



Learning from each other - sharing in education

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Introduction and context

Shared education has grown and progressed in Northern Ireland since the 1980s.

The Shared Education Act in 2016 placed a statutory duty on the Department of Education and the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. Through the Act other arm's length bodies, including sectoral bodies, have a power to encourage and facilitate shared education.

The number of schools involved in shared education partnerships has grown significantly over recent years and the availability of funding through the Shared Education Signature Project and Peace IV funds has enabled many more projects to develop.

Shared education in the controlled sector

Recent figures (2018) from the Department of Education show that 267 controlled schools were involved in shared education partnerships with schools from other sectors through the Shared Education Signature Project and Peace IV programmes¹. These figures do not take into account shared education projects funded through other funding streams including T:BUC, or those which are not externally funded.

Shared education partnerships have developed between schools in the controlled sector and those in the Catholic maintained, other maintained, voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated sectors. A wide range of partnerships across each of the phases in the sector exist.

Exploring the perspective of controlled schools

Shared education projects deliver educational benefits to children, enable schools to access and share resources and support pupils and school staff to build relationships and engage with those from different backgrounds and cultures. Shared education adds to the educational experiences schools offer.

In autumn 2018 the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) identified a range of schools from across the sector that are involved in shared education.

CSSC conducted interviews with leaders in the identified schools about their shared education projects. The interviews explored the history of the shared education partnerships and how they have progressed and developed. Leaders also discussed the benefits and challenges of shared education.

The interviews provide insight into some of the types of shared education projects which exist and the partnerships that have developed across sectors. This includes a range of

¹ At March 2018, see DE (2018) Advancing shared education – report to the Northern Ireland Assembly, available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Shared%20Education%20-%20Report%20to%20Assembly%20May%202018_2.pdf, p29.

projects, from schools just embarking on shared education to those who have progressed projects over decades.

Together the interviews give a flavour of how school partnerships approach shared education from the perspective of controlled school leaders across a range of phases.

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Jenny Lendrum, Antrim Grammar School

Nancy Magrath, Edenderry Nursery School

Jim Brown, Fair Hill Primary School and Nursery Unit

Simon Mowbray, Devenish College

Victor Coert, A Kincaid and C McAtee, Kilkeel High School

Jonathan Grey and Paul O’Gara, Arvalee Special School and Resource Centre

School overviews

Antrim Grammar School

Antrim Grammar, St Benedict's College (Randalstown) and Parkhill Integrated College began working together three years ago. The schools have developed a unified learning for life and work programme for Key Stage 3 pupils and have developed a number of joint projects, such as a joint student council and a programme focused on tackling underachievement. The three schools are also part of 'Moving Forward Together', a 19-school partnership comprised of all nursery, primary, special and post-primary schools in Antrim and Randalstown.

Arvalee Special School and Resource Centre

Partnership working is central to practice in Arvalee Special School. Since its establishment in 2004, a number of school and community links have been developed. Pupils at each phase engage in shared education. The completion of the Strule site will enable shared education to expand and develop further.

Castle Tower Special School

Castle Tower Special School is embarking on two new shared education projects. The nursery children will partner with Ballymena Nursery School and First Steps Nursery. This project, funded through 'Sharing from the Start' will focus on the medium of music. The primary project, in partnership with Clough Primary School, will begin with shared play, ICT and PE.

Devenish College

The Dutch Exchange Programme, which has been in place for over 15 years, was the beginning of shared working between Devenish College and St Joseph's College. This partnership also recently joined with two local primary schools through Project ENTHUSE. In recent years the college has also partnered with St Franchea's on a shared history project. In the 2018/19 school year all three post-primary schools began jointly working on a project through Peace IV funding focusing on art and music.

Edenderry Nursery School

Located in one of Northern Ireland's most divided interface areas, Edenderry Nursery and Holy Cross Nursery began working together over twenty years ago. Shared education is firmly embedded in the work of the schools and incorporates family and parent work. The schools have a dedicated family worker and families have the opportunity to take part in a residential at the end of the year. In 2017 the project was recognised by the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC).

Fair Hill Primary School and Nursery Unit

Fair Hill Primary School and St Colman's Primary School in Dromore first began working together in 2014 through a local rural development group. Through the Shared Education Signature Project they have developed shared education from nursery through to P7, basing the project on curricular topics and involving outside agencies to facilitate other activities. A P3 project in conjunction with the Amma Centre was rated as 'outstanding' by ETI and has become a model of good practice.

Garvagh Primary School

In partnership with St Patrick's and St John's Primary School, Garvagh Primary embarked on shared learning beginning with joint projects and trips between the school's P6 and P7 pupils. In the second year the project incorporated curricular activities and expanded the number of year groups involved. To encourage relationship building the schools introduced 'buddying up' for the younger children and small groups for older year groups.

Kilkeel High School

Over a decade ago Kilkeel High School began offering shared A Level classes in partnership with St Louis Grammar School. The project has evolved and now covers eight shared subject areas. The working relationship between the schools has led to sharing in many other areas including after-school activities and revision classes. In 2018 the schools began a joint Year 8 induction programme through T:BUC funding which they hope to develop in the coming years.

Knocknagoney Primary School

Relatively new to shared education, Knocknagoney Primary School and St Patrick's Primary began their partnership in 2018 through Peace IV funds. The project is curriculum based, focusing on ICT, technology and coding, areas of priority identified in both schools' development plans. The schools are in their second year and have expanded the project to involve all P3 to P6 children. It will increase to the whole school in the lifetime of the project.

Moy Regional Primary School

For over 25 years Moy Regional Primary and St John's Primary have collaborated on a series of shared education projects. The schools collaborate in a number of areas, including shared classes, a joint after-school club and joint summer schemes. Plans are in motion to develop a shared campus through the T:BUC shared education campuses programme. The site will include both schools as well as Moy area playgroup.

‘Educating for life’, progressing shared education - Antrim Grammar School

Mrs Jenny Lendrum, Principal

Antrim Grammar is part of a three-school shared education partnership with St Benedict’s College, Randalstown and Parkhall Integrated College in Antrim. The three schools are also involved in ‘Moving Forward Together’, an education, community and peace building partnership comprised of 19 nursery, primary, special and post-primary schools in the Antrim and Randalstown areas.

Though ‘Moving Forward Together’ many joint activities take place including staff training, numeracy, literacy and SEN work. Staff from across each of the schools can share good practice and support pupils from across all sectors and communities.

Developing post-primary connections

The three post-primary schools began working together formally through shared education three years ago. Funding through the Shared Education Signature Project allowed the schools to begin working on a unified ‘Learning for Life and Work Scheme of Work’. Teachers across the three schools planned and developed the lessons together and the team taught key lessons throughout the year. In the first year of the project, pupils in Year 8 from across the three schools received these lessons. In addition a joint student council was established and the prefects in each of the schools came together to focus on peer mediation and anti-bullying. There was an opportunity for staff development with the PE departments from the three schools joining together to learn about different sports including rugby, Gaelic, soccer and camogie.

In the second year the project focused on tackling underachievement. A total of 40 pupils were identified as needing support and took part in a volleyball themed leadership course. The pupils’ attitudes towards school improved over the course. In year two, teachers were included in developing the unified the Learning for Life and Work project for Year 9 pupils. Staff collaboration continued with Heads of Departments coming together to work on the new GCSE curriculum specifications which were introduced to all schools. Relationships between staff in each of the schools developed and working relationships outside of the shared education project have grown, leading to a greater level of partnership on all levels.

The schools are now in the third year of the project. By the end of this year all Key Stage 3 pupils will be involved in the Learning for Life and Work programme. The schools were successful in achieving Peace IV funding to enable the joint student council to work together on a project looking at the development of a 3G pitch on the Antrim Grammar site and its benefits for the community.

Educating for life

Commenting on the progression of shared education, Mrs Lendrum said “the concept of ‘them’ and ‘us’ between the schools has broken down, our pupils are now in constant contact with one another, it has brought our community closer together. We are now regularly sharing good practice. Friendships between pupils in different schools have grown and school staff have enhanced professional relationships at all levels.”

“We now celebrate success together as a community. We plan to extend this work further and engage with parents going forward.”

“There are challenges, particularly as we are at post-primary level and the logistics of matching timetables and calendars can be difficult. The benefits definitely outweigh these challenges. Our school’s motto is ‘Educating for Life’; to grow as a person a pupil must grow in character and in culture. Shared education gives pupils an understanding of who they are whilst growing mutual respect and understanding for other cultures.”

Embedding sharing for all pupils - Arvalee Special School and Resource Centre

Mr Jonathan Gray, Principal

Arvalee Special School opened in September 2004, after the amalgamation of Heatherbank School and Cranny School. The school accommodates for pupils age three to age 19 with moderate to severe learning difficulties.

The development of shared education and working in partnership with other schools and the wider community is central to Arvalee's School Development Plan. It is driven forward at a strategic level by the school's Board of Governors and the leadership team.

Commenting on the school's place in the community, Mr Gray said "our focus is on children learning together and shared education is fundamental to the whole school's development." Over the years Arvalee has built up many links with the community and local schools in Omagh.

Partnership working

A wide range of school partnerships have developed, from nursery schools to post primary provision. Shared working underpins the educational experience of children attending the school.

At each phase pupils are involved in shared education projects. For example, at nursery level, partnerships with a range of nursery schools in Omagh have enabled teacher planned 'playdays'. On these days groups of pupils visit each other's schools to play and learn together. Partner schools include Dún Uladh, Balinamullan and Holy Family Nursery.

At primary and post-primary level various projects have enabled pupils at Arvalee to engage with a wide range of pupils from other schools in the Omagh area. Projects vary from shared classes, including home economics, drama and music, to targeted programmes on themes such as business and enterprise. Shared sports programmes and a joint student council have also been developed.

In 2017/18, funding through the Signature Project enabled KS3 and KS4 pupils in Arvalee in partnership with Omagh High School, Omagh Academy, Omagh Christian Brothers Grammar School, Loreto Grammar School and Sacred Heart College to take part in a sports leadership development course. Part of the project was the 'Broadening Horizons Boccia Championship'. Commenting on the project, Mr Gray said "the project involved pupils working together on a par with each other. This impacts on relationship building and also has a positive community impact."

The Strule Campus

Around 12 years ago a proposal was put forward by the Western Education and Library Board to redevelop the former Lisnally Army Barracks site in Omagh to become a shared education campus.

Six local schools, including Arvalee Special School, Omagh High School, Omagh Academy, Omagh Christian Brothers Grammar School, Loreto Grammar School and Sacred Heart College will relocate to the new campus.

The site will include shared spaces such as a sports centre and education centre. Currently Arvalee is the only school on the Strule site. It is hoped that each of the schools will be relocated by 2023.

Building on good foundations

Working together with other schools is fundamental to school life in Arvalee Special School. Shared education takes many forms and is firmly embedded in school practice.

Highlighting the benefits, Mr Gray said, “shared education creates an environment of openness and challenges perceptions. Traditionally, pupils in special schools and those in mainstream schools had little contact; through school partnerships and shared projects children are working together, spending time together and learning together. It creates an atmosphere of understanding, acceptance and familiarity.”

Discussing the impact of partnership working between schools, Mr Gray said “education is relationship based; it is about teachers, principals and leaders working together for the benefit of the children. We are dedicated to ensuring that our children have the best learning experience and shared education is fundamental to achieving that vision.”

Through the development of the shared campus, the six schools, which already have strong working relationships, will be in close proximity with one another. This will remove some of the challenges around transport and the logistics of shared education projects.

Mr Grey concluded, “the shared education campus is a group of buildings. It is the people in those buildings that make the difference. The partnerships and relationships that already exist between our schools are founded on a dedication to embed shared learning and experiences for pupils. The shared campus will enable us to build on these relationships and further expand shared education.”

Building on common ground - Castle Tower Special School

Mrs Stephanie Caldwell, Primary Curriculum Senior Leader

Castle Tower has many links with other schools in the Ballymena area, particularly through the 'Ballymena Learning Together' community. However, an ETI inspection report in 2017 recommended that the school should begin a programme of formal shared education. Castle Tower embarked on its shared education journey at the beginning of the 2018/19 school year with two separate projects, one for nursery pupils and the second for primary pupils.

Sharing from the start

Through Peace IV's 'Sharing from the Start' programme, the nursery in Castle Tower linked with Ballymena Nursery School and First Steps Nursery, a playgroup located in the town centre. Ballymena Nursery shares the same site as Castle Tower with access between the two schools.

Teachers from the three settings chose music as the theme for the project. Mrs Caldwell commented "music is a natural inroad, it is a medium where all children are on a level playing field. Through music every child can enjoy, partake and not feel isolated. Using music we can explore sensory themes and 'personal, social and emotional development.'"

In total 12 joint sessions have been planned, taking place in Castle Tower School or on the Ballymena Nursery site. Each session will last the length of a typical school day. The project is teacher-led and will include external facilitators on some of the days, such as Jo Jingles and CJ's Musical group.

Sharing best practice

The project for primary school pupils will be carried out in partnership with Clough Primary School and will focus on pupils in P1, P2 and P7. Mrs Caldwell comments "The P1 and P2 classes will focus on developing shared play. Castle Tower is particularly strong in this area, therefore we saw this project as an opportunity to share best practice with Clough Primary." The P7 classes will share ICT and PE lessons. The project will be teacher-led and a total of 11 sessions will take place between the two schools.

Shared education is an opportunity for each of the schools involved to share expertise, resources and to learn from one another. Mrs Caldwell states, "staff in each of the schools have already started working together to share practices. We have expertise in special educational needs and can share this with mainstream schools. We are bridging a gap and learning from each other."

Increasing engagement

Castle Tower also hopes to enhance parental engagement through the programme. As a special school, Castle Tower's catchment area is much larger than other schools. Many children are transported by bus so there is limited opportunity to engage with parents. Through the nursery project parent nights and fun days are planned to increase family engagement.

The shared education projects will run until 2021 through Peace IV funding. Mrs Caldwell concluded "the funding is an investment in our schools and classroom practice. We have a clear vision for the projects and as schools we can all support one another and learn from each other."

Connecting Enniskillen and beyond - Devenish College

Mr Simon Mowbray, Principal

Shared education has been embedded in Devenish College's practice for over 15 years. When Mr Mowbray became principal in 2015 there was already a longstanding partnership in place with St Joseph's College in Enniskillen.

The Dutch exchange programme

The schools' partnership began when both schools were approached by a Dutch school to take part in an exchange programme, which has taken place every year since 2003.

Pupils from Northern Ireland spend four days in Holland staying with local families. The Dutch children also spend four days in Northern Ireland and visit sites such as Enniskillen town, Devenish Island and Derry/Londonderry. The project enables pupils to learn about each other's cultures and history. As well as an international aspect, local cross community relationships are formed.

Shared education and curricular classes

Devenish College previously partnered with St Fanchea's College in 2015 for the provision of joint history classes, focusing particularly on World War One, 20th Century Irish history and the history of Enniskillen. Year ten pupils learn together with lessons taking place in both schools. Teachers from each school prepared and delivered the classes.

Traditionally pupils from Devenish College in this year group had the opportunity to take part in a history trip to Belgium and France on a biannual basis. Last year, pupils from St Fanchea's were invited to attend as an end to the programme of shared lessons. In June 2018, 37 pupils from both schools took part in the trip which was an enjoyable and educational experience for all.

Multi-school sharing

In the 2018/19 school year a three-school partnership between Devenish College, St Joseph's and St Fanchea's began through Peace IV funding. The project focuses on art and music for pupils in Year 9. There are 90 pupils currently involved in shared classes. Pupils have worked with a local artist to design umbrellas to be used as part of the 2019 St Patrick's Day parade in Enniskillen. This year's work will cumulate with a musical and artistic float in the parade. The project will run for three years and will expand to cover pupils from Year 8 to Year 10 focusing on different curricular topics.

Devenish College's partnerships with St Fanchea's College and St Joseph's College have led to the development of other joint projects, such as a joint netball team with St Fanchea's.

Devenish College and St Joseph's College have recently partnered with two local primary schools to embark on a new project focused on the effective use of iPads in developing ICT and programming skills. Through Project ENTHUSE, a UK-wide project, teachers from the four schools will train to become 'digital leaders'. These skills will be used to work across each of the four schools and across pupil groups.

New approaches and shared understanding

Mr Mowbray commented "involvement in shared education has opened up new opportunities for pupils across each of the schools. It also allows pupils to form deeper relationships and explore different viewpoints, particularly when studying history. Mutual understanding and respect for each other's cultures can grow and develop."

Mr Mowbray also highlighted the strong working relationship which he has developed with the principals from St Joseph's College and St Fanchea's College, saying, "we were all appointed within a year of each other and have carried on the work of our predecessors regarding shared education. This is a work we want to continue growing for many years to come."

Bridging the divide - Edenderry Nursery School

Ms Nancy Magrath, Principal

Edenderry Nursery School is located in one of Northern Ireland's most divided interface areas. In 1998 a partnership was formed with Holy Cross Nursery School in North Belfast. Commenting on the partnership Ms Magrath said, "Nuala Gallagher, the former Principal of Holy Cross approached me about starting up a community relations programme. It was a good fit from the start. Our two areas mirror each other, if not by religion, but the same levels of deprivation and existing social issues. There was a lot of common ground to start from."

Laying the groundwork

The partnership began with EMU funding. Although it was a step in the right direction, contact between the two pupil groups was fleeting. The project was based on educational activities but there were very few opportunities for the pupils to get to know one another. The schools applied for various other funding streams, "When we had to we ran the project on a shoestring, but you can do so much more and create a greater impact when funding is available", said Ms Magrath.

Through the Belfast Education and Library Board Edenderry Nursery School was partnered with CRIS (Community Relations in Schools). In the early days of the project CRIS carried out activities with the children; however through time they dedicated their time to the parents. Together Edenderry Nursery, Holy Cross Nursery School and CRIS have propelled the project to the success it is today.

Shared education is now firmly embedded in the work of the schools. At the start of the school year children in Edenderry are 'buddied up' with the children in Holy Cross. Each set of 'buddies' stays together throughout the year. The schools met up for eight 'play days' each year. A number of other joint activities also take place helping the children form friendships with one another.

Engaging parents

Family and parent work is a key aspect of the project. Ms Magrath said "so much of the work is based on getting the message through to the homes and welcoming the parents in." Though the Shared Education Signature Project the schools have accessed funding for a joint Family Worker to run classes and activities for parents. Until this point parents only engaged with one another during the 'play days' though activities provided though CRIS. The Family Worker provides activities based on the needs and wants of the parents involved, such as cookery classes.

For the last 13 years the project has included a residential for children and their parents at Corrymeela in the North Coast. During their time away CRIS works with the parents through workshops addressing personal development in the context of community. The children take part in a programme of learning and at the end the two groups come together for joint activities. Initially there was a wariness from parents about becoming involved with the project and taking part in the residential, however over time it has become one of the highlights of the year, with overwhelming support from parents in both schools.

Ms Magrath commented “In the beginning we were nervous about engaging the parents but the support has been overwhelming. Parents were keen to be involved, now there always something on for the parents and strong friendships have formed. The support for the residential in particular emphasises the commitment of parents to the project.”

Celebrating success

The dedication of staff and the strength of the schools’ leadership has driven the project forward. Recently Edenderry Nursery and Holy Cross became part of the network of school improvement (NSSI) enabling them to access funding for training for staff.

To mark the 20 year anniversary of the project, a celebration event was held in Girdwood Community Hub. The project has been widely recognised as a model of good practice. In 2017 it gained an international honour from the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) and was also awarded the Spirit of Northern Ireland Award for exceptional contribution to education.

Ms Magrath concluded, “The progression of this project has been revolutionary! Twenty years ago there was a nervousness about being involved with the project and promoting the work. Today we are able to celebrate how far we have come; we almost take it for granted.”

“There is still some pressure from outside the school and this can affect parents. It can be challenging but the silent majority in the community want this work to continue. Every day is a learning experience but we are in a great partnership and we have a shared vision which we will continue to work towards.”

Building on community support - Fair Hill Primary School and Nursery Unit

Mr Jim Brown, Principal

Fair Hill Primary and St Colman's Primary School in Dromore first began working together though funding provided by a local rural development group in 2014. Together the schools organised an art project for children in P3 and an ICT project for P6 children. This was the beginning of a working relationship which has gone from strength to strength.

Formalising shared education

In 2015 the schools joined formally as one of the first partnerships through the Shared Education Signature Project. In the first year pupils from Nursery to P3 were involved. Both schools identified STEM as a beneficial focus for the project. After the success of year one, all year groups became involved from year two onwards, with the P4 to P7 year groups sharing 'personal development and mutual understanding' classes. Outside facilitators have also been invited to provide activities for the children, including the Evo soccer school, the Ulster Scots Agency and the GAA.

The schools' shared education efforts have been rated 'outstanding' by ETI. One particular aspect of the project in which P3 children designed their own iPad game in conjunction with the Amma Centre has become a model of good practice.

Enhancing existing provision

Both schools have benefited from involvement in the project on a number of levels. From a teaching and learning perspective, schools have gained from built-in time dedicated to planning and evaluation, as well as access to teacher professional learning courses and extra staff development days. In addition, good working relationships have formed between the Principals and teachers in the two schools, many of which extend beyond shared education.

Speaking about benefits for the children, Mr Brown commented that although the schools are not located in an area traditionally associated with conflict there are very few opportunities for children from different backgrounds to mix: "schools are here to give our children a better future. If the only connection a child has to another child from a different culture is sitting beside them in a classroom then this can only be beneficial." Typically, shared sessions cover a full day allowing the children time to both learn and socialise with each other, forming friendships.

The funding available through the Signature Project is central to the schools' ability to continue engaging in shared education. Over the project's timeframe funds have reduced making it more difficult to run the project to its full capacity. If the funding were to decrease again the schools would be forced to cut back the programme, but this is an option they would prefer to avoid as it has been so successful in its current form.

Building on success

Speaking about the project Mr Brown said, "Shared education has become an integral part of school life. We are now at the stage where the hard work is done, the plans are laid, and it runs like clockwork. We hope to be able to continue the project and extend it, however if the funds keep decreasing it will become difficult to sustain."

The project has enjoyed the support of parents, Governors and the local community. Mr Brown highlighted, "it was the local community groups which brought us together in the first instance and since then our partnership has blossomed. It is a win-win for everyone involved."

Breaking down barriers, the evolution of sharing - Kilkeel High School

Mr Coert, Principal, Mr Kincaid, Shared Education Co-ordinator and Mrs C McAtee, Vice principal

Over 11 years ago Kilkeel High School embarked on its shared education journey with St Louis Grammar school as part of a the Queen's University Shared Education Programme. The schools began with the joint provision of two A Level subjects. Although this was the first step towards curricular, formal shared education, the schools had a history of informal sharing. The provision of funding allowed the partnership to develop and build on the existing relationship.

Evolution of sharing

In the 2015/16 school year the schools achieved funding through the Shared Education Signature Project. The appointment of Mr Kincaid as Shared Education Co-ordinator allowed shared education in the schools to develop further. The sixth form programme was expanded and now covers eight subject areas. Pupils regularly visit each other's schools to take part in shared classes.

Alongside the signature project the schools share in many other areas including a number of afterschool activities, trips, revision classes and career conventions. Mr Coert said "there has been a natural evolution of sharing between our two schools; this was accelerated by the signature project."

An ETI inspection recommended that the schools should start expanding shared education to other year groups. This work started with year 8 pupils in September 2018. T:BUC funding allowed the schools to run a joint induction programme and 230 pupils from both schools were involved. As part of this programme the 'Amazing Brains' study pack was provided to all pupils, a resource the schools would have been unable to fund themselves.

Relationship building

The relationship between the two schools has thrived. Six years ago, before the signature project, St Louis hosted a lunch for Kilkeel High staff and since then there have been a number of joint staff training events and the sharing of resources. Staff also worked together on the new specifications for the GCSE curriculum within departments.

Mrs McAtee discussed the relationships between the two pupil groups involved in shared classes saying, "the students are comfortable and 'at home' in each other's schools. It is a natural part of school life to see two sets of uniforms in the school grounds. The programme has broken down any barriers that existed, pupils can form bonds and find out about each other's cultures in a respectful and non-threatening way."

Overcoming challenges

While the partnership has received much support from the community, one recent event led to negative press about the schools' efforts. Discussing the issue, Mr Coert said "in a project like this there are always going to be challenges about how shared education is perceived. We were overwhelmed with the support we received in the aftermath of this event. The majority of the community are on board and shared education is part and parcel of who we are as a school."

Mr Coert continued "shared education is a beneficial and worthwhile initiative. It has enhanced the teaching and learning in our school by enabling us to offer more subjects to pupils at sixth form, it has enhanced the resources we have been able to access and it breaks down barriers between staff, pupils and parents in the two schools in a very natural way. It is a journey that hasn't reached its end."

"We are very reliant on funding to continue the work. We cannot sustain it within our own budget, and if funding were to stop it would be a backward step for the schools and the community."

Enhancing community connections - Knocknagoney Primary School

Mrs Ann Burton, Principal

Knocknagoney Primary School began its shared education journey in 2018. Keen to begin a shared education project but unable to find an available partner in the East Belfast area, Principal Ann Burton attended a Peace IV information session in January 2018.

St Patrick's Primary School in Holywood was also interested in the funding but had been unsuccessful in a previous shared education bid due to lack of a suitable partner. Principal Burton saw this as an opportunity to partner with St Patrick's which is situated only two miles away from Knocknagoney Primary School.

The partnership was a good fit for both schools from the outset. The children in each school live in the same catchment areas and some had already met through community football clubs and other activities. The shared education project further enhanced these connections.

Incorporating shared education through School Development Plans

In planning the project, staff from each school looked for shared areas of priority in their School Development Plans. ICT was an area of common importance and was therefore chosen as the basis of the shared education project.

The project began with P4 classes in each school and focused on ICT, technology and coding. There were six shared lessons for the year group, with three lessons taking place in each school. At each session 'parent helpers' were invited to assist with the project.

At the end of year one a celebration event was held for parents and governors. The children spoke positively about their experiences. Mrs Burton noted the positive support provided from families, staff and the wider community.

In year two the project was expanded to include all P3, P4, P5 and P6 children. The teachers involved from the two schools took part in a bonding session in August 2018. Each year group focuses on a different curricular topic which is taught in shared classes across six sessions.

Enhancing teaching, learning and community connections

Bringing the schools together has enabled the sharing of ideas, knowledge and resources. The availability of funding has also allowed the schools to access new resources, providing a more exciting and interesting learning experience for the children. Access to Peace IV funding also has benefits including the provision of transport between schools, the provision of sub-cover for teachers and access to staff development.

The advantages of the shared education project also extend to the wider community. Discussing the project Mrs Burton commented that sharing is good for the community: "Sharing between the two schools reinforces for the children that 'we are all the same, we can all learn together, we can all be friends and live in the same community.'"

Mrs Burton attributes the strength and success of the partnership to the curricular nature of the project saying, "it fits in with what each school is already doing and the funding enables us to access resources which enhance both schools' teaching and learning." She continues, "because we are located in the same area, we are creating a legacy for these children who have limited opportunities to mix. The sustained nature of the project will bring children together year on year throughout their primary school experience will help them form deeper bonds."

The project is relatively new, but already the outcomes for both schools and the wider community are very positive.

Looking towards a shared campus - Moy Regional Primary School

Mrs Jennifer Little, Principal

Moy Regional Primary and St John's Primary School are two of the first schools in Northern Ireland to be identified as part of the T:BUC shared education campuses programme. The schools have a long history of sharing. For over 25 years they have collaborated on a number of shared education projects including EMU, CRED and currently the Shared Education Signature Project.

Embedding shared learning

The schools are now in their fourth year of the Signature Project and have increased the number of pupils involved each year. Shared classes are based on curricular topics, including 'the world around us' and 'personal development and mutual understanding'. Unlike previous funding programmes the Signature Project allowed teachers in the schools to both plan and deliver the project for pupils, helping embed shared classes in school life.

Outside the Signature Project, the schools run a joint after-school club together and collaborate as much as possible, for example hosting PSNI safety talks for pupils and running joint summer schools together. Sharing between the schools developed gradually over time but has become so engrained in the life of the schools that the next step is a shared campus.

A vision for a shared campus

In 2006 the Bain report was published by the Department of Education (DE). One of its recommendations was the need to explore improving sharing and collaboration amongst schools. The Board of Governors and Principals from Moy Primary and St John's began to discuss the prospect of a shared campus.

Mrs Little commented that the first phase in this development was in 2010 when Moy's cross community playgroup relocated to the Moy Primary site. The playgroup retained its own identity but its relocation benefited the primary school which saw an increase in enrolment as a result.

Plans for the shared campus encompass Moy Primary, St John's Primary and Moy Area Playgroup.

In 2012, the schools publicised their plan for a shared campus to parents and the community. A business case has been submitted to DE and upon its approval a site can be purchased and plans put into motion.

The schools have already begun working together to prepare for the new campus. The principals are developing shared policies and action plans. Aspects of existing provision have also been aligned in preparation, such as streamlining school starting and finishing times, as well as holidays.

Shared education and community investment

Mrs Little discussed the support of the community for the schools' plans and the benefits for the local area, saying "the shared site will not only further enhance community relations, it will provide a range of educational and recreational facilities which will benefit the whole community, including a library, which does not currently exist in the Moy."

On the shared site, schools will share an entrance, playground and dining area. However each school will maintain its own identity and ethos.

"Sharing between our schools has developed gradually over time" said Mrs Little, "On the new site there will be greater opportunities for relationship building between pupils and school staff in an environment which enhances, maintains and develops the respective cultural identities and ethos of both schools."

Sharing is embedded in the practice of both Moy Primary and St John's and has developed steadily with support from the community. A shared campus is the next step and will further enhance the schools' relationship, benefiting pupils, families and the wider community.

Conclusions

This report provides a snapshot of shared education practice across the controlled sector and the partnerships that exist. It showcases the actions some schools have taken to develop shared education projects, as well as exploring the benefits, challenges and pitfalls.

The purpose of shared education is to deliver educational benefits to children and young persons and promote:

- the efficient and effective use of resources
- equality of opportunity
- good relations, and
- respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

The interviews with controlled school leaders have shown that these objectives are not only being met but that the benefits of shared education extend beyond these purposes. A number of common trends were notable in the interviews, summarised as follows:

Educational benefits: Every school leader commented on the educational benefits of shared education. In particular, in projects where teachers from each school in the partnership come together to plan and teach lessons, there is an opportunity to share expertise and best practice. Schools can learn from one another.

The opportunity to purchase additional resources through shared education funding was also mentioned by a number of school leaders as a benefit to the schools and the educational experience they can provide for their children. These can range from items such as books or revision packs to iPads and drones. A number of school leaders mentioned that they would be unable to access the additional resources without shared education funding.

At post primary level the curricular offer can be expanded through shared education, providing more choice and opportunity for pupils.

Strong school leadership is essential to drive forward shared education: Successful projects are built on the determination and commitment of school leaders - in setting up the partnership and gaining the support of staff. It is clear that each of the leaders interviewed had a commitment and enthusiasm for shared education and lead the way in terms of developing the project and growing support.

Relationships are central: Many of the interviews focused on the relationships that have formed between partner schools. Although these relationships developed from shared education, in most cases they have grown beyond only focusing on the joint project. A number of school leaders mentioned the professional and working relationships that have formed between school staff at all levels. Working together in other areas, such as the wider curriculum, is common. In many cases friendships have also formed, widening the support networks for school staff and leadership.

Funding is crucial: It is clear that the funding programmes available have developed through time. Today's shared education projects are more successful in embedding shared practice than the earlier funding programmes. This success is derived mainly from the involvement of school staff in planning and delivering the projects and the encouragement of sustained, regular, contact between pupils in partner schools. The availability of transport though funding is crucial to the sustainability of some projects. Many school leaders mentioned that without funding they would be unable to continue shared education.

Schools and communities benefit from shared education: Each of the interviewees commented that shared education has many benefits for schools, including relationship building, school investment, enhanced teaching and learning, access to resources and sharing expertise. Communities also benefit from shared education though enhanced community cohesion, investment and the availability of resources.

Mutual respect and understanding is forged through shared education: Shared education projects operate in an environment in which the culture, identity and ethos of each school is maintained. Many leaders commented that outside school pupils have limited contact with pupils in other sectors. Shared education creates a platform for pupils, and staff, to engage with those in other schools. Through frequent interaction mutual respect and understanding forms. While some schools tackle topics such as culture and identity through shared education projects, contact where there was no contact before for others is enough to encourage positive opinions and perceptions to grow. Many leaders commented that through shared education, the school is creating a legacy for their children.

Shared education is a journey: Each of the schools we spoke to are at different stages of their shared education journey. Some schools are just starting out while others have progressed shared education over years of practice. It is important to note that regardless of the stage schools are at, every day is a learning experience and the experiences of one school will differ from those of others.

Like any journey there are ups and downs and along the way. Schools have faced challenges, some in the form of bringing the community with them, others regarding the logistics of working with other schools. However, the resounding message from our interviews was that shared education leaves a lasting legacy for children and young people.