"encourage, facilitate and promote shared education"*. Section 4(2) confers a power to *"encourage and facilitate shared education"* on a number of bodies.

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6   http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/section/7

7   http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/section/3

8   http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/12/section/2

2.4   The Act, at Section 1.2, defines the purpose of Shared Education as:

    (i)   delivering educational benefits to children and young persons;

    (ii)   promoting the efficient and effective use of resources;

    (iii)   promoting equality of opportunity;

    (iv)   promoting good relations; and

    (v)   promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

Methodology

2.5   DE gathers data across the reporting period from policy teams within the Department, those bodies named in the Act and those which meet the Act's definition of "sectoral body" and from third parties.

2.6   For this reporting period, DE Heads of Teams have been required to make "statements of compliance" confirming that they have complied with the duty to consider and, where appropriate, with the duty to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education.

2.7   Regular monitoring is in place to gather information from other bodies and supplemented by follow-up queries as required. This facilitates challenge to those bodies identified at section 6 of the Act to ensure that Shared Education is considered when developing policy or delivering a service.

2.8   Information on the impact of Shared Education is obtained from a range of sources including regularly scheduled surveys and reports such as the Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey, the Kids' Life and Times (KLT) Survey and the School Omnibus Survey. For this period, the available information captured through these means has been supplemented by a number of evaluations, reports, surveys and research papers linked to the funded programmes, including the Impact Evaluation of PEACE IV Shared Education Programme.

2.9   Data on participation is obtained from the Shared Education funding streams, viz. CASE, SfS, Shared Education Transition Phase and MSE.

3   PROGRESS OVER REPORTING PERIOD (April 2022 - March 2024)

3.1   This section sets out the progress made by DE, the EA, and other education and sectoral bodies against the duties and powers specified in the Act.

(i)   Department of Education Compliance with the Act

3.2   The Act requires the Department to:-

(i)   encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education[9]; and

(ii)   consider Shared Education when:-

a.   developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy/strategy/ plan; and

b.   designing and delivering public services[10].

These are addressed in turn below.

Duty to Encourage, Facilitate and Promote Shared Education (DE)

Compliance with Statutory Definition

3.3   The definition of Shared Education set out in the Act requires both a mix of children or young persons across the religious divide **and** of those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, i.e. both conditions must be satisfied. Tables 2a, 2b, 3a and 3b at Appendix 1 quantify the religious divide and levels of entitlement to free school meals[11], respectively, across the Northern Ireland education system over the last two years. These show that the current school structure continues to provide scope to satisfy the statutory definition of Shared Education, i.e. there

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9   Shared Education (Northen Ireland) Act 2016, section 3.

10   Shared Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2016, section 6.

11   Level of Free School Meal Entitlement is used as a proxy measure for social deprivation.

remain high levels of religious segregation across schools and a social mix within schools. These criteria have been, and are, applied in approving partnerships in all Shared Education Programmes.

Raising Awareness, Supporting & Monitoring

3.4 Responsibility within DE for advising on the Act and monitoring its implementation falls to the Shared Education and Community Relations Team (SECRT). Throughout the reporting period, SECRT has raised awareness of Shared Education in the Department through working with various teams to help them consider how their policies and areas of responsibility relate to Shared Education. Examples include:

- **Early Years Pre-school** - In order to build on the success of pre-school engagement in Shared Education funded programmes, the Early Years Team was involved in the development of a pre-school funding model piloted as part of the first phase of implementation of the MSE Strategy to meet the inescapable additional costs associated with engaging pupils with their peers from partner settings;

- **Area Planning** - The Act requires DE to consider Shared Education when: *developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy/strategy/ plan.* In light of this, SECRT has continued to liaise with DE's Area Planning team to ensure Shared Education is considered during the development proposal stage of the Area Planning process;

- **Investment and Infrastructure** - SECRT is represented on the various project boards with responsibility for the Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC) and Shared Education Campus (SEC) programmes to monitor alignment of the programmes with the Department's *Sharing Works* policy and MSE Strategy;

- **Education governance** - SECRT works with governance and sponsorship colleagues to ensure Shared Education is prominent in DE and Arms Length Bodies' (ALBs') business plans;

- **Communications Team** - The Department's Communications Team is represented on the cross-organisational Shared Education

Communications Group established to support the delivery of the MSE Strategy and to promote Shared Education;

- **Other teams** - working with various policy teams where appropriate in the further development of the PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together programme including, for example, Youth Work Policy Team, Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team etc.

3.5 **Wider Government Policy** - There are also linkages with policies outside of DE, in particular with The Executive Office (TEO)'s Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy - a commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society. As reported by TEO, considerable progress has been made with a number of headline action targets fully achieved (e.g. T:BUC Camps, Urban Villages, Shared Housing) while progress continues to be made towards other targets in often complex areas of work (e.g. Shared Education, removal of interface barriers).

3.6 SECRT has engaged with TEO officials in relation to the ongoing review of the T:BUC Strategy. TEO are reviewing the Strategy following a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process which critically evaluates delivery and impact to date, while exploring other key areas such as hate/ race crime, rural delivery, and considering how good relations interacts wider socio-economic factors such as skills, unemployment, mental health and poverty.

3.7 A workshop bringing together education stakeholders focused on core themes relating to education's role in, and impact on, developing good relations. Discussions were held on SECs, mainstreaming Shared Education, inclusion, difference and diversity, programme and project beneficiaries and impact and outcomes.

3.8 SECRT continues to identify opportunities to link Shared Education and DE's *Community Relations, Equality & Diversity* (CRED) policy with TEO's Urban Villages programme, which is designed to improve good relations outcomes and develop thriving places where there has previously been a history of deprivation and community tension. Of particular interest are the Schools

of Sanctuary, Buddy Up Scheme and Creative Schools initiatives. These links were evidenced in joint events celebrating Shared Education organised through Good Relations Week in September 2022 and 2023. Good Relations Week supports the aims and objectives of T:BUC by providing a platform for the 300 groups and organisations, many grant supported by the Community Relations Council, as well as statutory bodies such as the EA, Libraries NI and the 11 local Councils, to showcase the work they are doing in their local area in the field of community relations and cultural diversity.

Engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

3.9 In recognition of the critical role played by teachers in successfully delivering Shared Education outcomes and the need to equip them with the necessary skills as they enter the workforce and progress in their teaching career, SECRT officials also presented (November 2023) to a recently established Higher Education Institution Policy Engagement Working Group. This provided the opportunity to update on developments regarding the MSE Strategy and explore how HEIs may assist in terms of further embedding Shared Education across our education system. In line with actions set out in associated MSE delivery plans, engagement with HEI colleagues is expected to continue building on that initial contact made.

Funding to Advance Shared Education

3.10 Over the reporting period the Department has provided £4m of earmarked resource funding via the EA to facilitate pupil engagement in MSE partnerships and to support the encouragement of wider participation across the education system:

■ £2m in financial year 2022/23. £200k was allocated for term 3 of the 2021/22 academic year to allow completion of activities as part of the Shared Education Transition Phase (see paragraphs 3.13 - 3.14). The remaining £1.8m was provided to support pupil engagement in terms 1 and 2 of the 2022/23 academic year in experienced partnerships formerly supported by the DSC SESP project using the funding models (see paragraphs 3.23 - 3.26) developed for mainstreaming.

- £2m in financial year 2023/24. This allocation was c. £1-1.5m less than the estimated budget required to maintain participation rates at the same level as the previous year. £1.121m was allocated to allow MSE partnerships to complete planned activities in term 3 of the 2022/23 academic year. The remaining £879k was provided to support pupil engagement in terms 1 and 2 of the 2023/24 academic year. Due to the reduction in budget for the 2023/24 academic year (less than 50% of that available for the same period in the previous year), partnerships were given the autonomy to use the budget as best met their individual needs, while planning activities that maximized the number of pupils involved and the quality of the shared learning experiences. Due to the uncertainty over future year budgets, a decision was also taken to ask partnerships to restrict pupil engagement to terms 1 and 2 of the 2023/24 academic year (see paragraph 3.26).

3.11   In addition, the Department has continued to provide a range of funding streams to advance Shared Education as follows:

- €35m was initially awarded to fund the PEACE IV Shared Education Programme (with funding from the EU and match funding from DE and the DE (RoI).

- c. £51m spend to date on SSEC.

- £18.4m spend to date for delivery of the projects approved to proceed in planning under the SEC Programme, the majority of which has been secured as part of the Fresh Start Agreement announced in March 2016. This includes £12m for the Limavady SEC which completed in August 2023.

- The Department has also received £0.87m from TEO in resource funding during the report period to develop the SEC's through Principal Release Time, Staff Salaries and support from the Managing Authorities.

3.12   Furthermore, a total financial allocation of €51.2m was identified as available in support of Investment Area 3.1. of PEACE PLUS, the Shared Learning Together programme, over the programming period. At the end

of March 2024, just over €13.3m has been approved thus far in respect of four successful funding applications submitted under related calls for this programme, however the overall assessment process has not yet fully concluded or any Letters of Offer yet made. Further detail on PEACE PLUS can be found later in this section at paragraphs 3.69 -3.83.

Shared Education Transition Phase

3.13   In April 2020, largely due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the imminent closure of the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC SESP), the then Minister agreed that the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years should be a Shared Education Transition Phase. The Transition Phase provided an opportunity to develop a long term strategy for the phased mainstreaming of Shared Education, to address some of the issues emerging from various evaluations conducted during the DSC SESP project and to strengthen capacity to engage in and deliver Shared Education in the education workforce.

3.14   The Department provided £200k of earmarked funding to the EA in the 2022/23 financial year, to complete Transition Phase activities planned for the period April to June 2022.

Mainstreaming Shared Education (MSE) Strategy

3.15   The previous Report to the Assembly outlined the work that had been taken forward to develop the MSE Strategy. Developed on a co-design basis and in consultation with a range of stakeholders, the Strategy was formerly launched by the then Education Minister in September 2022 and sets out the vision for Shared Education over the longer term.

3.16   The Strategy aims to create the conditions to enable partnership working across religious and socio-economic divides and seeks to establish Shared Education as a core feature of educational provision in Northern Ireland that is affordable, sustainable and accessible to all. The intended outcomes of the Strategy are:

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■ Children and young people have quality Shared Education learning experiences on a continued and progressive basis.

■ A competent and well-trained education workforce delivering and supporting quality Shared Education.

■ The necessary infrastructure and resources are in place to assist partnerships to deliver quality Shared Education, and to promote the efficient and effective use of resources.

■ The purpose, benefits and impact of Shared Education are understood across the education system and by practitioners, parents, stakeholders and the wider community.

■ An agreed process is in place to measure the impact of Shared Education and to evaluate attitudinal change.

■ Robust arrangements are in place to support the efficient and effective delivery of Shared Education.

3.17 Funding, as outlined in earlier sections, has been provided to support pupil engagement and the delivery of the Strategy. Implementation of the Strategy is being taken forward through a series of delivery plans under the direction of the Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group (MSEOG)

3.18 The MSEOG has been established to direct and monitor the implementation of the MSE Strategy. Chaired by a Deputy Secretary from the Department, the Oversight Group's membership includes senior officials from relevant Directorates in the Department and representatives from the EA, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and TEO.

3.19 The Group has responsibility for setting, agreeing and monitoring delivery against targets in the MSE Strategy delivery plans, seeking to identify and manage any risks that may impact on the delivery of the Strategy.

3.20   The first meeting of the MSEOG was held in October 2022, with meetings normally held on a quarterly basis since then. One of the Group's first tasks was the development of the Phase One Delivery Plan, to implement the first stages of the MSE Strategy.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy Phase One Delivery Plan

3.21   The MSE Phase One Delivery Plan covered the period September 2022 to June 2023 and contained 51 actions designed to address the immediate priorities of the MSE Strategy, including actions taken from the other major programmes aligned to Shared Education, such as the PEACE IV Shared Education Programme, the SEC programme and the SSEC project. By the end of the 2022/23 academic year, 49 of the 51 actions had been completed with key achievements including:

- Introduction of the MSE Funding Models and Essential Criteria (see paragraphs 3.23 – 3.26) for the first cohort of partnerships entering a mainstreamed environment (145 partnerships involving 341 pre, primary, post-primary and special schools) to support pupil engagement with over 41k pupils involved;

- Introductory programme developed and delivered for non-participating schools which expressed an interest in becoming involved in Shared Education;

- Further development of the EA's Shared Education Hub with a range of resources, case studies and training available online;

- Continued delivery of the PEACE IV Shared Education programme to its closure and continued development of the PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together programme;

- Strengthened coordination and collaboration between education and sectoral bodies through the establishment of the Shared Education Stakeholder Forum and the cross-organisational Shared Education Communications Group (see paragraphs 3.27 - 3.28);

■ Shared Education Communications Strategy and Operational Plans developed and operational;

■ Interim monitoring and evaluation arrangements developed and introduced in 2022/23 which will be used to inform the wider Shared Education Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, currently in development;

■ Shared Education firmly embedded in DE, EA and ALB's annual business planning;

■ Robust governance arrangements in place for accessing and reporting on the earmarked funds available for Shared Education.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy Phase Two Delivery Plan

3.22   The MSE Phase Two Delivery Plan, agreed by the MSEOG at its meeting in November 2023, covers the period September 2023 to June 2025. It has been drafted in collaboration across several organisations, including DE, EA, TEO and the ETI, and includes an initial set of 23 actions which will address all areas of the MSE Strategy. It is intended that further actions, as the initial actions are progressed, will be added over the period.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Funding Models

3.23   The previous Report to the Assembly advised of the development of a funding model to meet the inescapable additional costs associated with engaging pupils with their peers from partner schools. The funding model was also accompanied by a set of essential criteria, designed to assist experienced partnerships to embed Shared Education and to set minimum standards of sharing.

3.24   The funding model for primary, post-primary and special schools was first used in the 2022/23 academic year. A review of its first year of operation highlighted a number of areas which required further consideration:

- Transport and salary costs had risen significantly since the funding model was developed – all costs will be regularly reviewed against inflation and pay awards and uplifted accordingly;

- Clearer messaging has been developed on how the funding model is to be used and the limits set for various elements; and

- An additional line of funding will be made available within the funding model to assist partnerships to engage with parents, care-givers and the wider community.

3.25 A similar funding model and accompanying set of essential criteria have been developed for pre-school partnerships and piloted with a small cohort of mainstreamed pre-school settings, formerly supported by DSC SESP, during the 2022/23 academic year. An evaluation of the pilot is ongoing.

3.26 The allocation of funding for MSE pupil engagement to cover the 2023/24 academic year was not sufficient to operate the funding models as designed. Consequently, the MSEOG recommended that previous year budgets be proportionately reduced for each partnership and that the funding models would not be used, giving partnerships the autonomy to use their funding as best met their local circumstances, whilst maximising, as far as possible, the numbers of pupils involved and the quality of the shared learning experiences. An evaluation of the 2023/24 activities will be undertaken in the summer of 2024 and will include an assessment of the impact of the reduced funding on partnership activity.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Communications Group

3.27 A cross-organisational Communications Group (with representatives from all ALBs) was established in 2022 to support the delivery of the MSE Strategy and to promote Shared Education. A Communications Strategy and associated 2023/24 Operational Plan has been developed and agreed which includes key priority areas, objectives and affordable realistic targets for the year. The use of social media platforms extends the reach to a wider audience providing opportunities to increase public awareness of the

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purpose, impact and benefits of Shared Education for children and young people, partnerships, communities and the wider education sector.

3.28   The Group, which meets on a quarterly basis, considers opportunities within areas/themes that have been identified within the MSE Strategy with a focus on the challenges in promoting Shared Education and the benefits it brings. These include:

- Making the wider community more aware of Shared Education and maximising any available resources to promote same.

- Ensuring buy in from all organisations.

- Raising awareness of Shared Education in schools yet to engage in partnership working.

- Increasing participation in specific sectors/phases.

PEACE IV Shared Education Programme

3.29   The PEACE IV Programme (2017-2023) funded Shared Education partnerships within Northern Ireland, within the border counties of Ireland, and cross-border, through two projects:-

- Collaboration through Sharing in Education (CASE) for Primary, Post-primary and Special schools [12]. This project had an initial budget of €28.9m, which included an intervention to support youth work approaches aimed at enhancing Shared Education delivery within school partnerships; and

- SfS for early years settings, with a budget of €4.26m.

3.30   The Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB), a cross-border body set up under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the Irish Government Act 1999, acted as the Managing Authority for implementation

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12   And school led projects in collaboration with youth service providers.

of the PEACE IV Programme and, as such, had overall responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

3.31   As a direct impact of Covid-19, SEUPB awarded both the CASE and SfS projects an extension for pupil engagement to March 2023 and June 2023 respectively, to facilitate the delivery of the shared programmes of activity in order to maximise the achievement of their outputs. Both projects reported that, despite the impact of the pandemic and the associated school closures, they exceeded their original output targets. As implementation has now concluded, both projects have now moved into the closure process.

3.32   DE, as the appropriate policy Department in Northern Ireland (the 'Accountable Department'), represented Government interests through exercising a scrutiny role, ensuring compliance with policy and participating in the various oversight and selection bodies associated with the PEACE IV Programme.

Sharing from the Start (SfS)

3.33   The SfS project was delivered by a consortium led by the Early Years Organisation (EYO) partnered by the Fermanagh Trust and the National Childhood Network (NCN).

3.34   The SfS Advisory Group provided strategic and operational advice and support to the Project Management Team throughout implementation and delivery of the project. Membership of this Group consisted of representatives from DE, the DE (RoI), EYO, Fermanagh Trust, and NCN. The project also established an Internal Project Board consisting of project delivery staff, meeting on a quarterly basis to discuss and support project delivery.

3.35   The project, approved in March 2017, delivered a programme to pre-school settings in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland; and was

required to involve 99[13] settings, engage 9,914 pupils and train 157 teachers with the capacity to facilitate sharing.

3.36   The main activities of the project included:

- Developing neighbouring Shared Education pre-school partnerships;

- Training of pre-school staff on a shared basis;

- Supporting pre-school partnerships to develop and implement a policy to sustain Shared Education in their settings beyond the end of the project, to sustain inclusion, equality and diversity;

- Involving parents in workshops and activities;

- Giving priority to children from marginalised and divided communities, ethnic minority communities and vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds; and

- Engaging pre-school children in Shared Education activities on an ongoing and sustained basis over the duration of the project.

3.37   SfS was due to end in 2022, having completed 5 years delivery of the project and during this time they delivered over 600 Shared Education classes per partnership setting, four annual conferences and four external participation conferences.

3.38   SfS noted that Covid-19 restrictions had an impact on the planned delivery of the project and presented many challenges. Despite this, the project reassessed delivery, sought and were granted approval by SEUPB to purchase IT equipment to enable them to implement an IT infrastructure plan for settings and a blended approach for face-to-face engagement. This saw settings move to online delivery to continue to implement the project. While many of the partnerships initially engaged in virtual shared sessions during 2021/22 with some groups facilitating outdoor shared sessions, hosted either in settings or in external venues such as St Colums Park, The Play Trail,

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Gortin Glens and AnCreggan. The focus of these sessions was to promote shared outcomes such as building relationships, community cohesion – using shared spaces and beginning to re-engage parents, virtually and with a small number face-to-face.

3.39 The Partnerships undertook shared learning activities aimed at improving community cohesion, inclusion, diversity and educational outcomes for young children. The project involved bringing children from different pre-school settings and different community backgrounds together for regular joint sessions during the year. A virtual information session for new parents to the programme was offered by Senior Early Years Specialists and the leaders of each setting. Throughout this period a reduced schedule of engagement was agreed with the funder.

3.40 In July 2022 EYO submitted a request to SEUPB and was awarded a 12-month extension period to allow for pupil engagement to continue until June 2023 with final closure in September 2023. This extension was requested to ensure the continued and successful delivery of Shared Education within the early years' settings, capitalising on the work implemented to date and to assist in maximising achievement against the PEACE IV Programme outputs.

3.41 Within 2022/23, planning for shared sessions were mainly delivered virtually while peer practice sessions were delivered face-to-face. There was limited engagement via virtual platforms as a means of introducing children and staff. A renewed focus on parental engagement ensured all post Covid-19 sessions were conducted face-to-face staff recognising how important it was to bring parents and communities together.

3.42 After six years, the SfS project activity concluded in September 2023 and the lead partner is in the process of closing off claims with funder and preparing end of project evaluations and case studies. The final outputs from the programme are noted in the table below:

Table 1
SFS Final Output

		Target	Actual	% Differential
Indicator 1	The number of schools involved in Shared Education	99	123 (90 - Northern Ireland)	+24
Indicator 2	The number of trained teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	157	266 (174 – Northern Ireland)	+69
Indicator 3	The number of participants in Shared Education classrooms	9,914	13,017 (9,273 – Northern Ireland)	+31

3.43 In the absence of funding, the continuation of implementation is not possible. However, the majority of settings continue to maintain contact between leaders / teachers and other staff to continue to develop links between settings and communities as well as the sharing of best practice to promote high quality provisions. Early Years have also submitted an application within the new PEACE PLUS programme, in partnership with the EA, to expand implementation of the Shared Education activity to more pre-school settings throughout Northern Ireland for the period 2024-2029.

Collaboration through Sharing in Education (CASE) Project

3.44 EA, the lead partner, worked with Léargas [14] to deliver Shared Education through the PEACE IV CASE project. The project operated across Northern Ireland and the Border counties and targeted schools with no or limited prior experience of Shared Education.

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14 Léargas, a not-for-profit organisation, wholly owned by the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland

3.45   The CASE project held quarterly Project Management Board meetings, with representation from the EA, Léargas, SEUPB and the Accountable Departments - DE and DE (RoI).

3.46   DE liaised with SEUPB on the Shared Education Programme implementation/ progress and scrutiny of financial and management data provided by SEUPB.

3.47   As with SfS, an extension was awarded to the project end date to allow for pupil engagement to continue until March 2023 with final closure in October 2023. This was approved by SEUPB to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and support full achievement of all outputs. The project concluded in October 2023 and end of project procedures are now in place i.e: end of project evaluations and case studies.

3.48   Details of the implementation of the CASE project can be found at paragraphs 3.158 - 3.170.

Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC)

3.49   SSEC is a flagship programme located in the Omagh area that will bring together six schools and over 4,000 children and young people from all backgrounds to learn together on a single, vibrant and dynamic campus.

3.50   Following Executive endorsement, a Ministerial Direction was issued in July 2021 to move forward to the next phase of construction. The previous Main Works contract procurement Invitation to Tender issued on 13 December 2021 and the closing date for tender returns was 26 September 2022. The Main Works Contract Procurement Competitive Procedure with Negotiation (CPN) process was closed on the 15 September 2023 with a new Tender returned on 12 October 2023.

3.51   Taking account of the earlier extensions to the procurement competition, the additional time required for the CPN process and the requirement to obtain all the necessary business case approvals (which can only be sought once a value for money tender has been received) contract award is now planned for the second quarter of 2024. Construction is scheduled to commence during

the fourth quarter of 2024, with completion in 2028 and campus opening planned for September 2028.

3.52   Officials are finalising the Full Business Case (FBC) for the programme which will include an analysis of all costs and benefits of the programme (construction and non-construction).

3.53   Given the scale of the Programme, it is not affordable from within the Department's current Executive capital budget. At the meeting on 21 March 2024 the Executive pledged to provide £150million of earmarked additional funding over the next three years to deliver the SSEC in Omagh.

Strule Project 4 Update

3.54   The work required to realise the educational benefits and pilot various Shared Education initiatives prior to go-live is being detailed in an end-to-end plan for Project 4 (Education Model) and will be included in the Programme FBC currently being drafted. The educational benefits are vital to the success of the programme.

3.55   The Department is continuing to work closely with the six school principals and their teams to build on the culture of sharing in Omagh and advance the Strule Programme.

Shared Education Campuses (SEC) Programme

3.56   The delivery of the SEC Programme of capital works arising from the commitment by the UK Government as set out in the Fresh Start Agreement to release up to £500m over ten years of new capital funding to support shared and integrated education and housing, subject to individual projects being agreed between the Executive and UK Government. The ultimate desired outcome of this funding stream is to help overcome divisions in society and bring communities together by increasing the level of children from different communities and religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland being educated together.

3.57   Fresh Start funding formally announced 28 separate projects in March 2016 and November 2018. Five of the announced projects were SECs arising from the Northern Ireland Executive's T:BUC Strategy, published in May 2013 and which included a headline action to commence 10 new SECs by 2018. The headline action is being taken forward by DE under the SEC Programme which provides capital assistance to applicant schools to facilitate Shared Education through:

- Shared Education facilities – where new facilities are built to allow for shared educational use by all schools within the model;

- Enhanced education facilities – where current facilities are improved to allow for shared educational use by all schools within the model; and

- SECs – where schools are co-located and share infrastructure.

3.58   The key objective is to ensure high quality educational benefits to children and young people. Applicant schools must have an established history of sharing and provide clear evidence of educational benefits for all the children and young people involved. There have been three Calls to the SEC Programme to date. Work is continuing on three projects approved to proceed in planning from the first two Calls, with capital funding secured under the Fresh Start Agreement.

3.59   Construction commenced in 2021 in Limavady SEC (St Mary's High School, Limavady and Limavady High School), with works completed in August 2023. The Ballycastle SEC (involving Ballycastle High School and Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle) has appointed a design and build contractor. The final stage of design is almost complete with construction of the shared campus expected to commence in spring 2024.

3.60   Work is continuing on one primary school project - Brookeborough SEC (which involves the two primary schools in the village - St Mary's Primary School and Brookeborough Primary School). The EA is currently developing the business case for this project.

3.61   The Moy SEC project involved the proposed development of a SEC for Moy Regional Primary School and St John's Primary School. Unfortunately, it became apparent that the level of sharing between the schools in Moy had been unable to develop to the extent needed to make a Shared Campus arrangement practicable within the timeframes required to avail of Fresh Start Funding. As a consequence, following discussions with both schools, the EA and CCMS, the Project Board agreed that the current project should draw to a close. The project formally closed on 25 May 2023 and the school communities were advised of this decision.

Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI)

3.62   The ETI continues to advise, provide objective observations and exercise a challenge function on the development of Shared Education through their participation on the DE MSEOG.

3.63   Through extensive ongoing consultation with the education and training systems around the development of inspection, ETI is developing the quality of inspection and reporting for Shared Education in schools. When the current industrial action ends, ETI will pilot the new inspection arrangements in primary and post-primary schools. The reports for the pilot inspections will be reviewed and examples of effective reporting and writing on Shared Education will be shared with inspectors. Through professional development on Shared Education, the ETI continues to develop the capacity of inspectors to evaluate and report on the quality of Shared Education across schools and the youth sector providing Inspection services to schools and educational institutions on behalf of DE.

3.64   During the reporting period, formal individual institution inspections in primary and post-primary schools have been paused due to ongoing industrial action short of strike. District engagement and thematic evaluations have been taking place during this time.

3.65   In addition, ETI have been involved in extensive ongoing consultation with the education and training systems around the development of inspection;

this has led to a co-design approach to the development of a new inspection process.

3.66   The new process is underpinned by five core questions and nine contributory areas based upon the ETI 'Stepping up and Stepping Forward' publication (February 2022). Pilot inspections have taken place in a number of Youth, work-based learning and early years (Voluntary/Private) settings. The reports for the pilot inspections have been published on the ETI website.

3.67   Shared Education is embedded within the new inspection approaches across the nine contributory areas of: Curriculum for all; Planning teaching learning and assessment; Equity and inclusion; Health wellbeing and keeping safe; Environment, society and economy; Digital Skills; Staff Professional learning; Collaborative networks; and Learner participation.

3.68   Within the area 'Collaborative Networks' there is a specific focus on the extent to which the learner's skills and confidence are developed through collaboration and networking with external providers. This includes the Shared Education partnerships. The area 'Equity and Inclusion' has a full strand focused on Shared Education, which will ensure Shared Education, and its outworkings, is reported on comprehensively.

PEACE PLUS

3.69   Similar to PEACE IV, PEACE PLUS is a cross-border co-operation Programme co-funded by the European Union (EU), the UK Government and the Irish Government via the European Regional Development Fund. The Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government will also provide match-funding allocations.

3.70   The Programme aims to promote peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland and is a single successor to previous EU PEACE and INTERREG Programmes. Under the new Programme, there is the potential for increased geographical scope for activity to reach beyond the immediate 'Programme area' i.e. Northern Ireland

and six border counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth.

3.71 As with the PEACE IV Programme, SEUPB is the managing authority for PEACE PLUS. Since 2019, SEUPB has, in line with its legislative duties, sought to develop the PEACE PLUS programme, engaging with key stakeholders in establishing strategic priorities, including consultation with government departments. As part of that early engagement, DE emphasised the importance of advancing Shared Education in compliance with the DE's legislative duty to 'encourage, facilitate and promote' Shared Education under the Act, submitting relevant joint proposals on a North South basis for consideration by SEUPB which could enhance the provision of shared learning.

3.72 PEACE PLUS is worth a total of approximately €1.14bn over the programming period, supporting a total of 22 'Investment Areas' across six Themes. The PEACE PLUS Programme 2021-2027 Programme Overview document[15] presents an overview of the Themes and Investment Areas approved by the Northern Ireland Executive, Irish Government and North South Ministerial Council in late 2021 and by the European Commission in Summer 2022.

3.73 DE will act as the 'Accountable Department' for two such Investment Areas under Theme 3: 'Empowering and Investing in Young People', namely the Shared Learning Together programme as mentioned in earlier sections, and a separate Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing programme.

3.74 As with its predecessor under PEACE IV, the Shared Learning Together programme will retain a focus on Shared Education but also seeks to build upon, enhance and amplify the earlier programme by incorporating opportunities to address other policy areas which can be considered as complementary to, or are 'enablers' of, Shared Education.

3.75   The Shared Learning Together programme is designed to support:-

   (i)   Increased participation (in Shared Education) within the education
          system in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, across
          early years settings, primary schools, post-primary schools and special
          schools, including those in the integrated sector.

   (ii)   Development and delivery of youth to youth Shared Learning Together
          programmes in the non-formal education sector delivered by youth
          organisations.

   (iii)   Programmes which develop youth work capacity on a cross-border
          basis that will include enhancing relationships between youth workers.

   (iv)   Actions to address educational underachievement and disadvantage,
          which will also seek to equip parents with the skills to make a fuller
          contribution to their children's educational and social development.

   (v)   Digital-based approaches which will contribute to the development and
          sustainability of Shared Education partnerships, including those of a
          cross-border nature.

   (vi)   Awareness-raising programmes outlining the benefits of shared
          learning.

   (vii)   Collaborative initiatives which enable stakeholders from all education
          sectors to further develop approaches to shared learning.

   (viii) Development of diverse school collaborations through the exploration
          of wider social and civic issues of relevance to young persons (14 to
          16 year olds).

3.76   The significant investment of PEACE PLUS funding through the Shared
       Learning Together programme over the coming years will enable the
       exploration of ways to sustain support for some of those involved in
       pre-existing Shared Education partnerships and, crucially, provides a key
       vehicle for expanding the reach of Shared Education across Northern Ireland
       and beyond.

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3.77 Notably, these enhanced opportunities for participating in Shared Education will incorporate both pre-school settings and schools, whilst also extending across youth settings. This is an important development in line with the aims of the Act.

3.78 During this reporting period, DE officials have continued to work extensively alongside departmental colleagues in RoI and with SEUPB, assisting with the further development and progression of the PEACE PLUS programme in line with relevant procedures. Most notably, this included consideration, input to, and agreement of 'calls for applications' prepared by SEUPB for the education related programmes falling within the responsibility of DE, and participation at pre-application support workshops held for prospective applicants in early 2023.

3.79 Given the different target audiences and nature of the organisations involved, two distinct calls were taken forward for Shared Learning Together, one focusing on the formal learning environment (i.e. pre-school settings and schools) and one for non-formal (i.e. Youth). These calls were published in June 2023, with a deadline of 7 September 2023 for completed applications by interested parties.

3.80 Assessment of admissible applications received under these calls has been undertaken by the SEUPB's Joint Secretariat with input as appropriate from Accountable and Policy Departments North and South in line with agreed delegated thresholds. Final decisions on funding are taken by a programme Steering Committee made up of a range of representatives across various sectors, including representation from relevant Departments.

3.81 The Steering Committee recently met (20 March 2024) to consider recommendations put forward by SEUPB on a total of seven applications (below the delegated limit of £10m Northern Ireland element), straddling both calls under the Shared Learning Together programme. A decision has been made at this stage to approve one application on the formal side, focusing on the North South school civic exchange aspect of the programme, worth up to almost €3.9m. A further three applications (non-formal) have been approved worth over €9.4m combined which will support collaboration between youth

organisations on a cross-community and cross-border basis. Further detail is available on SEUPB website.

3.82   At the time of writing (March 2024), the assessment process remains ongoing for one other larger (above delegation) application from a consortium led by the EA which addresses the formal education element of Shared Learning Together, the outcome of which is expected over the coming months. Associated successful projects are anticipated to become operational during the 2024/25 academic year following a lead in period which will see relevant preparatory, planning and development activity undertaken.

3.83   Engagement between officials in both jurisdictions will continue, alongside SEUPB colleagues and successful project delivery partners, as we collectively work towards the implementation of a programme of activity under Shared Learning Together which will seek to improve educational outcomes, promote good relations and support social inclusion across a wide range of educational settings. This collaboration will continue over the lifespan of the PEACE PLUS programme.

Duty to Consider Shared Education (DE)

3.84   The DE's duty to consider Shared Education in terms of both public services and policy represents action to be taken across the Department to further Shared Education. For this reporting period Heads of Teams have been required to make "statements of compliance" confirming that they have complied with the duty to consider, and where appropriate, complied with the duty to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education. Heads of Teams were also required to retain documentary evidence to demonstrate their compliance with the duties placed upon them by the Act.

3.85   As part of that latest exercise in February 2024, DE Heads of Teams confirmed that Shared Education had been considered when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans; and/or designing and delivering public services for which the respective team is responsible.

(ii)   Education Authority Compliance with the Act

Duty to Encourage, Facilitate and Promote Shared Education (EA)

3.86   The Act commenced the duty placed on the EA in the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to *encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education.* Action in compliance with this duty, as reported by the EA over the period of this report, is summarised below.

EA Organisational Structure - Shared Education

3.87   The Education Directorate is responsible for reporting on and ensuring the implementation of the statutory requirements of Shared Education as outlined in the Shared Education Act (2016) to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education. The Assistant Director and Head of Service for Shared Education and Sectoral Support (SESS) regularly present strategic and performance reports to the EA Committees, outlining the work that has been ongoing across the organisation.

3.88   The Assistant Director for Education is responsible for leading an EA Cross-Directorate Group (CDG) that is responsible for SECs. This group consists of representatives across all EA Directorates from within key Service Areas which meet quarterly to discuss all aspects of SEC Development. This CDG is set to be renamed as a Shared Education CDG focusing not only on the SEC Programmes but also on embedding Shared Education across the organisation.

3.89   In addition to internal working groups, the Assistant Director is responsible for Co-Chairing, alongside a senior official from the Department, the Shared Education Stakeholder Forum which was established in October 2023. The Directorate is also represented on the MSEOG and the Shared Education cross-organisational Communications Group.

3.90   Service Areas within the Education Directorate have worked collaboratively throughout this timeframe. This has involved the following:

Area Planning

3.91   The Area Planning Team have worked with the SESS Team regarding the mapping and reconfiguration of partnerships process.

3.92   Area Planning Officers have explored the potential for Shared Solutions, in specific geographical areas, in line with the Sustainable Schools Policy. This has focused on existing Shared Education Partnerships and how they could act as a catalyst for the provision of education in certain areas.

School Governance

3.93   The SESS Team have worked with School Governance to include two Shared Education Board of Governor Modules within the EA Menu.

Community Use of Schools (CUOS)

3.94   The CUOS Team have engaged in regular meetings with the SESS Team to support the development of Community Connections in line with the MSE Strategy.

3.95   A dedicated EA Officer from the SESS Team has been assigned to the CUOS Working Group which has designed and facilitated a range of programmes for the education system.

3.96   The CUOS Team are involved in the review and planning for the reconfiguration and development of new Shared Education Partnerships and also in the planning and facilitation of workshops to support the EA PEACE PLUS Bid.

Locality School Improvement Teams

3.97   The Locality School Improvement Teams are aware of all the Shared Education Partnerships within their Locality Areas across all phases.

3.98   School Improvement Professionals (SiPs), across each Locality, have access to the Shared Education Plans and a dedicated Shared Education Officer is assigned to each partnership.

3.99   SiPs provide additional support and challenge to school leaders and practitioners across all partnerships with an aim to improving outcomes for pupils.

3.100   The SESS Team have worked in partnership with the Pathways into Partnership Team to connect the learning from previous projects, including the Network of Shared School Improvement (NSSI), with an aim to embedding cross-sectoral partnership working.

Teacher Professional Learning (TPL)

3.101   The TPL Team are responsible for implementing the Learning Leaders Strategy which places collaboration and partnership working at its core. The team has worked closely with SESS to ensure that TPL development helps to support Shared Education Partnerships.

3.102   Shared Education Officers have helped facilitate core EA TPL Programmes including Early Career Teacher and Teacher Tutor sessions which have focused on developing knowledge and understanding.

3.103   A strategic TPL Cross-Service Working Group has been established by the Head of Service which includes the Head of Service for SESS. This will help ensure Shared Education is embedded across all future TPL offers.

3.104   SESS have worked in collaboration with EA TPL Partners including Armagh multi media Access & the Outdoor Learning Team in Magilligan, to plan, deliver and evaluate TPL for Shared Education Partnerships.

3.105   As part of the EA TPL Summer School & 'TPL Thursdays' the SESS Team have facilitated a number of modules within the programmes. This has helped build capacity of practitioners to deliver high-quality Shared Education.

Professional Learning & Development

3.106   The Head of Professional Learning & Development works in collaboration with the SESS Team to ensure that Shared Education is considered across all EA led Leadership Programmes. This includes Officers presenting in the Steps into Leadership Programme and the Pathways into Senior Leadership Programme.

3.107   The new programme for Headship/Principalship is currently under development and conversations on how Shared Education could be incorporated have taken place. This aims to ensure that all Senior Leaders, who engage in the programme, will have a solid understanding of Shared Education going forward.

Specialist Setting Support Team (SSST)

3.108   The SSST Team have met with the Head of Service for SESS to discuss how PEACE PLUS and MSE can support the Special Provision in Mainstream Schools Programme.

3.109   Planning for Capacity Building, at all levels, to ensure inclusion and integration of SEN pupils within their Shared Education Partnership Programmes has taken place with an aim to incorporate programmes within future Shared Education TPL Programmes.

3.110   Adaptations to future Shared Education Planning Templates have been discussed which will support the work undertaken by the SSST.

3.111   A specific SEN/Inclusion Pathway has been planned for the PEACE PLUS Programme if EA are successful in their bid.

Education Information Solutions (EdIS)

3.112   Strategic Planning for the EdIS Programme has fully incorporated the requirements of Shared Education Partnerships.

3.113   A series of meetings between the SESS and representatives from DE have taken place to discuss the bespoke requirements for Shared Education within the new digital solution.

3.114   A focus on SECs and their unique digital solutions has been carefully considered by the EdIS Team.

EA TV

3.115   The EATV Team have worked with the SESS Team to produce a series of videos and Case Studies that have been used to promote Shared Education and share best practice.

Human Resources and Corporate Services (HRCS)

3.116   The HRCS Directorate have worked in collaboration with the SESS Team to meet the statutory requirements to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education throughout this timeframe. This has involved the following:

Recruitment Service

3.117   A dedicated HR Officer has worked in collaboration with the Head of SESS to discuss the recruitment of staff to support the delivery of Shared Education.

3.118   Advice and guidance has been provided to the Head of Shared Education to support the planning for PEACE PLUS and the future staffing for mainstreamed Shared Education.

Business Support Service

3.119   The SESS Team are represented in the Business Support Category Council Meetings which develop and discuss pipelines for procurement needs across the organisation.

3.120   Procurement Officers have worked in collaboration with the Head of SESS to outline frameworks and processes that could be used to support the

PEACE PLUS programme if EA are successful in their recent bid to facilitate Theme 3.1 Shared Learning Together.

HR Business Partnering

3.121   An HR Business Partner has been allocated to support the SESS Team within the Education Directorate.

3.122   Working in collaboration with CCMS, Schools HR Business Partnering has provided ongoing advice and guidance in respect of staffing matters associated with the establishment of Limavady Shared Campus, to include consideration and input into a draft Shared Campus Operating Agreement.

Data Analytics & Performance Support Management

3.123   The Head of Data Analytics has worked in collaboration with the Head of Shared Education to develop an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) Report Card for Shared Education and a set of performance metrics for mainstreamed Shared Education.

3.124   The Data Analytics Team have worked in partnership with the SESS Team to develop a Shared Education Dashboard which is used to host live data and inform returns to DE.

3.125   The Data Analytics Team have held a series of meetings with the SESS Team and DE colleagues to discuss data capture and recording for mainstreamed Shared Education.

3.126   A representative from the data analytics team has been involved in the co-design of the PEACE PLUS bid from EA.

Digital Transformation

3.127   Ongoing updating and maintaining Shared Education content on the EA website, as required by the Service. In addition, the Website team have

overseen the recent closure of the Shared Education website (portal used for the PEACE IV CASE project now concluded).

Equality & Human Rights Service

3.128   The Equality Team have worked in collaboration with the SESS Team to discuss training approaches and resources that can support all aspects of CRED.

3.129   Regular meetings between the Head of Equality & the Head of Shared Education have been ongoing throughout the reporting period. This has helped identify potential areas for cross-service collaboration.

Legal Services

3.130   EA Solicitors provide advice and guidance to ensure that all aspects of the Shared Education Legislation are being met.

3.131   EA Solicitors Commercial Property team is fully involved in providing EA with necessary legal support arising from the creation of Shared Campuses with particular reference to the Ballycastle and Strule campuses. EA Solicitors are also involved in DE's Strule Legal Working Group.

3.132   EA Solicitors will, as required, contribute to work across Audit, Finance and with educational partners in relation to CASE PEACE IV.

Organisational Development & Learning Service (OD&L)

3.133   The OD & L Head of Service has worked closely with the Head of SESS Team to discuss and develop EA Staff Training to support Shared Education. This has included lunch and learn sessions and online training.

3.134   OD & L and the SESS Team are currently designing a Mandatory Staff Training Programme for Shared Education.

Information Governance

3.135   The Information Governance Team have provided guidance and support in regard to the collation and use of data to support the development of mainstreamed Shared Education and PEACE PLUS.

3.136   Providing support in relation to any data protection or Freedom of Information matters arising.

HR Transformation

3.137   Ensuring that where new processes / systems are being developed and implemented, that Shared Education is a focus for accessibility.

Business Planning

3.138   Shared Education has been considered and is visible in the Corporate Business Planning for EA within the reporting timeframe.

3.139   A delivery plan for Shared Education has been developed by EA in collaboration with DE and updates are provided to the Performance and Engagement Committee biennially.

3.140   The Head of SESS Team has worked in collaboration with the Business Planning Team to ensure the requirements for Shared Education are being met.

Youth Service

3.141   Youth Service supports Shared Education by offering learning opportunities for children and young people to develop new skills and relationships and become active citizens.

3.142   The Executive's T:BUC Strategy is also progressed through the involvement of Youth Services supporting and maintaining good relations, ensuring they develop positive and inclusive attitudes towards one another. Youth Work

also supports DE policy, Priorities for Youth, through active engagement of every young person achieving to his or her potential at each stage of their development.

3.143   During the reporting period a regionally funded project was completed. From this, a series of resources were produced to inspire and guide youth organisations to build sustainable Shared Education partnerships allowing youth clubs to engage in collaborative work across traditional community divides empowering children and young people to create a shared future. The following link highlights the resources: Shared Education in Youth Work – EANI Funding.

3.144   All new Local Area and Project funding opportunities issued in April 2023 had a Shared Education and CRED criteria embedded, ensuring improved access for learners and supporting the facilitation and sharing of ideas and good practice between organisations.

3.145   The EA report that, in 2023 the EA T:BUC Camps programme supported 107 projects engaging 3,950 young people and 70 Planned Intervention programmes operated supporting 1,400 young people.

3.146   CRED is embedded in both generic and targeted youth work. Throughout this period, EA Youth Service local teams continued to deliver Good Relations and Shared Education programmes. A total of 376 programmes were delivered across the service supporting 7,536 children and young people and 366 achieved an accreditation.

3.147   These programmes helped improve relationships and communities by promoting a culture of mutual understanding through engagement and interaction between children and young people from different community backgrounds.

Pupil Wellbeing and Protection - EOTAS provision

3.148   Education Otherwise than at School (EOTAS) - Providing education to children and young people who are not in school due to social behavioural,

emotional and well-being needs or because they are medically unfit to attend school. EOTAS can be part-time or full-time provision. Children from all school sectors are educated together in group EOTAS provision. Key objectives of EOTAS provision are to support the continuation of the child or young person's education whilst addressing barriers to mainstream school attendance, with a view to the child or young person returning to their enrolled school.

3.149   All children and young people of statutory school age can be referred to EOTAS provision. This includes children from all school sectors in Northern Ireland. Children who are expelled from school can access EOTAS provision if a full-time school placement cannot be accessed. EOTAS placements are in partnership with schools in line with DE guidance.

3.150   In cases of referrals for Exceptional Teaching Arrangements (ETA), supporting evidence is required from either Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services or relevant consultant.

3.151   Children and young people, from differing school sectors, religious backgrounds and cultures, are educated together applying strategies and interventions adopted within a whole school ethos firmly built on Trauma Informed Practice and the principles of nurture. EOTAS settings support good relations by promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion. The service is provided, as needed, to all learners from all Section 75 categories and socioeconomic status.

3.152   Full time EOTAS centres work in partnership with mainstream schools (from all sectors) to ensure children and young people have access to the full curriculum. The EOTAS curriculum is tailored to meet the academic, personal, and social needs of individual learners. Academic and therapeutic approaches are used to support the needs of each young person to facilitate their transition back to school or on to further education, training or employment. EOTAS provides a shared learning experience for pupils across all sectors. This distinct setting helps complement the EA's statutory duty to promote, encourage and facilitate Shared Education, as well as promoting equality of opportunity in learning and provision.

Finance / Budgetary Control and Reporting

3.153   A dedicated Finance Officer has been assigned to work in collaboration with the SESS Team to support the management and allocation of Earmarked Shared Education including Budget Lines ie: MSE, CASE PEACE IV and Shared Campuses.

3.154   Senior Finance representatives are currently engaged in programme management structures to develop the SSEC and have engaged with DE to consider the financial requirements of all Shared Education projects within the scope of the EA Budget Strategy.

3.155   Representatives from the Finance Directorate are part of the current SEC CDG which has been established to support the development of SECs.

3.156   EA Finance have worked in collaboration with SESS to help inform aspects of the PEACE PLUS application with a view to developing processes if successful in the bid.

Progressing Shared Education

3.157   During the period of this report, the EA led on the implementation of a number of Shared Education Projects: the Shared Education Transition Phase; the PEACE IV CASE Project in partnership with Léargas (RoI); and leadership and co-ordination of the T:BUC Camps programme (Youth Service).

Key Actions & Outcomes

- Planning, implementation and evaluation of MSE funding models for 145 partnerships across Northern Ireland.

- Development of OBA Report Card for MSE to capture the impact of activity across schools/partnerships.

- Implementation & evaluation of MSE Phase One Delivery Plan.

- Co-design of MSE Phase Two Delivery Plan with DE's SECRT.

- Implementation of MSE Phase Two for 139 Partnership (334 Schools) with potentially 25,000+ pupils engaged in Shared Activity.

- Creation of Essential Criteria and Funding Model for MSE.

- Support provided for SEC Projects in Limavady, Ballycastle & Brookeborough.

- Facilitation of an EA CDG for SEC Projects.

- Development & implementation of TPL Programmes for Shared Education which have been accessed by 1000+ practitioners from Oct 22 -Dec 23.

- Delivery & Evaluation of the CASE PEACE IV project, in collaboration with Léargas, for 300+ schools across Northern Ireland and RoI.

- Design and Submission of Strategic Project for PEACE PLUS Theme 3.1 Shared Learning Together in collaboration with Léargas and the EYO.

- Co-designed a strategy and operational plan for Shared Education Communications.

- Established a cross-organisational team for Shared Education Communications to support the promotion of Shared Education.

- Continue to develop the EA Shared Education Hub which is a digital platform used to share learning, engage educators and promote Shared Education. To date the platform has received 7,200+ users, 37,000+ views & 12k events.

- Engagement with a range of educational partners to support the advancement of Shared Education including Good Relations Teams within District Councils.

- Delivery of small scale projects to support Shared Education including Stena Line Project and Co-Operation Ireland Programme.

PEACE IV Collaboration through Sharing in Education (CASE) Project

3.158   The EA was lead partner in the consortium delivering Shared Education through the PEACE IV CASE Project (2017-2023) which operated across Northern Ireland and the Border counties. The project targets schools with no or limited prior experience of Shared Education.

3.159   The project was required to:-

■   involve 280* schools in Shared Education; (target exceeded with 387 schools);

■   train 2,000* teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education; (2,507 teachers trained); and

■   engage 135,000* participants in Shared Education classrooms (in total 141,594 pupils participated in shared lessons from 2017 – 2023).

*inc ROI schools, teachers and pupils

Table 2
CASE Final Output

	Schools	Pupils	Teachers
Northern Ireland	289	120,479	2,009
ROI	98	21,115	498
Total	**387**	**141,594**	**2,507**

3.160   These were addressed through two main delivery streams:-

■   Shared Education delivery through school partnerships; and

■   Practitioner professional learning, including teachers, school leadership and Boards of Governors/management committees.

3.161   Note that the 135,000 participants target was for pupil school years, i.e. it is cumulative. For example, 10,000 participants in year 1, and 20,000 in year 2 gives a total of 30,000 pupil school years. Detail on participation levels is provided at Chapter 4.

3.162 The EA provided a comprehensive support package to CASE schools including supporting schools in basic aspects of Shared Education, such as timetabling, action planning and transport issues. A key aim was that participants should have the knowledge and skills to ensure that sharing is sustainable once PEACE IV funding ends.

3.163 In addition the project invested heavily in training to develop high quality, effective and sustainable practice. The CASE Project Implementation Team directly delivered TPL workshops for schools on:

- managing a Shared Education Project;

- developing a Shared Vision for your Partnership; and

- delivering Shared Education in the Classroom. The project has also supported TPL at a partnership and cluster level.

3.164 The EA have developed a variety of TPL modules with a range of educational stakeholders which are offered to all CASE schools to build further the capacity of teachers and school leaders to deliver Shared Education. These modules cover strategic operational and curricular based topics and support teachers and leaders at all levels. During this period the TPL modules included:

- Developing effective sharing through the Curriculum - Outdoor Learning

- Middle Leadership (Online)

- Emergent Leadership

- Outdoor Learning – Orienteering

- Developing effective sharing through the Curriculum – Coding

- Developing effective sharing through the Curriculum - Outdoor Play
  Developing effective sharing through the Curriculum – STEM

- Investigating Maths

3.165   During this reporting period the Controversial and Sensitive Issues (CSI) TPL programme was developed and implemented by the EA's youth work team and evaluated by Queen University, Belfast (QUB)[16]. The CSI TPL programme was developed following recognition that, while project-level reports have indicated positive developments in staff collaboration and pupil-to-pupil contact, schools' engagement with reconciliation and good relations has been more limited.

3.166   Teachers' lack of confidence to address such topics and manage pupil dynamics and responses has been identified as a major reason for this. Consequently, EA identified a need to increase teachers' capacity and confidence to address CSI in their practice, with the aim of enhancing the quality and depth of engagement with good relations through Shared Education.

3.167   The CSI TPL programme was delivered through two main modes. First, teachers participated in two group training days at and shortly after the start of the programme and a further two days of training at the end. Second, and constituting the core of the programme, teachers in participating partnerships worked with the CASE youth workers to plan and deliver a series of Shared Education sessions for Key Stage 2 pupils that addressed topics that schools identified as potentially sensitive in their contexts.

3.168   Three linked processes supported this, each informed by youth work practice, through which CSI TPL activity was expected to enhance teacher competence and capacity to deliver Shared Education. These were:

- The creation of spaces for professional dialogue

- Mentoring and modelling

- Development of reflective and reflexive practice

16   Evaluation of the Controversial and Sensitive Issues Teacher Professional Learning Programme; Report for the Education Authority (QUB; 2023)

3.169 Five partnerships engaged with the CSI TPL programme and completed all aspects of the programme - central staff training, mentoring and delivery of their specific projects. The identified partnerships reflected a range of community contexts - small rural partnership, large urban partnerships, small urban partnership, interface areas.

3.170 The evaluation from QUB identified improvement in both confidence and competencies of teachers to engage with and teach CSI in their partnership. Further references to the QUB CSI report are also made in Chapter 5.

Shared Education Campuses (SEC)

3.171 The EA continued to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education through its progression of all four SEC projects. On behalf of DE, the EA is responsible for all aspects of project management for each of the four SEC projects.

Brookeborough SEC - St. Mary's PS & Brookeborough PS

- Planning and design implementation of feasibility options for a SEC in the village of Brookeborough, near Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. This is the coming together of two primary schools, Brookeborough Primary School and St. Mary's Primary School, in Brookeborough. Development of an updated technical feasibility report to include costings for business case approval. This is currently underway with Business Case approval programmed for May 2024. Further detail on the SEC can be found at paragraphs 3.56 - 3.61.

Limavady Shared Campus Project

- The final Phase of Limavady SEC was completed on site on 18th August 2023. The defects period ends on 18th August 2024. The Integrated Supply Team (IST) are currently addressing and closing out defects on site and the ICT are agreeing the Final Account. The Limavady Shared Campus was officially opened on 21 February 2024.

Ballycastle Shared Campus Project

■ the Project Team has worked since 2015 to achieve the optimum design for new facilities which will create the best environment for the promotion of Shared Education in Ballycastle.

■ the Project Team has taken the project through the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Design Stages 0 – 4 and achieved Planning Permission for the scheme in 2021.

■ the IST was appointed in 2023.

■ construction is programmed to commence in early April 2024 and will complete in late summer 2027.

Moy Shared Campus Project - Moy Regional PS and St John's PS

■ Given the additional difficulties associated with delivering joint classes throughout the Covid-19 period, the level of sharing between the schools in Moy has been unable to develop to the extent needed to make a Shared Campus arrangement practicable within the timeframes required to avail of Fresh Start Funding. As a consequence, following discussions with both schools, DE, the EA and CCMS, the Project Board agreed that the project should draw to a close. This project closed January 2024.

Duty to Consider Shared Education (EA)

3.172   The organisational structure design of the EA, discussed at paragraphs 3.87 - 3.89, ensures that it fulfils its statutory duty to consider Shared Education. Specific, direct responsibility for Shared Education rests with senior officers, and significant resources are directed to create opportunities for its advancement, particularly through the available funding streams. Further assurance is provided through the EA Committee with responsibility for Shared Education which has a formal role in ensuring the duty to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education is fulfilled.

(iii) Other Education Bodies Compliance with the Act

3.173   The Act, at Section 4, provides a power to 'other bodies' to encourage and facilitate Shared Education. These are listed at Section 4(2) as:-

(a)   Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS);

(b)   Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI);

(c)   Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and

(d)   any sectoral body[17] (i.e. an organisation recognised by DE as representing the interests of grant-aided schools of a particular description; and (b) to which grants are paid under section 4 of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014).

3.174   Additionally, the Act places a duty on CCMS, YCNI and CCEA, to 'consider Shared Education' in policy, planning and service delivery. The non-operation of the YCNI since April 2019 has meant that the duties and powers placed on YCNI through the Act have not been actioned since that time. The Minister is considering the results of a survey of youth sector organisations on the future of the YCNI along with the *New Decade, New Approach* commitment to review ALBs with a view to their rationalisation.

3.175   The Department, through the annual business planning process, requires its ALBs to include actions in relation to the duties and powers provided by the Act. The ALBs' 2022/23 and 2023/24 business plans updates were reviewed quarterly by SECRT to consider progress on annual business plan actions in relation to Shared Education, adopting a challenge role as necessary.

3.176   The extent to which each of these 'other bodies' exercised this power, and for CCMS and CCEA, complied with the duty to consider Shared Education, over

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17   Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Controlled Schools' Support Council, Catholic Schools' Trustee Service and Governing Bodies Association fall within this definition.

the reporting period is summarised below. Inputs have been provided by each of the education and sectoral bodies.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

3.177   CCMS continues to support schools' engagement in Shared Education initiatives. CCMS report that data for the 2022/23 academic year shows a total of 17,860 pupils from the Catholic Maintained Sector engaged in at least 20 hours of MSE activity. This was 44% of the overall total for 2022/23 and represented 133 Schools out of 341 participating in MSE.

3.178   CCMS continues to work collaboratively with the EA and DE to support the delivery of Shared Education and in particular in the development of the five SECs. In line with previous years, a Senior Education Adviser had been allocated to oversee the work on Shared Education with further support from the Building and Development team on the progression of shared campuses. Support was also provided by members of the Senior Management Team in relation to three projects.

3.179   Work on shared governance of projects in conjunction with EA continued where possible in terms of EA and school engagement as listed below:

- Supported primary SEC schools with the collation of qualitative information and robust identification of deliverables against the monetary figures to support Business Cases.

- Supported primary SEC schools with the clear identification of the educational and societal benefits.

- Supported school leaders and governors with identifying the elements of ethos shared across both schools.

- Continued engagement with DE, staff, governors and diocesan trustee of St John's PS Moy until the closure of the project board in May 2023.

- Continued support for the post-primary SECs, with the official opening of the Limavady Campus in February 2024.

- Membership and participation in Strule Programme Board and Project 2 and 3 Boards and progression of related work including a range of papers for DE. Participation in Project 4 Board was suspended due to lack of resource.

3.180 CCMS also engaged with DE, EA and trustees in August - November 2022 to provide updated information to support DE's review of applications for the SECs Programme – Third Call in Autumn 2016.

3.181 As projects progress, and dependent on resource availability, work also includes:

- Providing technical support to the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and Trustees.

- Regular attendance at Project Board and/or Project Team Meetings.

- Providing advice to SRO and Trustees in respect of capital, asset and legal matters.

- Assistance in the development of/or updating of associated legal and governance documents.

- Participating in Design/Construction review processes and assisting in implementation of recommendations.

- Expeditious progression of signing of contracts, way-leave agreements, warranties, etc.

- Assisting panel members or moderators in the procurement of Consultants/Contractors.

- Providing technical assistance in the review of designs during the appropriate RIBA design stage.

- Liaison with the Educational Trusts when required.

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

3.182   Throughout 2022/23, CCEA continued to work with education partners, such as the EA and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to promote all CCEA resources relevant to Shared Education.

3.183   CCEA continued to promote equality of opportunity, respect for others, good relations and inclusivity through compliance with its duty to consider Shared Education and will exercise its power to encourage and facilitate Shared Education, in line with legislation and DE's *Sharing Works* Policy and provided reports to DE when required.

3.184   Throughout 2023/24, CCEA continued to work with education partners, such as EA and ITE to promote all CCEA resources relevant to Shared Education. This will include:

- creating an online presentation on Shared Education in the primary curriculum aimed at supporting learning in ITE colleges;

- refreshing existing PDMU guidance to include Shared Education opportunities; and

- promotion of equality of opportunity, respect for others, good relations and inclusivity through compliance with its duty to consider Shared Education and will exercise its power to encourage and facilitate Shared Education, in line with legislation and DE's Sharing Works Policy, and will provide a report to DE when requested.

3.185   CCEA have engaged in a range of activities throughout the reporting period that encourage and/or facilitate Shared Education:

Curriculum and Assessment

- Curriculum and Assessment delivered an internal CCEA workshop (November 2023) to share CCEA guidance so that all curriculum and qualifications colleagues had appropriate information for consideration of future opportunities to facilitate Shared Education in CCEA activities.

- Promoted CCEA Shared Education resources 'Northern Ireland Placenames' and 'Cultural Traditions' to schools through social media, planned termly newsletters.

- A suite of resources to support education about the British monarchy and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee was published in May 2022.

- Inclusion of suggested opportunities for Shared Education activities in resources such as those for the Queen's Jubilee.

- A CCEA communications manager has been part of the development of the EA cross-organisational Communications Team for Shared Education which will develop shared messages about the mainstreaming of Shared Education.

- Creating an online presentation for ITE on how the Northern Ireland Curriculum enables Shared Education to be published on the CCEA website by 31st March 2024.

- Published new CCEA guidance on 'Shared Education and the Northern Ireland Curriculum' for primary and post-primary schools which describes opportunities for Shared Education activities to deliver educational outcomes through curriculum and qualification activities.

- Refreshed CCEA's Supporting Shared Education Webpage in August 2023 to include clearer links to CCEA Shared Education resources and consistent messaging with other bodies (DE and EA).

- Drafting of updated content for existing CCEA Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) guidance to include Shared Education opportunities.

Irish Medium (IM) Sector Programme of Work

- Developed new partnerships with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta;

- Developing IM primary Resources and continuing IM translation of CCEA pupil resources.

Ulster-Scots

- Continuing development of the www.discoverulsterscots.com education website.

- Working in support of Northern Screen Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund and with the Ulster-Scots Agency in supporting Curriculum input and the promotion of:

  - ☐ Twarthy Poems

  - ☐ My Yarns

  - ☐ Ingenious Ulster

- Working with Northern Ireland Screen to promote its Digital Film Archive of moving images from Northern Ireland from 1897 to 2024.

Sectoral Bodies

Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC)

3.186 As a sectoral body, CSSC has a power to encourage and facilitate Shared Education, as set out in the Shared Education Act 2016. The organisation seeks to raise awareness of Shared Education amongst controlled schools, encouraging and facilitating their participation, assisting with funding applications. CSSC also represents the controlled sector on Shared Education strategic groups.

3.187 During the reporting period a number of actions were carried out, these are detailed below:

DE Policy Development:

- CSSC contributed to feedback on the Draft MSE Strategy in Summer 2022, via the working group and through a series of stakeholder meetings and written feedback.

- CSSC welcomed the launch of the MSE Strategy. CSSC shared various posts promoting the MSE Strategy relating to Shared Education carried out by DE and EA on our social media platforms.

Research and Communications:

- The Shared Education section on the CSSC website contains resources for schools, including a briefing paper on Shared Education policy in Northern Ireland and CSSC's 'Learning from each other, sharing in education' report. The report contains ten interviews with controlled school leaders regarding their school's Shared Education partnership. Two video resources are also available, containing interviews with the principals of Kilkeel High School and Edenderry Nursery School.

3.188 CSSC has shared videos promoting successful Shared Education programmes across Northern Ireland. This includes Carrick Primary School, Jones Memorial, Botanic Primary, Holy Rosary PS. We also carried out filming at Limavady High School and St Mary's High School, highlighting the positive work being carried out there and the success of their new SEC.

External Relationships:

3.189 During the reporting period CSSC representatives continued to engage, support and facilitate Shared Education in a number of areas including participation in work and meetings with a focus on:

- Shared Island Dialogue: education systems, connecting communities.

- PEACE PLUS (6 workshops)

- Third Call Proposed SEC Programmes (7 meetings)

- Peace Builds at the Speed of Trust: Exploring 'Trust Indicators' in Reconciliation (CRIS)

- T:BUC Programme

- SEC programmes including the Limavady SEC

- Shared Education Forum

- QUB Shared Education event

- Coalition for Inclusive Education (launch)

- Shared Education and ethos work with Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College

- Shared Education Communications Group

3.190 CSSC engaged with the Strule Managing Authorities Liaison and met with the EA to support controlled schools involved in the Strule Campus programme.

3.191 Promotion of Shared Education partnerships and SECs was significant with substantial development and communication of new Shared Education content with controlled schools.

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

3.192 NICIE continues to have a strong and productive collaborative working relationship with the EA's SESS team.

3.193 NICIE report that in the timeframe covered by this report, fifty Integrated schools have been engaged in Shared Education partnerships across the three main programmes: Steps into Sharing, MSE and CASE. This amounts to just over 70% of Integrated schools.

3.194 NICIE is aware that due to recent funding constraints the number of partnerships able to actively engage in Shared Education activity has reduced, but it is anticipated that when PEACE PLUS funding becomes available the numbers will increase and NICIE will continue to encourage all eligible Integrated schools to participate.

3.195 NICIE contributed to the submission of a PEACE PLUS application in support of our partners in the EA. If successful, NICIE will assist the EA in delivering Shared Learning Together project strands.

Support, Promotion and Representation

3.196 The Senior Development Officer responsible for promotion represents NICIE on the Shared Education Communications Group. This provides a valuable forum for NICIE to be aware of Shared Education progress and identifying areas and projects where NICIE could contribute. NICIE is also represented on the recently formed Shared Education Stakeholder Forum.

3.197 NICIE has taken part in an ongoing project aimed at supporting schools to deal with sensitive and controversial issues. Using the emotive and hard-hitting documentary: 'Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland,' the project aims to develop a resource/module to support educators to make use of the thought-provoking content.

3.198 In February 2024, NICIE delivered a session to Croatian teachers on an educational visit, in partnership with the Centre for Shared Education at Queen's University Belfast. This workshop explored the history, development and current context of Integrated education and addressed the question of how Integrated schools meet the challenges of delivering the curriculum in the context of a divided society.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

3.199 CnaG reported the following actions in relation to Shared Education within the Irish-medium sector over the reporting period:-

■ Facilitated a meeting between IM Principals' Forum and the EA Shared Education Team in order to discuss and promote future Shared Education opportunities/initiatives.

- Shared EA correspondence relating to expressions of interest forms with IM schools which resulted in 8 more schools registering interest.

- Have been active on the Shared Education subgroup of Area Planning Working Group (APWG) and also have provided input into consultations relating to MSE.

- Have written to DE to request a discussion regarding the PEACE PLUS criteria to ensure this is more accessible to IM schools in the next funding round.

- Have engaged with EA Sectoral Support officers to assess IM participation in all Shared Education initiatives to date and determine current barriers to participation. This will be considered in future initiatives to increase IM participation.

- Have attended all relevant PEACE PLUS workshops during summer 2023 to identify potential initiatives for IM participation in Shared Education going forward. CnaG has liaised with EA following these workshops during the application process and this has remained an agenda item in meetings between CnaG and EA Sectoral Support. CnaG is represented on the DE Shared Education Stakeholder Forum and has contributed to discussions to date regarding Terms of Reference, Comms Strategy and 2023/24 Operational Plan.

- CnaG has also held discussions with DE about IM opportunities within the Strule project.

Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS)

3.200   One of the key objectives of CSTS is to assist Trustees in working with all Catholic schools to develop more cohesive engagement with the sector to DE policy in areas including Shared Education. In delivering this objective, CSTS's key activities over the reporting period have been as follows:-

- CSTS continue to promote Shared Education through the promotion of the Trustee policy on Shared Education and through the Annual business plan for the organisation.

- CSTS participate in the APWG - Sub group which is developing ideas relating to collaborative working including Shared Education.

- CSTS continues to work with other Churches in developing a model of Shared Education through Jointly Managed Church Schools;

- CSTS participates in the Shared Education Stakeholder Forum;

- CSTS continues to work towards the development of the SSEC via membership of the Managing Authorities Liaison Group and Programme Boards.

Governing Bodies Association (GBA)

3.201   The GBA listed the following key activities carried out during the reporting period:-

- Attended Shared Education cross-organisational Group meeting to discuss school partnerships, funding, and future directions.

- Promotion of Shared Education at meetings with member schools not currently involved in Shared Education partnerships.

- Attended Shared Education Stakeholder Forum to discuss a Communications Strategy and explore barriers to Shared Education.

- Attended Shared Education Stakeholder Forum Workshop to discuss current landscape, challenges and collaborative support going forward.

- Provide updates and information about Shared Education in GBA monthly news bulletin (audience: Principals and Governors).

4   PARTICIPATION IN SHARED EDUCATION

4.1   This report, in line with previous reports, provides information on participation at the academic year end, providing a comparison between levels of setting and pupil participation at 30 June 2021 and at 30 June 2023.

4.2   Participation in Shared Education is, to a large degree, facilitated by the provision of dedicated funding, and the data presented in this section of the report is sourced from the main funding streams in operation over the two year reporting period (see paragraphs 3.10 – 3.14). The remainder of this section provides details and commentary on participation levels, and how they have changed, across the relevant funding streams.

Participation Level Data

4.3   Table 3 below provides the breakdown of the settings and pupils participating, by Shared Education funding stream, across phases, and the change in the level of participation between June 2021 and June 2023.

Table 3:
Setting and pupil participation June 2021 and June 2023

Phase	Settings			Pupils		
	30 June 2021	30 June 2023	Change between June 2021 and June 2023	30 June 2021	30 June 2023	Change between June 2021 and June 2023
Mainstreaming Shared Education[18]						
Pre-school	16	11	-5	0	1,698	+1,698
Primary Schools	246	229	-17	0	28,498	+28,498
Post-primary Schools	95	93	-2	0	11,094	+11,094
Special Schools	10	8	-2	0	343	+343
Sub-total	**367**	**341**	**-26**	**0**	**41,633**	**+41,633**
PEACE IV[19]						
Pre-School[20]	40	56	+16	1,045	1,591	+546
Primary Schools	255	210	-45	16,050	25,246	+9,196
Post-primary Schools	22	12	-10	60	399	+339
Special Schools	12	10	-2	328	348	+20
Sub-total	**329**	**288**	**-41**	**17,483**	**27,584**	**+10,101**
OVERALL TOTAL	**696**	**629**	**-67**	**17,483**	**69,217**	**+51,734**

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18   Mainstreaming Shared Education funding introduced in September 2022 supporting cohort of experienced partnerships previously supported by the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project and Shared Education Transition Phase funding.

19   PEACE IV CASE project support for pupil engagement ended in March 2023. PEACE IV SfS project support for pupil engagement ended in June 2023.

20   Figures provided by Early Years Organisation (EYO), lead partner in the PEACE IV Sharing from the Start project. EYO has confirmed that the settings and pupil participation figures for 2021 have been updated since their inclusion in the previous report to the Assembly, and are the final verified figures.

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4.4   Table 4 provides the breakdown of the overall number of schools and pupils supported by the Shared Education funding streams, across phases, and the change in the level of participation between June 2021 and June 2023.

Table 4:
Levels of participation compared to total setting/pupil population
June 2021 and June 2023

Phase	Schools				Pupils			
	June 2021		June 2023		June 2021		June 2023	
	No. of schools participating in Shared Education	As % of school population	No. of schools participating in Shared Education	As % of school population	No. of pupils participating in Shared Education	As % of pupil population	No. of pupils participating in Shared Education	As % of pupil population
Pre- school[21]	56	12%	67	15%	1,045	5%	3,289	15%
Primary Schools	501	63%	439	56%	16,050	9%	53,744	31%
Post-primary Schools	117	61%	105	55%	60	0%	11,493	7%
Special Schools	22	56%	18	46%	328	5%	691	10%
Total	**696**	**47%**	**629**	**43%**	**17,483**	**5%**	**69,217**	**20%**

Mainstreaming Shared Education

4.5   During the 2022/23 academic year, participation data was collected from partnerships involved in MSE via interim monitoring and evaluation arrangements while more permanent arrangements are developed.

4.6   During the 2022/23 academic year there were 341 schools and pre-school settings in 145 partnerships supported by the Department-funded MSE funding models, their first year of operation. Partnerships report that 41,633 pupils were engaged in shared learning experiences with their peers from partner settings.

4.7   Previously, in the period September 2020 to June 2022, this cohort of partnerships were supported through the DE-funded Shared Education

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21   voluntary and private pre schools and Nursery schools

Transition Phase during which, due to the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a suspension of face-to-face contact for pupils in these settings.

4.8   Consequently, while there has been a small reduction in the numbers of MSE settings involved over this period, mainly due to school closures and some settings opting to withdraw (in some cases temporarily) from Shared Education, the level of pupils involved has risen from a zero baseline in June 2021 to over 41,000 in June 2023.

PEACE IV

4.9   Data on setting and pupil participation levels across PEACE IV has been provided by the respective project leads – EYO in relation to the SfS project and the EA in relation to the CASE project.

Sharing from the Start

4.10   Over the two year period EYO report that there has been an increase in both the number of settings and the numbers of pupils involved in the SfS project. In its final year to June 2023, the project supported 56 Northern Ireland pre-school settings in 29 partnerships, an increase of 16 settings (40%) from June 2021, involving 1,591 pre-schools children, an increase of 52% from June 2021.

4.11   In the 2021/22 academic year, EYO report that the majority of contact, including planning for shared sessions by practitioners and peer practice delivery, was conducted virtually, with a face-to-face closure event held in May 2022. Some partnerships were able to facilitate outdoor shared sessions, hosted either in settings or external venues.

4.12   In 2022/23, whilst planning sessions remained mainly online, peer practice sessions were delivered face-to-face, preceded by limited engagement via online platforms as a means of introducing children and staff. There was also a focus on parent participation during face-to-face sessions, in recognition of the importance of bringing parents and communities together.

4.13   EYO report that the SfS project, over its complete term, has exceeded all of its participation-related indicators, with 123 settings involved (90 in Northern Ireland) against a target of 99; 266 practitioners trained (174 in Northern Ireland) against a target of 157; and 13,017 pupils (9,273 in Northern Ireland) involved against a target of 9,914.

4.14   Following closure of the PEACE IV Shared Education programme, SfS partnerships require further support before entering the MSE environment and it is anticipated there will be opportunities to continue their growth as Shared Education partnerships through the upcoming PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together programme, when operational.

Collaboration Through Sharing in Education

4.15   The EA CASE project lead has reported a reduction in the number of settings, but an increase in the number of pupils engaged in Shared Education during the two year period. The CASE project was extended to March 2023, and in its final academic year, 2022/23, a total of 232 Northern Ireland schools in 106 partnerships were involved, a reduction of 57 from June 2021. The project lead reports that the reduction is largely down to schools deciding not to continue in a Shared Education partnership.

4.16   Over the same two year period the number of Northern Ireland pupils engaged in CASE partnerships in the 2022/23 academic year has risen to 25,993, an increase of 58% from June 2021.

4.17   Following cessation of pupil engagement through the CASE project in March 2023, the EA project team were able to utilise a small amount of excess funding to offer a bridging programme to partnerships, to support their continued development. 117 schools from 57 partnerships participated in the programme.

4.18   Similar to the SfS project, the CASE project has exceeded all of its participation related indicators. Over its complete term, there were 387 schools (289 in Northern Ireland) involved against a target of 280; 2,507 teachers (2,009 in Northern Ireland) trained against a target of 2,000; and

141,594 pupils (120,479 in Northern Ireland) benefitting from shared learning experiences against a target of 135,000.

4.19   Due to the disruption of COVID 19, no CASE partnerships demonstrated the capacity to immediately transition from the supported programme of CASE into a self-supporting environment like MSE. While a number of partnerships were delivering with whole school engagement, when assessed against the (ETI) Shared Education self-evaluation indicators, the partnerships recognised ongoing support was needed to fully establish their partnership working. Areas like changes in school leadership, financial management and delegating Shared Education coordination to middle leaders have been identified as key factors that need to be well established to facilitate and deepen partnership working. It is expected that over the next few years, with support from funding such as PEACE PLUS, these partnerships will be able to transition from a supported programme to MSE.

Other Areas of Participation

4.20   As outlined in the previous report to the Assembly, in 2020 the EA's programme of engagement with schools not involved in Shared Education had to be suspended due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The EA were able to re-start the 'Steps into Sharing' programme in early 2022 and 234 schools agreed to participate.

4.21   The Steps into Sharing programme focussed on developing a better understanding of Shared Education amongst non-participating schools in preparation for the upcoming PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together project. There was no pupil activity associated with the programme. At March 2024, 34 new partnerships have been formed from these schools and it is hoped that further development of these and other prospective partnerships will be taken forward through the PEACE PLUS programme.

4.22   The EA Shared Education and Sectoral Support Team has connected with a range of external partners, including Local District Councils, to explore opportunities to advance Shared Education outside of the main funded programmes. Connections with Belfast City Council, Causeway Coast

and Glens Borough Council and Co-operation Ireland has resulted in the facilitation of small scale projects across a number of Shared Education partnerships.

4.23   For example, the Stena Line Shared Education Project, facilitated in collaboration with Belfast City Council, has supported eight schools from South and West Belfast over 4 academic years. In the 2022/23 academic year, 1,033 pupils benefited from shared learning experiences with their peers from these partnerships.

General Commentary on Participation Levels

4.24   Shared Education, like all other aspects of the education system, has continued its recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In acknowledgement of the benefits of Shared Education, schools and other educational settings have maintained and built on their relationships, engaging pupils when funding and Covid-19 restrictions allowed.

4.25   Whilst we have seen a small reduction in the number of settings involved over the two year period, there has been a four-fold increase in the number of pupils with nearly 70,000 children and young people, one fifth of the Northern Ireland education system, able to learn with and about their peers from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

4.26   Setting and pupil participation is dependent on the availability of funding, either through funded programmes or from central budgets, and the PEACE IV programme and MSE have driven participation over the two year period of this report.

4.27   Whilst progress over the last two academic years has been positive, gaps and challenges to participation remain in some areas. The Department, in collaboration with its partners in the Shared Education Stakeholder Forum, has been working to identify and address the challenges, work which will continue into the next reporting period.

4.28   While it is the Department's aim that every child and young person has the opportunity to engage in Shared Education, it is also acknowledged that it is not practical for every pupil to be involved every year. Participation rates in existing partnerships, although very encouraging post-pandemic, have not reached pre-Covid levels when, at its peak, around 87,000 pupils were involved in the 2018/19 academic year. This is perhaps understandable as partnerships may have adopted a "cautious" approach to re-building relationships and returning to pupil engagement.

4.29   As touched upon elsewhere in this report, going forward, the PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together programme provides a key vehicle to help expand the reach of, and further develop, Shared Education which will help to enhance current participation levels across the phases including schools, pre-school and youth settings.

5. EXTENT TO WHICH THE PURPOSE OF SHARED EDUCATION HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

5.1 The purpose of Shared Education is set out in the Act as:

(i) delivering educational benefits to children and young persons;

(ii) promoting the efficient and effective use of resources;

(iii) promoting equality of opportunity;

(iv) promoting good relations; and;

(v) promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

5.2 Complementing a wide range of evaluative evidence and research outlined in previous reports laid before the Assembly, the positive impact of Shared Education continues to be demonstrated - for children and young people, families and communities, and the educational settings which serve them. Such findings relating to or made available during the period covered by this latest report are examined further within this Chapter focusing, in turn, on each of the five distinct areas (i.e. highlighted above at 5.1).

Delivering educational benefits to children and young persons

5.3 This reporting period has seen a focus on recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic which extensively disrupted classroom based activity and pupil to pupil engagement. Information gathered from a range of sources, including relevant programme evaluations and reports from schools and other participating settings, re-affirm that Shared Education continues to deliver educational benefits for children and young people.

5.4 Following on from earlier interim reports, the final Impact Evaluation[22] on the PEACE IV Shared Education programme (October 2022), commissioned by SEUPB and taken forward by SJC consultancy and the National Children's

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22 Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Year 5) PEACE IV Programme – Full Report – Microsoft Word – PIV Shared Ed Eval Yr5 Report – FINAL Jan 2023 (seupb.eu)

Bureau, provides the key piece of evidence published in this time-period. Incorporating analysis of activity supported under both the CASE and SfS projects, its main findings as outlined in the accompanying Executive Summary[23] are summarised below. Note this evaluation was completed in line with the original planned research schedule (i.e. prior to the final conclusion of each project in 2023 as a result of extensions granted):

> *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 five 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.*
>
> *Based on self-reported figures, over the last five years (up to June 2022), 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) have been funded, involving 494 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors (141% of 2023 target achieved); 2,360 teachers are now equipped with the skills and capacity to deliver Shared Education (112% of 2023 target achieved) and 115,261 children have participated in cross-community contact delivered via an enriched curriculum through shared class activity (80% 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, cross-community relations; and educational outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, and practitioners/teachers, as well as societal outcomes for children, parents, and the wider community.*

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23   Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Year 5) PEACE IV Programme- Executive Summary Microsoft Word – PIV Shared Ed Eval Yr5 Ex Summary – FINAL Jan 2023 (seupb.eu)

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Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Project Partners and partnerships demonstrated resilience and perseverance to sustain Shared Education. Without the use of IT as an enabler, and the 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 have been met/ are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools. The SEUPB's ongoing support has also helped Project Partners navigate uncertain times. The SEUPB have shown flexibility in approach with regard to timeline and budget extensions to facilitate meeting of targets within the parameters of the PEACE IV Programme to ensure the success of Shared Education.

However, it is important to recognise that understandably outcomes were not as well developed in Year 4 and Year 5 when compared to pre-Covid levels, and it is evident from feedback that reconciliation and educational outcomes are better achieved through face-to-face contact which is important for social and emotional development of children.

At the time of writing the Impact Evaluation, the project activity in pre-schools ended in June 2022 with SFTS project closure due by the end of September 2022 and CASE project activity in schools was due to complete by March 2023 with project closure by June 2023. It is important to note that as of September 2022, the following extensions have been granted by the SEUPB to facilitate Shared Education into another full academic year (September 2022 to June 2023) and a few months after to allow for project closure activities i.e.: - SFTS revised end date is now 30 September 2023. - CASE revised end date is 31 October 2023.

Overall, there is an appetite for shared activities to continue and to build on the reconciliation and educational benefits achieved to date. 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 PEACEPLUS programming period.

5.5   Research informing the evaluation was undertaken via a review of project monitoring data and partnership progress reports, discussions and interviews with project delivery partner staff/case officers, online surveys completed by early years practitioners in pre-school settings and principals/teachers in schools, and development of eleven partnership 'case studies' identified including focus groups conducted with parents and engagement with children and young people.

5.6   With particular relevance to educational benefits, the final PEACE IV Shared Education Impact Evaluation states *"Overall, it is evident that Shared Education has the potential to permeate throughout all aspects of the curriculum and over the last five years participation has provided access to a wide education/curriculum experience"*.

5.7   The underpinning survey results also revealed that:

- Most significantly, almost all (94%) of teacher/practitioner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has led to improved educational outcomes for participating children.

- 91% agreed or strongly agreed it improved children's communication skills.

- 85% agreed or strongly agreed it improved children's confidence, in terms of confidence interacting with both peers and adults within each setting and confidence taking part in new activities.

- 74% agreed or strongly agreed it improved children's social skills; as well as comments highlighting that it has helped to ease children's transition between pre-school to primary and primary to post-primary.

- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education supports, and fits with/complements existing policy and day-to-day practice in education, with respondents commenting on how Shared Education has contributed to meeting the objectives of each of the pre-school/school's curricular focus and learning outcomes. Specially participation has had a positive impact on helping to address curricular priorities in relevant Pre-school Development Plans or School Development Plans.

5.8   In respect of teaching and learning, the final PEACE IV Impact Evaluation (Executive Summary) also states that *'there is evidence that Shared Education is being translated into quality standards for teaching and learning that enable its values to be embedded into practice in pre-schools and schools. Inspection reports also provide evidence that Shared Education is recognised as a valuable intervention to improve teaching and learning'*.

5.9   Furthermore,

   ■   97% agreed or strongly agreed that it had enhanced teaching and learning in their school/pre-school.

   ■   94% agreed or strongly agreed that their professional practice/teaching skills and knowledge has improved due to involvement in SfS/CASE.

   ■   87% of respondents attributed the training provided by project partners as the means of helping them gain new knowledge and skills to deliver Shared Education.

5.10   The high approval rates from the survey informing the final PEACE IV Impact Evaluation chime with the results of earlier surveys and evaluations on funded programmes (such as the 2018 Education and Training Inspectorate report on the DSC Shared Education Signature Project)[24] which indicated that Shared Education provision impacts positively on pupil outcomes.

5.11   Interim monitoring and evaluation arrangements put in place in 2022/23 to help assess the impact of the first year of mainstreamed Shared Education, captured a range of data presented in the form of an OBA report card. Included in this, MSE partnerships were asked to indicate agreement with a number of statements aligned closely with the five distinct purposes of Shared Education. The information gathered through that process indicates that 97% agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has had a positive impact on educational outcomes for those pupils participating in 2022/23.

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24   The Shared Education Signature Project Evaluation Report (Education and Training Inspectorate; 2018)

5.12 Also echoing earlier findings and evaluations, it is evident that children and young people continue to enjoy the additional opportunities afforded to them through involvement in Shared Education. As outlined in recent survey findings from the latest version of the YLT and KLT which included specific modules on Shared Education (2022)[25], the experiences of children and young people who said they had done projects, had classes, and shared equipment with other schools were generally very positive about taking part in such shared activities.

Table 5:
How respondents felt about sharing activities with other schools

	% saying liked it a lot or a little	
	YLT	KLT
Doing projects with other schools	79	77
Having classes with other schools	80	74
Sharing equipment/facilities with other schools	90	86

5.13 In respect of other aspects of Shared Education the children and young people were asked about, of the respondents who said they had done each activity, it was clear that amongst both groups, the aspects of sharing that were liked the most were being with diverse groups of children and young people: those who had a different ethnic background to them (95% KLT and YLT); those who had a different religious background to them (88% KLT and YLT) and those who were from a different social class to them (88% KLT and 89% YLT).

5.14 In terms of activities, the respondents were most positive about doing classes they did not normally get to do at their own school (86% KLT and YLT),

25   Attitudes to Shared Education: Findings from the 2022 Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times surveys (ARK;QUB -2023). A linked Department of Education Research Briefing which provides a summary of the key findings from the 2022 YLT and KLT in respect of Shared Education is also available

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followed by making new friends (83% KLT and 81% YLT) and learning new things (78% KLT and 79% YLT). While still positive, the aspect of sharing they liked least was being taught by different teachers (68% KLT and YLT).

5.15   These findings are illustrated in the table below.

Table 6:
Activities respondents liked a lot or liked a little

	% saying liked it a lot or a little	
	YLT	KLT
Being taught by different teachers	68	68
Travelling to a different school	73	77
Doing classes we don't normally get to do at our school	86	86
Learning new things with pupils from another school	79	78
Making new friends	81	83
Being with young people (YLT)/children (KLT) who are a different religion to me	88	88
Being with young people who have a different ethnic background (YLT)/children who have a different skin colour or who speak a different language than me (KLT)	95	95
Being with young people who are a different social class to me (YLT)/children who are richer or poorer than me (KLT)	89	88

5.16   Ongoing industrial action has restricted inspection activity conducted by the ETI in schools therefore any formal published observations regarding the delivery of Shared Education are not available in respect of this reporting period, as would have been the case in previous Reports to the Assembly. An update on the relevant work progressed by ETI over this time is covered in further detail at Chapter 3.

Promoting the efficient and effective use of resources

5.17　It is well documented that more efficient and effective use of resources is a key benefit emanating from participation in Shared Education, enabling schools and other settings to collaborate across different sectors, building wider networks of professional relationships, working together to address common needs, increased access to development opportunities and allowing for the sharing of learning, experience, expertise and good practice, curriculum materials and resources, equipment and infrastructure.

5.18　Linked closely with the educational benefits explored earlier in this section, the recent PEACE IV final Impact Evaluation of Shared Education from 2022 continues that trend, highlighting that:

> *"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."*
>
> *"SFTS and CASE have a positive economic impact as a result of cost savings derived from sharing of resources, transport, practitioner/ teacher training, promote use of technology (more apparent in the current Covid-19 era)."*
>
> *"Overall, core subjects have been enhanced with the addition of new resources acquired, the access to other teaching staff and in some cases external tutors providing specific expertise, which would not have occurred in the absence of funding."*
>
> **PEACE IV Shared Education Final Impact Evaluation (SJC Consultancy & National Children's Bureau; commissioned by SEUPB; published 2022)**

5.19   This reflects associated survey responses from the final PEACE IV Impact Evaluation which found that:

■   93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that involvement in CASE/SfS had enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives, consequently adding to the sustainability of such activities in the future.

■   94% agreed or strongly agreed it had increased access to curriculum resources and/or equipment.

■   88% agreed or strongly agreed that there was increased access to external tutors/professional expertise.

5.20   Due in part from the enduring impact of the pandemic, a range of innovative digital platforms continued to be employed during the reporting period at partnership level, important in terms of sustaining collaborative relationships and enhancing the shared learning experiences for children and young people. The PEACE PLUS programme will support new and exciting opportunities for further developing access to and the use of digital technologies to improve sharing practice e.g. harnessing the potential of Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality tools.

5.21   This is afforded specific recognition within the final PEACE IV Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Executive Summary) which recommends, going forward, *"To help sustain and extend partnership working in a cost-effective way, a key learning is the investment in IT infrastructure (and training in its use) and is in line with the new PEACE PLUS approach on digital development – this has proven successful during PEACE IV where budgets were realigned to provide partnerships with the necessary equipment to embark in virtual classes during the pandemic. Budget allocation and investment in training will also continue to be an important factor to help practitioners/teachers and school leaders to plan work together, with virtual options particularly beneficial when coordination of schedules prove difficult".*

5.22   The EA has also continued to develop the suite of online learning and support materials and resources available on its Shared Education Hub, designed to assist practitioners and partnerships in delivering shared learning, and which is open and accessible across all phases and sectors. Further enhancements to the information and support available on the Hub are anticipated over the coming period.

5.23   The promotion of other shared resources has also continued, such as:-

- the **Developing Shared Education Frameworks**[26], for schools, early years and youth settings to support the embedding and mainstreaming of Shared Education. The ETI are continuing to progress a review of the school Framework based on learning from inspection and related evaluation work.

- the **Pupil Pathway**[27], a resource to support teachers in the planning, delivery and evaluation of Shared Education. Launched in 2019, the Pupil Pathway was developed collaboratively between a number of key educational stakeholder bodies including DE, EA, CCEA, NICIE and the ETI. The document emphasises that Shared Education complements the objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum to develop learners as individuals, as contributors to society and as contributors to the economy and the environment; and

- the **Joint Professional Development Toolkit** designed to support schools/partnerships who are engaging in clusters to address areas of common need.

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26   Developing Shared Education - A Framework for School Partnerships - November 2014 Developing Shared Education in Early Years Settings - A Framework for Collaborative Partnerships 2016-2017 Developing Shared Education - A Framework for Youth Provision Partnerships Available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/what-shared-education

27   Pupil Pathway Shared Education available at https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/school-document/a-pupil-pathway-shared-education

5.24   Following a pause, as a result of Covid-19, the Department issued a School Omnibus Survey in 2022[28] which included questions on Shared Education. In that latest set of data, with regard to sharing, the survey results revealed that as a percentage of all the activities (265) participated in by respondents, which partnered in the 2021/22 academic year (97), 15.5% involved shared classes (other than entitlement framework), 14.3% involved shared projects with other schools, 9.1% involved the development of shared policies, 8.7% involved sharing of equipment (e.g. school mini bus, computers) and 7.5% involved shared resources (e.g. teaching plans, materials etc). This is illustrated in the table below.

Table 7:
Type of activities schools have partnered on in the 2021/22 academic year

Type of Shared Education Activity	Percentage of All Activities
Project(s) with pupils from other school(s)	14.3%
Shared equipment (eg school minibus, computers)	8.7%
Shared classes with pupils from other schools (under Entitlement Framework)	26.8%
Shared teachers	4.5%
Extra-curricular activities	6.4%
Shared classes with pupils from other schools (other than under the Entitlement Framework)	15.5%
Development of Shared Policies	9.1%
Shared Resources (eg teaching plans, materials)	7.5%
Other	7.2%

Base all activities (265). Note: school may have participated in multiple activities.

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28   School Omnibus Survey 2022 (Department of Education)

5.25   The most used facilities by schools in Shared Education partnerships in the 2021/22 academic year were school classrooms (34.8%), followed by assembly or other halls (28.7%), and sports grounds (20%) as outlined below.

Table 8:
Facilities schools used in Shared Education partnership(s) in the 2021/22 academic year

Type of Facility	Percentage of All Facilities
Classrooms	34.8%
Science laboratories	2.6%
Music or drama facilities	7.0%
Assembly or other halls	28.7%
Sports grounds	20.0%
Other	7.0%

Base all facilities (230). Note: school may have used multiple facilities.

5.26   The results captured through the interim monitoring and evaluation arrangements for MSE partnerships i.e. 2022/23 OBA report card data indicates that 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the partnership works together to share resources available to the pupils, staff, parents and wider community.

5.27   Using information gathered from the latest KLT and YLT surveys, the percentage of respondents involved in Shared Education was lower in the 2022 surveys than in 2020/21 for both YLT (51% and 53% respectively) and KLT (60% and 67% respectively).

5.28   There has been a decrease in the percentages of respondents who said they had done projects with pupils from other schools, had classes with pupils from other schools and shared facilities among the YLT and KLT respondents between 2020/21 and 2022.

5.29   As the table below shows, this was most marked for having classes and sharing facilities or equipment, particularly among the KLT respondents. The accompanying research report compiled notes that *"It is perhaps unsurprising that there has been a decrease in the percentages of children and young people saying they were involved in Shared Education given the exceptional circumstances schools have had to contend with during the past two years in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. In some of the open-ended questions, it was clear that some schools were using alternative methods of involving their pupils in Shared Education, with reference by a number of children in KLT and a few young people in YLT of Zoom/Teams meetings/ projects. In KLT one child noted that 'we didn't share any equipment, we did send letters to each other and zoom a lot and did a project'.*

Table 9:
Whether respondents have been involved in Shared Education, and have done particular activities in 2015, 2017, 2018, 2020/21 and 2022

	%									
	YLT					**KLT**				
	2015	2017	2018	2020/21	2022	2015	2017	2018	2020/21	2022
Has been involved in SE	51	72	40	53	51	58	69	63	67	60***
Has done projects with pupils from other schools	69	70	67	81	66***	56	50	51	74	53***
Has had classes with pupils from other schools	55	60	50	48	40**	34	41	34	64	29***
Has used or shared sports facilities or equipment, like computers	38	48	40	52	37***	44	33	34	56	33***
Has done something else	6	4	12	4	8	28	24	24	14	16

*Differences between 2020/21 and 2022 *p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001;*
Effect sizes 0.17 (YLT projects); 0.08 (YLT classes); 0.15 (YLT facilities) small
Effect sizes 0.06 (KLT SE); 0.20 (KLT projects); 0.34 (KLT classes - small); 0.22 (KLT facilities - small)

Promoting equality of opportunity

5.30   There has been significant growth of Shared Education in recent years through the DSC SESP programme (and associated DE funding support for this cohort of partnerships thereafter), supplemented by subsequent PEACE IV projects. This includes strategic inroads made by the SfS project into the pre-school sector, in addition to (according to the latest available figures explored in Chapter 4) at June 2023, reaching 56% of primary, 55% of post primary and 46% of special schools, which is very encouraging.

5.31   As highlighted already in this Report, in line with the statutory duty to *'encourage, facilitate and promote'* Shared Education and prior commitments made within *Sharing Works* to consider long term delivery arrangements, the Department, working closely with the EA and following a process of co-design with a range of other key stakeholders, developed and published a comprehensive MSE Strategy in September 2022.

5.32   At its core, that Strategy aims to work towards a point whereby all children can participate, and avail of the benefits brought about by sharing, reflected in the associated objective: *to provide the opportunity for all children and young people to participate in quality Shared Education on a continued and progressive basis*. The promotion of equality of opportunity, good relations and respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion are also part of the 'guiding principles' underpinning the development of the Strategy.

5.33   This approach not only reinforces the definition and purposes of Shared Education as set out in the 2016 Act but also the preceding *Sharing Works* policy in 2015 which outlined that:-

> *"It is DE's objective that all children and young people have an opportunity to participate in Shared Education", incorporating "both statutory and voluntary early years educational settings; Primary, Post Primary and Special schools; and non-formal educational environments, such as statutory and voluntary youth work settings."*
>
> **Sharing Works (Department of Education; 2015)**

5.34   Of those partnerships which have already made the transition to a mainstreamed environment, the associated monitoring and evaluation information collected in the 2022/23 academic year reports positively in this regard with 95% of participating partnerships agreeing or strongly agreeing that Shared Education has a positive impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

5.35   Making further progress in terms of mainstreaming whereby Shared Education is normal and accepted practice right across our education system is an iterative process, and it is acknowledged that we still have some way to go towards achieving that ultimate goal. There is however a clear appetite amongst those schools and settings not yet participating, to become involved in Shared Education. This is evidenced, for example, by the Steps into Sharing programme operated by the EA which involved introductory support and guidance for more than 200 interested 'new' schools, as well as other preparatory work in advance of the introduction of PEACE PLUS.

5.36   In line with commitments made and direction of travel outlined in the MSE Strategy and associated 'delivery plans', it remains a priority for DE to address any current gaps in provision where they exist and to tackle any potential barriers which may be impacting on the participation and/or uptake of Shared Education by schools and other education providers, working with relevant stakeholder and sectoral bodies as appropriate.

5.37   Critically, the new PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together programme will seek to further develop, enhance and amplify the delivery of Shared Education, including extending upon its current reach in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, encompassing opportunities to grow provision across pre-schools, schools and youth settings in both jurisdictions.

Promoting good relations

5.38   A key benefit arising from Shared Education provision is the enhanced opportunities for children and young people to spend time with peers or in surroundings/environments perceived as different or 'other', building trust, connections and friendships which might not otherwise have been possible. That relationship building is also commonplace between teachers and

other professionals, facilitated via the collaboration and closer working of educational partners.

5.39   This is evidenced by findings outlined in the 2022 final PEACE IV Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Executive Summary):-

> *"Based on Impact Evaluation findings (summarised below), there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, and between practitioners/teachers in partner schools, as well as enhanced educational outcomes (for example increased confidence working in a diverse classroom, improved educational experiences achieved by access to educational resources/ equipment to enhance curricular subjects, which would not be available in the absence of funding). This coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established will create a legacy of the funding.*
>
> *A wide range of shared/reconciliation outcomes have been achieved over the last five 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."*
>
> **PEACE IV Shared Education Final Impact Evaluation (Executive Summary) (SJC Consultancy & National Children's Bureau; commissioned by SEUPB; published 2022)**

5.40   Again, this positive impact on good relations is backed up by the associated survey results undertaken with teachers and practitioners which informed the final impact evaluation, indicating that:

■   73% agreed or strongly agreed that participating in SfS/CASE has led to children making friends in the shared classroom.

5.41   It is worthwhile noting here that, whilst still positive, the above dropped markedly since the previous interim impact evaluation based on online survey results from Year 3 undertaken prior to the pandemic (was 93%). The report authors attribute this drop to the disruption caused by Covid-19 *"as face-to-face classes and connections were limited during the pandemic which impacted on the extent of friendships made when compared to the pre-Covid years-but once restrictions were lifted in term 3 this led to increased contact and relationships being developed."* [29]

5.42   Team working tasks and informal interactions were regarded as the optimum approach for nurturing such friendships. *"Again, the importance of physical, practical and team building activities was raised as contributing most to achieving shared/reconciliation benefits, which has been inhibited due to the aftermath of Covid-19 restrictions."* In feedback received, a practitioner also commented *"I believe the lack of face-to-face lessons prevented true rapport and natural friendships to be developed as would have been the case in previous years."*

5.43   Such observations serve to underline the importance of, and meaning attached to, in-person contact in supporting reconciliation outcomes, noted in the final Impact Evaluation *"thereby highlighting the need for this type of contact to build and cement bonds between children of partnering schools."* It is also important to stress in this context that whilst IT is appreciated as a key enabler of Shared Education and, as already noted, PEACE PLUS will explore vital opportunities to enhance the use of digital technologies including the potential of new and emerging technology, it is not a replacement or substitute for physical engagement in the same space.

5.44   Interestingly, in Year 5, 70% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the friendships made by children in the shared classroom extended into home/community life. This shows a significant increase from the previous year (Year 4) where only 19% agreed with this statement as contact was restricted at this time due to Covid-19, however it is also an uplift on that of pre-pandemic levels (was 61% in Year 3).

_____

29   Microsoft Word – Shared Education – infographic v2 (seupb.eu)

5.45   Furthermore:-

- 96% of teacher/practitioner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has fostered cross-community co-operation between practitioners/teachers across their partnership. Feedback was noted as supporting *"the reduction in cultural barriers and a more open, receptive approach to cross-community and cross-border sharing and collaboration, with sharing becoming increasingly 'normalised' within the pre-school and school routine."*

- 88% of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has improved cross-community understanding and relationships.

- Those partnerships involved in cross-border linkages are noted as having *"the added dimension and benefit of children experiencing a wider sense of community, outside their own jurisdiction."*

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

5.47   The following excerpt provides a flavour of the feedback derived from the focus groups undertaken with parents of children involved in PEACE IV projects which also paints a positive picture in terms of the impact on wider community relations:

"Parents feel that Shared Education has been extremely beneficial for their children, in terms of supporting friendship building, developing confidence, and giving children the opportunity to try new things and have broader social and educational experience. Parents reflected on how they have observed that their child has increased confidence and ability to mix and interact with new people, as well as improved self-esteem. They believe that these benefits will positively influence their child's engagement outside of school, helping them to mix with others in their neighbourhood or in local clubs and sporting activities more easily. Parents are pleased that children have had the chance to mix with those from different backgrounds that they would not have traditionally met before. This is important as many children live in small or predominantly single religion areas, therefore mixing would not have previously occurred. Parents note that in many cases this has led to genuine friendships, rather than just an awareness of others."

5.48   Some 89% of teachers/practitioners surveyed agreed that feedback from parents was either positive or very positive. Whilst an encouraging result overall, it does represent a decrease from Year 4 (96%) and Year 3 (97%), indicating that this is an area of focus for any future activities in a post-pandemic era.

5.49   In relation to positive feedback from the wider community, the corresponding figure was 70%, again with an acknowledgement that Covid-19 impacted upon engagement opportunities during the course of programme delivery.

5.50   The final PEACE IV Shared Education Impact Evaluation notes similar findings to the interim Impact Evaluation (Year 3), as highlighted in the last Report to the Assembly, in that when comparing both the pre-school and school based projects *"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".*

5.51   As mentioned, whilst Covid-19 restrictions are noted as having impeded progress on building such school-community links during the operation of the programme, it goes on to stress *"By promoting the benefits and allaying the concerns of the wider community will aid the sustainability of activities and will result in longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes."*

5.52   It is acknowledged from this, and from earlier programme evaluations such as the 2018 ETI evaluation of DSC SESP, that parental and community engagement is a key area for development with 'Community Connections' found to be, of the four pillars which make up the ETI Shared Education Self Evaluation Framework used by schools, the one with the least progress made; and that many partnerships experienced challenges in this regard.

5.53   Strengthening relationships with parents and wider community is also reflected in the MSE Strategy as a particular area requiring focus going forward given the crucial role played by both in terms of securing enhanced participation and collaboration, and in promoting awareness, understanding and acceptance of Shared Education across society.

5.54   Crucially, it is expected that the PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together programme, due to be operational over the coming reporting period pending the final outcome of an ongoing assessment process, will enhance provision in this regard, allowing opportunities for increased number of parents and community members to be directly involved in shared activities as it seeks to achieve *"Increased involvement of the wider school community including parents, grandparents, teachers, school managers; enabling the development of new and sustainable relationships, which contribute to a more cohesive society"*[30], with an active role, in particular, envisaged in terms of upskilling parents so they can better support their children's learning.

5.55   A range of other related findings, made available during this reporting period, also help to illustrate how Shared Education provision can enable and positively influence good relations.

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30   PEACE PLUS Programme 2021-27 Programme Overview (SEUPB; 2021)

5.56   For instance, the MSE partnerships reported in 2022/23 that 92% agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has had a positive impact on relations between partner settings and the wider community.

5.57   As referenced earlier in this report, an evaluation was carried out by Queen's University on the CSI TPL programme[31], supported as part of PEACE IV, which sought to respond to an identified need to increase teachers' capacity and confidence in addressing CSI in their practice, with the aim of an improved experience for pupils and enhancing the quality and depth of engagement with good relations through Shared Education.

5.58   That evaluation concluded that:

"The TPL Programme offered training to shared education partnerships that aimed to build teacher capacity for dealing with controversial and sensitive issues. The training was delivered through adoption of youth sector derived strategies in two main modes: group training for teachers, and youth worker/ teacher/partnership mentorship through the development and delivery of partnership projects.

A target short-term outcome of the training was that teachers would report greater confidence and competence to engage with sensitive and controversial issues through shared education. Longer-term, more substantive, and high-quality engagement with such issues is anticipated.

Our impact findings are consistent with achievement of short-term outcomes. Assessment on all confidence/competence scores indicated improvement from time point 1 (baseline) to time point 2 (post-training). Increases in participant confidence to facilitate dialogue and discussion in shared classes, manage strong emotions amongst pupils and respond to prejudice and discrimination are particularly notable."

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31   Evaluation of the Controversial and Sensitive Issues Teacher Professional Learning Programme; Report for the Education Authority (QUB; 2023)

5.59   In addition, evidence is also available via the latest YLT and KLT surveys. For example, in answer to a question about the number of close friends of a different religion made as a result of taking part in Shared Education, the 2022 survey reported that 38% of KLT and YLT respondents indicated that they had made at least one friend, outlined in the table below. Whilst this represented an increase on previous 2020/21 survey results for YLT (was 36%), it is significantly down from the corresponding KLT (was 55%). This may be attributable to the reduction in face-to-face pupil engagement due to Covid-19.

Table 10:
Number of close friends from a different religion made as a result of Shared Education

Close Friends from a Different Religion	YLT %	KLT %
None	43	41
One	6	11
2-4	19	18
5-9	8	5
10 or more	5	4
I don't know the religion of the friends I made	8	10
I don't know how many close friends I made	11	10
Total	**100**	**100**

5.60   More detailed information on YLT and KLT results are available in the next section which specifically deals with identity, diversity and community cohesion.

5.61   An important development based on learning from the Good Relations and Collaborative Education model of peacebuilding in education has been the development of a Trust Indicator Framework, examined in a report compiled by the charity Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) and the Centre for

Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, published in 2023[32]. Whilst not prescriptive or exhaustive, ten such trust indicators have been developed which provide a useful starting point for recording trust that can be implemented as part of a wider monitoring and evaluation process to help measure the impact that sharing and collaboration in education can make in terms of reconciliation outcomes.

Promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion

5.62   Some of the key 2022 YLT and KLT survey findings are set out below representing the results from two modules of questions commissioned by DE on Shared Education and lessons and discussion about different groups of people in our society (i.e. CRED).

5.63   This allowed comparison of attitudes towards those from Section 75 groups between those who had experience of Shared Education and those who had not, as well as comparison with corresponding results from earlier surveys.

Summary of key findings from the 2022 KLT and YLT surveys[33]

■   Just over half (51%) of YLT and 60 per cent of KLT respondents said they had been involved in Shared Education.

■   Doing projects with pupils from other schools was the most common shared activity (66% of YLT and 53% of KLT respondents).

■   Whilst generally very positive overall, YLT respondents enjoyed sharing equipment (90%) with other schools slightly more than having classes (80%) or doing projects (79%). KLT respondents also enjoyed sharing equipment (86%) and this was followed by doing projects (77%) and sharing classes (74%).

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32   Trusting GRACE: The development of trust indicators from the Good Relations and Collaborative Education (GRACE) model of schools-based peacebuilding (Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University; 2023)

33   Northern Ireland Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times Shared Education Research Brief (Department of Education; 2023)

- Thirty-eight per cent of both KLT and YLT respondents had made at least one close friend from a different religion as a result of taking part in Shared Education.

- Approximately two thirds of KLT (66%) and YLT (64%) respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they were better able to respect the views of other people since taking part in Shared Education.

- Just under half (48%) of KLT respondents and 61 per cent of YLT respondents said they were very favourable or favourable about Shared Education. Only a minority in both surveys were very unfavourable and more of the younger children. However, more KLT respondents said they did not know (19% KLT) compared to their older YLT counterparts (5% YLT).

- In the primary school setting, in the lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society, the topics the children were least likely to have discussed in school were political opinion (18% had not done this) and religious beliefs (16% had not done this). In contrast, only seven per cent said they had not any lessons or discussions on gender.

- Seventy-two per cent of YLT respondents said they have had lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society either in school or in their youth project/centre. Just over half (52%) of them said they have had these lessons and discussions in school only, 12 per cent said they have had them in the youth project/centre only, and seven per cent have had them in both settings.

- The topics YLT respondents had covered most often in the school setting were religious beliefs (76%) and ethnic groups (75%). In the youth setting, the topics covered most often were ethnic groups (71%) and religious beliefs (69%).

- One third (33%) of KLT respondents and 40 per cent of YLT respondents said they would like their school to be part of a SEC; 44% KLT and 35% YLT respondents said they did not know whether they would like their school to be part of a shared campus or not.

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■ There has been a decrease in the percentages of respondents who said they had done projects with pupils from other schools, had classes with pupils from other schools and shared facilities among the YLT and KLT respondents between 2020/21 and 2022.

5.64 Respondents were asked, as in previous surveys, whether they felt better able to respect the views of other people since taking part in Shared Education. Approximately two thirds of respondents (66% KLT and 64% YLT) either strongly agreed or agreed that they were, as outlined in the below table.

Table 11:
Better able to respect the views of others as a result of Shared Education

	YLT %	KLT %
Strongly Agree	26	27
Agree	38	39
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23	17
Disagree	6	2
Strongly Disagree	2	3
I don't know	5	12
Total	**100**	**100**

5.65 YLT respondents were asked whether or not they had taken part in lessons and discussions about different groups of people in society. Just over half (52%) said that they had in school only; 12 per cent said they had them in their youth project or youth centre only, and seven per cent had them in both settings. No corresponding question was asked in the KLT, although children were specifically asked if they felt they had not had such lessons and discussions about different groups.

5.66 Both surveys analysed those respondents who indicated that they felt that they had not had lessons and discussions about different groups of people

in our society in school, by whether or not they have taken part in Shared Education.

Table 12:
Percentage of KLT respondents who feel they have not had lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society, by whether or not they have taken part in Shared Education

	Have not had lessons and discussions on this topic %
People with different religious beliefs	
Has done Shared Education	14
Has not done Shared Education	19
People from different ethnic groups	
Has done Shared Education	10
Has not done Shared Education	12
People of different ages (older and younger people/children)	
Has done Shared Education	9
Has not done Shared Education	11
Girls and boys	
Has done Shared Education	6
Has not done Shared Education	9
People with a disability and those without a disability	
Has done Shared Education	8
Has not done Shared Education	9
People with different political opinions	
Has done Shared Education	17
Has not done Shared Education	19

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5.67   Note here given the age of respondents in the KLT, they were not asked about sexual orientation, marital status or people with dependants (i.e. questions cover six out of nine Section 75 groups in total).

5.68   As shown in the table above, across all Section 75 groups asked in KLT, more respondents who had not done Shared Education said they had not had lessons and discussions in school about different groups of people in our society than their peers who had done Shared Education, although the differences were relatively small. The largest difference in percentages was for 'people with different religious beliefs' (14% and 19% respectively).

5.69   The results of the corresponding question in the YLT are outlined below. With the exception of the categories of marital status and caring responsibilities, children and young people who have not done Shared Education were more likely to say they felt they had not had lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society.

Table 13:
Percentage of YLT respondents' who feel they have not had lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society in school, by whether or not they have taken part in Shared Education

	Have not had lessons and discussions on this topic IN SCHOOL %
People with different political opinions*	
All	39
Has done Shared Education	36
Has not done Shared Education	44
People with different religious beliefs*	
All	24
Has done Shared Education	21
Has not done Shared Education	28
People from different ethnic groups	
All	25
Has done Shared Education	23
Has not done Shared Education	28

	Have not had lessons and discussions on this topic IN SCHOOL %
People of different ages (older and younger people)	
All	43
Has done Shared Education	42
Has not done Shared Education	44
People who are single, cohabiting, married or divorced	
All	45
Has done Shared Education	46
Has not done Shared Education	44
People with different sexual orientations	
All	43
Has done Shared Education	42
Has not done Shared Education	43
Men and Women	
All	34
Has done Shared Education	32
Has not done Shared Education	36
People with a disability and those without a disability	
All	33
Has done Shared Education	31
Has not done Shared Education	37
People with dependants (eg children) and those without	
All	59
Has done Shared Education	58
Has not done Shared Education	59
People with caring responsibilities and those without caring responsibilities	
All	54
Has done Shared Education	54
Has not done Shared Education	54

p<0.05 Effect sizes range from 0.086-0.089 (small)

5.70　In terms of school types, respondents (KLT only) who attended Controlled primary schools were more likely to say they had not had lessons and discussions on all six groups asked about although, once again, the differences were relatively small. The YLT survey did not include any corresponding analysis by school type.

Table 14:
Percentage of KLT respondents who feel they have not had lessons anddiscussions about different groups of people in our society, by school type

		KLT
		Have not had lessons and discussions on this topic %
People with different religious beliefs		
School Type	Catholic Maintained	14
	Controlled	20
	Integrated	14
	Other	10
People from different ethnic groups		
School Type	Catholic Maintained	9
	Controlled	13
	Integrated	8
	Other	7
People of different ages (older and younger people)		
School Type	Catholic Maintained	9
	Controlled	12
	Integrated	7
	Other	10
Girls and Boys		
School Type	Catholic Maintained	7
	Controlled	8
	Integrated	6
	Other	4

	KLT
	Have not had lessons and discussions on this topic %
People with a disability and those without a disability	
School Type Catholic Maintained Controlled Integrated Other	8 9 9 3
People with different political opinions	
School Type Catholic Maintained Controlled Integrated Other	18 19 16 18

5.71   A higher percentage of YLT respondents who had done Shared Education said they had become more favourable towards all of the Section 75 groups as a result of having lessons and discussion about different groups of people in our society than their peers who had not done Shared Education. This is highlighted in the following table. However, more of those who had not done Shared Education said they had not changed in their opinion: they were still as favourable as they were before having lessons and discussions.

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Table 15:

Whether or not YLT respondents' attitudes have changed as a result of lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society, by whether or not they have taken part in Shared Education

Attitudes towards people...	Favourable %				Unfavourable %			
	More Favourable		No Change - as favourable as I was		No Change - as unfavourable as I was		More Unfavourable	
	Has done Shared Education	Has not done Shared Education	Has done Shared Education	Has not done Shared Education	Has done Shared Education	Has not done Shared Education	Has done Shared Education	Has not done Shared Education
With different political opinions	28	20	65	70	6	9	1	1
With different religious beliefs	31	26	62	69	6	5	1	<1
From different ethnic groups	30	22	64	72	5	5	1	1
Of different ages (older and younger people/ children)	23	18	72	76	5	6	<1	<1
Who are single, cohabiting, married or divorced	22	16	72	78	5	6	1	1
With different sexual orientations	26	19	67	70	6	9	2	1
Men and Women	24	18	70	76	5	5	1	1
With a disability and those without a disability	30	22	68	74	3	4	0	1
People with dependants (eg children) and those without	22	16	71	80	5	3	2	1
People with, and those without, caring responsibilities	22	16	72	78	5	5	1	0

5.72   For KLT respondents who were asked similar questions, a slightly higher percentage of children who had done Shared Education said they had become more positive in relation to all of the Section 75 groups asked in the survey as a result of having lessons and discussions in school than their peers who had not done Shared Education. The differences were statistically significant for two groups – religious beliefs and political opinion although the effects sizes were small. This is illustrated in following Table 16.

5.73   Once again, however, where children indicated that their attitude had not changed it is not clear whether they were already positive or negative towards any of these groups before having had lessons and discussions in school.

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Table 16:

Whether or not KLT respondents' attitudes have changed as a result of lessons and discussions about different groups of people in our society, by whether or not they have taken part in Shared Education

	More Positive (%)	Attitude has not changed (%)	More Negative (%)
People with different religious beliefs**			
Has done Shared Education	48	49	3
Has not done Shared Education	42	54	4
People from different ethnic groups			
Has done Shared Education	51	47	2
Has not done Shared Education	48	50	2
People of different ages (older and younger people/children)			
Has done Shared Education	45	52	3
Has not done Shared Education	42	55	3
Girls and boys			
Has done Shared Education	40	58	3
Has not done Shared Education	36	61	2
People with a disability and those without a disability			
Has done Shared Education	56	42	2
Has not done Shared Education	54	44	2
People with different political opinions**			
Has done Shared Education	29	64	7
Has not done Shared Education	25	69	6

**p<0.01 (Effect sizes 0.058 (small)

5.74 In general, of those who had done Shared Education, almost half of KLT respondents (48%) were either favourable or very favourable to Shared Education in general which is down from the last 2020/21 survey (58%). Amongst YLT respondents however, those who said they were favourable or very favourable had increased to 61%, up from 55% in 2020/21.

5.75   The final PEACE IV Shared Education Impact Evaluation outlines that *"SFTS and CASE target pre-schools/schools of differing ownership, sectoral identity, and ethos. They are inclusive and focused on promoting good relations, respect for diversity, mutual understanding, and the promotion of community cohesion"*.

5.76   Under the 'Dealing with Differences' section, the final PEACE IV Impact Evaluation states that *"The contact facilitated by Shared Education aims to have positive impacts on intergroup attitudes and behaviours, including a reduction in prejudice and promotion of more harmonious intergroup relations by being able to understand and deal with difference in whatever form it occurs. The shared sessions have nurtured equality and diversity, allowing all children the opportunity to participate and learn from one another."*

5.77   Related survey findings for the same final Impact Evaluation (Year 5 of the programme) revealed that:-

■   79% of teachers/practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that children feel comfortable and at ease when taking part in shared classes. Associated commentary in the evaluation notes:

"whilst this is a positive verification of the level of ease which children feel in each other's company, it does show a reduction from previous years (Year 4: 84% and Year 3: 93%) which may be explained by the uncertainty emanating from the pandemic and transition to virtual contact (Year 4) and now to the adoption of a bended approach (Year 5). In Year 3 research was conducted prior to the first Covid-19 lockdown when shared classes were conducted face-to-face providing enhanced opportunities for children to interact and mix within a shared class environment."

■   72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others in a shared classroom. Again, whilst this is a positive finding and demonstrates that children are comfortable in each other's company, it does represent a decrease from results in Year 4 and Year 3 (82% and 85% respectively).

5.78   Complementary to this, it is pleasing to note that, as reflected in the MSE 2022/23 OBA report cards, based on interim monitoring and evaluation arrangements, almost all those partnerships (97%) taking part in mainstreamed structures in its initial year agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has had a positive impact on pupils' respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

"

Shared Education adds to the educational experiences that schools offer and I wholeheartedly have never experienced such a rewarding, valuable and beneficial project like PEACE IV. Shared Education is the way forward, the way to promote good practice and to celebrate all that is good.

"

"

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

"

(PEACE IV Shared Education Final Impact Evaluation October 2022)

6 NEXT STEPS

6.1   Looking ahead to the next reporting period, the Department, building on the successful collaboration with stakeholders in delivering funded streams to date, will continue to strengthen relationships and further embed partnership working across the system, including via the recently established Shared Education Stakeholder Forum.

6.2   In conjunction with a range of key stakeholders, the Department will continue to implement the MSE Strategy through its phased delivery plans, seeking primarily to increase participation levels through maximising pupil engagement in existing partnerships and working towards the establishment of new partnerships across both formal and non-formal educational settings yet to be involved.

6.3   The opportunities presented by PEACE PLUS will be a key enabler in this area over the coming years. The Department will continue to engage closely with SEUPB and RoI colleagues firstly in terms of finalising the assessment and reaching decisions on all successful projects making up the overall Shared Learning Together programme, and then to further plan, prepare for and support the implementation and delivery of those projects as we move forward. These forthcoming projects will seek to incorporate new or additional elements designed to enhance and amplify the provision of shared learning, leading to improved outcomes for children and young people, for example, a focus on addressing educational disadvantage, enhanced use of digital technologies and greater levels of direct engagement of parents.

6.4   Other key areas of work will involve continuing to build capacity across the education workforce, so that all those involved in delivering or supporting Shared Education have the requisite skills, experience, and ability to carry out their role; and the provision of the necessary support and resources to enable partnerships to deliver quality shared learning experiences for children and young people. Much of this work is dependent on the availability of funding and the continued collaboration with stakeholders.

6.5   Both PEACE IV Shared Education projects, CASE and SfS, have now
        completed project delivery and the closure process, inclusive of a Post
        Project Evaluation (PPE) review, is now underway. The PPE findings will be
        useful in capturing any lessons learned from those concluded projects which
        can inform future delivery of Shared Education as we move forward.

6.6   The Shared Education cross-organisational Communications Group will
        continue to develop and implement annual operational plans designed to
        raise awareness of Shared Education within and beyond the education
        system, so that the purpose, benefits and impact of Shared Education are
        communicated, promoted and understood widely.

6.7   Another key focus of the next reporting period will be the development of
        a co-designed MSE Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to assess the
        impact of Shared Education delivery in participating partnerships, including
        the consistent measurement of educational benefits and attitudinal change at
        both partnership and system levels.

6.8   In tandem with this, the Department will continue to consider governance and
        accountability arrangements to support leaders in the education system to
        provide quality shared learning experiences which provide value for money.

6.9   Work will continue to further develop the community connections dimension
        of Shared Education partnerships through closer working relationships
        with District Councils and other key stakeholders, building on previous
        collaborative practice and identifying new opportunities in the delivery of
        other DE and wider government policy areas.

6.10   The Strule and SEC projects will continue to be progressed in line with
        confirmation of access to funding and approved business cases. Evaluating
        the SECs will be a key consideration as they come into operation, to include
        the OBA Evaluation of the Limavady SEC.

7.   CONCLUSION

7.1   It is clear from the series of statutory reports laid to the Assembly to date that significant progress has been made over recent years in advancing Shared Education. This latest report highlights that, despite the challenges of the last couple of years, progress has continued through delivery of relevant Shared Education funding streams, alongside continued planning and development of the new PEACE PLUS programme.

7.2   The Department and the EA continue to comply with their respective duties to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education. So too, the other educational and sectoral bodies impacted by the legislation have exercised the powers granted by the Act to encourage and facilitate Shared Education and, where required, have also complied with the statutory duty to consider Shared Education.

7.3   The introduction of the MSE Strategy, and the successful implementation of its first phase delivery plan, is a major step forward during this reporting period in the advancement of Shared Education.

7.4   Significant resource investment supporting pupil engagement from the Department and via the Northern Ireland Executive and the EU, alongside a growing and positive culture of collaboration between partners, has continued the process of embedding Shared Education throughout our education system and has resulted in participation rates, severely impacted by the pandemic, gradually increasing back towards pre-Covid levels.

7.5   In addition, the Executive recently pledged to provide £150 million of earmarked additional funding, over the next three years, to deliver the Strule Campus. This represents a significant investment into the largest education construction project ever delivered in Northern Ireland.

7.6   The benefits of engaging in Shared Education continue to be realised. A variety of sources, including recent programme evaluations, research and surveys, have provided further evidence of the impact of the collaboration

and shared learning experiences across religious and socio-economic divides, facilitated through Shared Education provision.

7.7 For example, the results captured through the interim monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the initial cohort of experienced partnerships making the transition to a mainstreamed environment in 2022/23 highlight the positive impact of Shared Education, reported by schools and other settings, both in terms of pupils' educational outcomes and on respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion and on relations between partner settings and the wider community.

7.8 As already highlighted in Chapter 5, it is worth re-emphasising the following excerpt from the 2022 PEACE IV Shared Education Final Impact Evaluation which serves to underline the effectiveness of Shared Education, in line with the purpose set out in the Act and outlines a clear rationale for continuing our efforts to further embed sharing right across the education system.

"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, cross-community relations; and educational outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, and practitioners/teachers, as well as societal outcomes for children, parents, and the wider community."

7.9 Key areas for development over the next reporting period will focus on taking forward a wide range of actions outlined in delivery plans which support implementation of the MSE Strategy over the medium and longer term. PEACE PLUS is a significant programme which will be a key driver in advancing Shared Education over the next five years.

7.10 In conclusion, whilst good progress has continued to be made over the latest reporting period towards further advancing Shared Education, especially in light of the challenging circumstances which have faced (and continue to face) the education sector as a whole, we acknowledge the collective work still required to realise the vision as outlined in the MSE Strategy:

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

7.11 The Department, working in collaboration with stakeholders, is committed to achieving that ultimate goal and ensuring all children and young people have the opportunity to participate and benefit from shared learning, benefits which can reach far beyond the boundaries of our schools and educational settings, impacting on us all.

> *"Shared Education has been essential in our rural community to break down barriers and help confront prejudices."*
>
> *"Shared Education proved invaluable for reconnecting links with partnership schools, sharing good practice and providing opportunities for children to explore new settings and friendships with a wider community following on from Covid-19."*
>
> **Leadership Voices**
>
> **(Mainstreaming Shared Education 22/23 OBA Report Card)**

Table 1a   Number of Educational Establishments in Northen Ireland by Management Type 2020/21

	Management Type	Schools
Nursery Schools	Controlled	64
	Catholic Maintained	31
	TOTAL	**95**
Primary Schools	Controlled	360
	Catholic Maintained	358
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	25
	Other Maintained - Other	3
	Controlled Integrated	22
	Grant Maintained Integrated	23
	TOTAL	**791**
	Grammar school prep depts.[34]	12
	Total Including Prep Departments	**803**
Post Primary Schools - Secondary	Controlled	48
	Catholic Maintained	57
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	2
	Controlled Integrated	5
	Grant Maintained Integrated	15
	TOTAL	**127**
Post Primary Schools - Grammar	Controlled	16
	Voluntary Schools under Catholic management	29
	Voluntary Schools under other management	21
	TOTAL	**66**
	Total Post Primary Schools	**193**
	Special Schools	39
	Hospital Schools	1
	Independent Schools	15
	All schools GRAND TOTAL (excl Prep Depts)	**1,134**
Voluntary and Private Pre-schools		362
	Total schools and Pre-school education centres	**1,496**

Source: Northern Ireland school census

34   Part of Grammar Schools

Table 1b   Number of Educational Establishments in Northen Ireland by Management Type 2022/23

	Management Type	Schools
Nursery Schools	Controlled Catholic Maintained Controlled Integrated	60 31 2
	TOTAL	**93**
Primary Schools	Controlled Catholic Maintained Other Maintained - Irish Medium Other Maintained - Other Controlled Integrated Grant Maintained Integrated	354 354 25 2 24 23
	TOTAL	**782**
	Grammar school prep depts.[35]	12
	Total Including Prep Departments	**794**
Post Primary Schools - Secondary	Controlled Catholic Maintained Other Maintained - Irish Medium Controlled Integrated Grant Maintained Integrated	47 56 2 6 15
	TOTAL	**126**
Post Primary Schools - Grammar	Controlled Voluntary Schools under Catholic management Voluntary Schools under other management	16 29 21
	TOTAL	**66**
	Total Post Primary Schools	**192**
	Special Schools Hospital Schools Independent Schools	39 1 14
	All schools GRAND TOTAL (excl Prep Depts)	**1,121**
Voluntary and Private Pre-schools		349
	Total schools and Pre-school education centres	**1,470**

Source: Northern Ireland school census

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35   Part of Grammar Schools

ADVANCING SHARED EDUCATION
4th Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly

Table 2a   Religion of Pupils by School Type and Management Type 2021/22

	Management Type	Protestant	Catholic	Other/Not Recorded	Total
Voluntary and Private Pre-school Centres (funded children only)	Voluntary	1,525	3,059	1,683	6,267
	Private	341	339	380	1,060
	TOTAL	**1,866**	**3,398**	**2,063**	**7,327**
Nursery Schools	Controlled	1,677	1,110	1,252	4,039
	Catholic Maintained	21	1,445	264	1,730
	Controlled Integrated	6	15	5	26
	TOTAL	**1,704**	**2,570**	**1,521**	**5,795**
Nursery Classes & Reception	Controlled	2,094	570	1,963	4,627
	Catholic Maintained	61	3,610	312	3,983
	Other Maintained	40	344	76	460
	Controlled Integrated	39	44	56	139
	Grant Maintained Integrated	160	229	219	608
	TOTAL	**2,394**	**4,797**	**2,626**	**9,817**
Primary Schools (Years 1 - 7)	Controlled	45,569	6,120	26,206	77,895
	Catholic Maintained	650	73,209	4,157	78,016
	Other Maintained	251	3,110	356	3,717
	Controlled Integrated	1,620	1,260	1,855	4,735
	Grant Maintained Integrated	1,865	2,496	2,071	6,432
	TOTAL	**49,955**	**86,195**	**34,645**	**170,795**
Prep. Departments (Years 1 - 7)	**TOTAL**	**559**	**225**	**746**	**1,530**
Secondary Schools (Non Grammar)	Controlled	23,072	1,457	6,949	31,478
	Catholic Maintained	724	37,378	2,041	40,143
	Other Maintained	5	1,042	66	1,113
	Controlled Integrated	1,656	592	992	3,240
	Grant Maintained Integrated	3,741	4,326	2,547	10,614
	TOTAL	**29,198**	**44,795**	**12,595**	**86,588**
Grammar Schools (Year 8-Year 14)	Controlled	9,457	1,697	3,514	14,668
	Voluntary - Catholic Maintained	420	28,120	1,208	29,748
	Voluntary - Other Maintained	11,828	3,173	5,896	20,897
	TOTAL	**21,705**	**32,990**	**10,618**	**65,313**
Special Schools	Controlled	2,059	2,531	1,627	6,217
	Catholic Maintained	9	314	29	352
	Other Maintained	26	28	30	84
	TOTAL	**2,094**	**2,873**	**1,686**	**6,653**
EOTAS Centres		**6**	**13**	**9**	**28**
ALL FUNDED PRE-SCHOOL, NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS and EOTAS Centres		**109,481**	**177,856**	**66,509**	**353,846**

Source: Northern Ireland school census
Data is based on pupils enrolled on Census day.

Table 2b   Religion of Pupils by School Type and Management Type 2022/23

School & Management Type		Protestant	Catholic	Other/ Christian/ Non-Christian/ No Religion / Not Recorded	Total
Voluntary and Private Pre-school Centres (funded children only)	Voluntary	1,286	2,925	1,778	5,989
	Private	341	294	419	1,054
	TOTAL	**1,627**	**3,219**	**2,197**	**7,043**
Nursery Schools	Controlled	1,665	1,071	1,221	3,957
	Catholic Maintained	32	1,450	253	1,735
	Controlled Maintained	43	24	37	104
	TOTAL	**1,740**	**2,545**	**1,511**	**5,796**
Nursery Classes & Reception[2]	Controlled	2,059	584	2,017	4,660
	Catholic Maintained	67	3,558	340	3,965
	Other Maintained	32	319	106	457
	Controlled Integrated	52	65	68	185
	Grant Maintained Integrated	128	226	255	609
	TOTAL	**2,338**	**4,752**	**2,786**	**9,876**
Primary Schools (Years 1 - 7)	Controlled	43,914	6,156	27,451	77,521
	Catholic Maintained	643	72,027	4,651	77,321
	Other Maintained	252	3,050	416	3,718
	Controlled Integrated	1,532	1,260	1,865	4,657
	Grant Maintained Integrated	1,809	2,512	2,184	6,505
	TOTAL	**48,150**	**85,005**	**36,567**	**169,722**
Prep. Departments (Years 1 - 7)	Controlled	#	*	46	80
	Voluntary	#	#	711	1,397
	TOTAL	**490**	**230**	**757**	**1,477**
Secondary Schools (Non Grammar)	Controlled	22,511	1,498	7,457	31,466
	Catholic Maintained	742	37,780	2,302	40,824
	Other Maintained	*	#	64	1,177
	Controlled Integrated	#	#	1,272	4,258
	Grant Maintained Integrated	3,714	4,381	2,770	10,865
	TOTAL	**29,269**	**45,456**	**13,865**	**88,590**
Grammar Schools (Year 8-Year 14)	Controlled	9,231	1,786	3,697	14,714
	Voluntary - under Catholic Management	414	28,168	1,414	29,996
	Voluntary - under Other Management	11,672	3,223	6,117	21,012
	TOTAL	**21,317**	**33,177**	**11,228**	**65,722**
Special Schools	Controlled	2,050	2,657	1,756	6,463
	Catholic Maintained	11	331	37	379
	Other Maintained	26	29	33	88
	TOTAL	**2,087**	**3,017**	**1,826**	**6,930**
EOTAS Centres		6	10	5	21
ALL FUNDED PRE-SCHOOL, NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS		**107,018**	**177,401**	**70,737**	**355,156**
ALL FUNDED PRE-SCHOOL, NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY, SPECIAL SCHOOLS and EOTAS Centres		**107,024**	**177,411**	**70,742**	**355,177**

ADVANCING SHARED EDUCATION
4th Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly

Table 3a   Free School Meal Entitlement[1, 4] by School Type and Management Type 2021/22[R]

School & Management Type		Number	Enrolment	Percentage
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Centres (funded places only)	Voluntary	997	6,267	15.9
	Private	81	1,060	7.6
Total		**1,078**	**7,327**	**14.7**
Nursery Schools (Full-time)	Controlled	1,109	2,329	47.6
	Catholic Maintained	847	1,574	53.8
	Controlled Integrated	6	26	23.1
Total		**1,962**	**3,929**	**49.9**
Nursery Schools (Part-time)	Controlled	285	1,710	16.7
	Catholic Maintained	12	156	7.7
Total		**297**	**1,866**	**15.9**
Nursery Classes (Full-time)	Controlled	996	2,279	43.7
	Catholic Maintained	1,060	2,389	44.3
	Other Maintained	123	284	43.3
	Controlled Integrated	42	76	55.3
	Grant Maintained Integrated	54	135	40.0
Total		**2,275**	**5,163**	**44.0**
Nursery Classes (Part-time)	Controlled	302	2,306	13.1
	Catholic Maintained	244	1,505	16.2
	Other Maintained	40	176	22.7
	Controlled Integrated	12	45	26.7
	Grant Maintained Integrated	78	473	16.5
Total		**676**	**4,505**	**15.0**
Reception pupils		21	149	14.3
TOTAL PRE-SCHOOL		**6,309**	**22,939**	**27.5**
Primary Schools (Year 1 - Year 7)	Controlled	21,461	77,895	27.6
	Catholic Maintained	23,977	78,016	30.7
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	1,302	3,377	38.6
	Other Maintained - Other	35	340	10.3
	Controlled Integrated	1,517	4,735	32.0
	Grant Maintained Integrated	1,693	6,432	26.3
Total		**49,985**	**170,795**	**29.3**
Prep Departments		19	1,530	1.2
ALL PRIMARY AND PREP YEAR 1-7 PUPILS		**50,004**	**172,325**	**29.0**

School & Management Type		Number	Enrolment	Percentage
Secondary (Non Grammar) Schools	Controlled	10,597	31,478	33.7
	Catholic Maintained	15,327	40,143	38.2
	Other Maintained	520	1,113	46.7
	Controlled Integrated	1,157	3,240	35.7
	Grant Maintained Integrated	3,691	10,614	34.8
Total		**31,292**	**86,588**	**36.1**
Grammar Schools	Controlled	1,767	14,668	12.0
	Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management[R]	5,015	29,748	16.9
	Voluntary - Schools under Other Management[R]	1,980	20,897	9.5
Total		**8,762**	**65,313**	**13.4**
All Post-Primary Schools		**40,054**	**151,901**	**26.4**
All Primary & Post-Primary Schools		**90,058**	**324,226**	**27.8**
All Special Schools		**3,515**	**6,653**	**52.8**
EOTAS Centres		0	28	0.0
All Nursery, Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools[5]		**98,804**	**346,491**	**28.5**
All Nursery, Primary, Post-Primary, Special Schools and EOTAS Centres[5]		**98,804**	**346,519**	**28.5**

1. Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance where an award of income-based job-seekers allowance has been converted and the amount of the award remains unchanged; and Universal Credit are some of the benefits which determine eligibility for free school meals. As school meals are not universally available to children in pre-school education, parental receipt of these benefits is a better indicator of social disadvantage for the pre-school sector. Pupils who are recorded as entitled to free school meals in nursery classes in primary schools are also included in the totals.

2. Percentages express the number of children in funded places whose parents were in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance where an award of income-based job-seekers allowance has been converted and the amount of the award remains unchanged; and Universal Credit at the time of first application for admission, as a proportion of all children in funded places. Thus, for example, 43.7% of children in full-time places in controlled nursery schools had parents in receipt of these benefits.

3. Enrolments for special schools and EOTAS centres relate those where pupils are single registered to the school, or are dual registered and the special school/EOTAS centre is recorded as the main school.

4. Due to a large number of late or incomplete free school meal applications, DE and the EA agreed to an extension to the date used for the purposes of assessing schools' Free School Meals entitlement numbers. Normally children must be entitled on census day this was extended to 5th November.

5. Excludes Voluntary and Private Preschools

R This table was revised to account for 2 additional FSME pupils in grammar schools

Table 3b   Free School Meal Entitlement by School Type and Management Type 2022/23

School & Management Type		Number	Enrolment	Percentage
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Centres (funded places only)	Voluntary	944	5,989	15.8
	Private	85	1,054	8.1
Total		**1,029**	**7,043**	**14.6**
Nursery Schools (Full-time)	Controlled	1,110	2,277	48.7
	Catholic Maintained	812	1,578	51.5
	Controlled Integrated	31	52	59.6
Total		**1,953**	**3,907**	**50.0**
Nursery Schools (Part-time)	Controlled	279	1,680	16.6
	Catholic Maintained	15	157	9.6
	Controlled Integrated	-	52	-
Total		**294**	**1,889**	**15.6**
Nursery Classes (Full-time)[4]	Controlled	993	2,311	43.0
	Catholic Maintained	1,038	2,366	43.9
	Other Maintained	122	282	43.3
	Controlled Integrated	51	78	65.4
	Grant Maintained Integrated	59	132	44.7
Total		**2,263**	**5,169**	**43.8**
Nursery Classes (Part-time)[4]	Controlled	263	2,291	11.5
	Catholic Maintained	256	1,509	17.0
	Other Maintained	16	175	9.1
	Controlled Integrated	15	78	19.2
	Grant Maintained Integrated	110	477	23.1
Total		**660**	**4,530**	**14.6**
Reception pupils		32	177	18.1
TOTAL PRE-SCHOOL		**6,231**	**22,715**	**27.4**
Primary Schools (Year 1 - Year 7)	Controlled	20,722	77,521	26.7
	Catholic Maintained	23,114	77,321	29.9
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	1,231	3,367	36.6
	Other Maintained - Other	28	351	8.0
	Controlled Integrated	1,458	4,657	31.3
	Grant Maintained Integrated	1,647	6,505	25.3
Total		**48,200**	**169,722**	**28.4**
Prep Departments		19	1,477	1.3
ALL PRIMARY AND PREP YEAR 1-7 PUPILS		**48,219**	**171,199**	**28.2**

School & Management Type		Number	Enrolment	Percentage
Secondary (Non Grammar) Schools	Controlled	10,279	31,466	32.7
	Catholic Maintained	14,970	40,824	36.7
	Other Maintained	496	1,177	42.1
	Controlled Integrated	1,538	4,258	36.1
	Grant Maintained Integrated	3,659	10,865	33.7
Total		**30,942**	**88,590**	**34.9**
Grammar Schools	Controlled	1,645	14,714	11.2
	Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management	4,828	29,996	16.1
	Voluntary - Schools under Other Management	1,881	21,012	9.0
Total		**8,354**	**65,722**	**12.7**
All Post-Primary Schools		**39,296**	**154,312**	**25.5**
All Primary & Post-Primary Schools		**87,515**	**325,511**	**26.9**
All Special Schools		**3,602**	**6,930**	**52.0**
All Nursery, Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools[3]		**96,319**	**348,113**	**27.7**

1. Figures for pupils in nursery schools/units and pre-schools include parents who are entitled to receive Income Support, or Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance, or Employment Support Allowance where an award of income-based job-seekers allowance has been converted; and Universal Credit are some of the benefits which determine eligibility for free school meals.
2. Due to a large number of late or incomplete free school meal applications, DE and the EA agreed to an extension to the date used for the purposes of assessing schools' Free School Meals entitlement numbers. Normally children must be entitled on census day this was extended to 5th November.
3. Excludes Voluntary and Private Preschools
4. Figures include full time and part time pupils who are enrolled in nursery settings that are not part of PSEP but are rather in Specialist Provision for preschool aged pupils.
5. PSEP overview - Pre-school education places | nidirect

ADVANCING SHARED EDUCATION
4th Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly