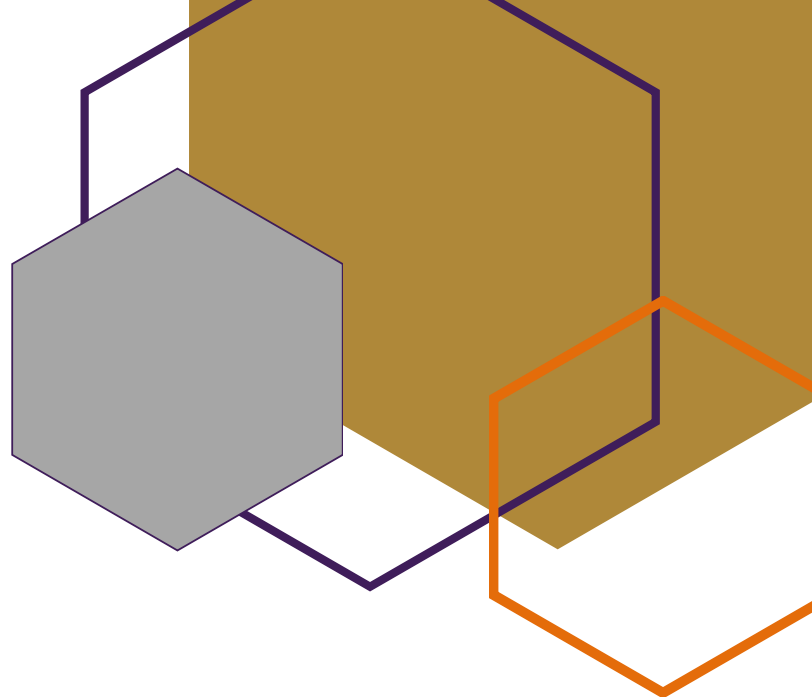




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Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Year 4)

PEACE IV Programme – Specific Objective 1

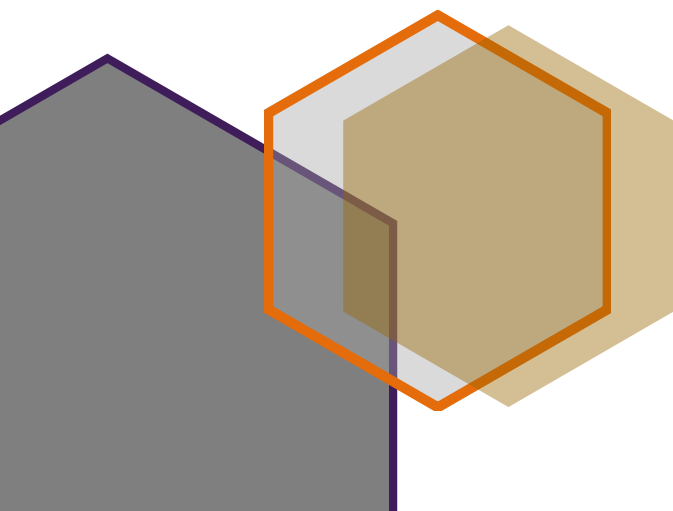


Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND	1
1.1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	APPROACH & RESEARCH OUTPUTS	2
1.3	REPORT STRUCTURE	3
2	PEACE IV SHARED EDUCATION PROJECTS – AN OVERVIEW	4
2.1	INTRODUCTION	4
2.2	SHARING FROM THE START	5
2.3	CASE	7
2.4	MONITORING & EVALUATION	9
3	ACHIEVEMENT OF PEACE IV OBJECTIVE & INDICATORS	11
3.1	INTRODUCTION	11
3.2	KEY ACHIEVEMENTS	11
3.3	FACTORS IMPACTING ACHIEVEMENT	14
3.4	CHAPTER SUMMARY	16
4	BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN	17
4.1	INTRODUCTION	17
4.2	EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN	17
4.3	SHARED/RECONCILIATION BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN	21
4.4	LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE CLASSES	25
4.5	CHAPTER SUMMARY	28
5	BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS	29
5.1	INTRODUCTION	29
5.2	KEY FINDINGS	29
5.3	CHAPTER SUMMARY	32
6	BENEFITS FOR WIDER COMMUNITY	33
6.1	INTRODUCTION	33
6.2	KEY FINDINGS	33
6.3	CHAPTER SUMMARY	37
7	SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECTS	38
7.1	INTRODUCTION	38
7.2	KEY FINDINGS	38
8	CONCLUSIONS	40
8.1	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	40

1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

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

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

Result Indicator: *The percentage of schools in the last academic year that have been involved in Shared Education with another school. The baseline value for 2013 is 76% [later revised to 58%]. The target value for 2023 is 88% [later revised to 69%]. This baseline is derived from the School Omnibus Survey 2013 figure. For the Border Region of Ireland, the baseline value is 0% and the 2023 target value is 7.5%.*

Output Indicators:

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

Shared Education aims to:

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

To deliver upon these aims, the SEUPB awarded €33.14m to two separate projects, ‘Sharing from the Start’ (SFTS) involving pre-schools (€4.2m), and ‘Collaboration and Sharing in Education’ (CASE) involving primary and post-primary schools (€28.9m). Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2022 (SFTS) and 2023 (CASE) as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018: September 2017 to June 2018.
 - September 2017: Funding awarded by the SEUPB.
 - September 2017 to December 2017: preparation and recruitment of first cohort of pre-schools/schools.
 - January 2018: commencement of project activity in pre-schools/schools.
- **Year 2** – 2018 to 2019: project activity from September 2018 to June 2019.
- **Year 3** – 2019 to 2020: project activity from September 2019 to June 2020 – impacted by Covid-19 (March 2020 onwards).
- **Year 4** – 2020 to 2021: project activity from September 2020 to June 2021 – impacted by Covid-19.
- **Year 5** – 2021 to 2022: project activity from September 2021 to June 2022 – SFTS to complete by June 2022¹.

¹ SFTS was originally contracted to run until December 2021 and project closure by March 2022. In August 2021, the SEUPB granted an extension for project delivery to continue to June 2022 and project closure to take place by September 2022.

- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity from September 2022 to June 2023 – CASE to complete by March 2023².

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children’s Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assess the impact of Shared Education (PEACE IV Specific Objective 1). The findings for the Year 3 evaluation, to include short video animation as well as an infographic, videos showcasing SFTS and CASE shared class activities, and case studies, can be accessed using the following link [\[click here\]](#).

This report reflects the Year 4 Impact Evaluation for project activity from **September 2020 to June 2021**.

1.2 Approach & Research Outputs

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

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

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

Table 1.1: Online survey response rate	Year 3 survey (pre-Covid)			Year 4 survey		
	SFTS	CASE	Total	SFTS	CASE	Total
No. of individual survey responses	83	133	216	24	45	69
No. of partnerships represented	40	86	126	20	45	65
<i>TOTAL number of partnerships engaged</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>214</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>178</i>
Response rate (based on no. of partnerships)	87%	51%	59%	63%	31%	37%

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

Despite the lower response rate, detailed feedback was provided by the 65 unique partnerships. This data was supplemented by monitoring data held by CASE and SFTS Project Partners across all 178 partnerships engaged in Year 4.

Please note that the online survey findings in this report are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., SFTS and CASE combined) to include quantitative data illustrated in graphs, and a summary of key themes emerging from qualitative feedback with illustrative quotes presented for each project.

² In December 2021, the SEUPB also granted permission for an extension to the CASE for project activity in schools until March 2023 and project closure to take place by June 2023.

1.3 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** PEACE IV Shared Education Projects – An Overview
- **Section 3:** Achievement of PEACE IV Objectives & Indicators
- **Section 4:** Benefits for Children
- **Section 5:** Benefits for Practitioners / Teachers
- **Section 6:** Shared/Reconciliation Benefits for Wider Community
- **Section 7:** Conclusions and Recommendations

2 PEACE IV SHARED EDUCATION PROJECTS – AN OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of each of the PEACE IV Shared Education projects. In September 2017, a total of €33.14m was awarded to two separate consortia – one focused on early years and the second on the primary/post-primary sector. These include:

Table 2.1: Overview of PEACE IV Funded Projects, Partners and Funding Award

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

85% of funding is provided through the PEACE IV Programme European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and 15% is match-funded by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. The PEACE IV Accountable Departments for Shared Education are the Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the Republic of Ireland.

PEACE IV Shared Education outputs:

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

PEACE IV actions for delivering these outputs include:

- Partnerships between schools to create opportunities for contact between children.
- The bringing together of school children at early years, primary and post primary level.
- Direct and sustained contact between children of different backgrounds.
- Development and delivery of related teacher training/professional learning initiatives.
- A whole school approach involving teachers, classroom assistants, non-teaching staff, governors, pupils, families, wider communities, curriculum development, school policies and collaboration with local community.
- Increased opportunities for cross-border co-operation.

PEACE IV targets pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland³ ('Border Regions') with no or limited previous experience of Shared Education⁴, thus increasing the overall number of schools and children that participate in Shared Education. SFTS and CASE Project Partners carried out respective needs analyses to identify and recruit pre-schools and schools with a baseline of no/limited prior experience of Shared Education. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background collaborating to deliver shared classes.

³ Counties: Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo.

⁴ Schools in Northern Ireland may have been involved in various pilot Shared Education Programmes, and/or involved in the current Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC ESP) delivered by the Education Authority. Details available at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>. PEACE IV specifically targets schools which have had **no experience** of these interventions. At the launch of PEACE IV there were approximately 530 schools (Border Region and Northern Ireland) that fell into this category. The PEACE IV target of 350 schools, represents 66% of eligible schools.

2.2 Sharing from the Start

2.2.1 Overview



Early Years – the organisation for young children, The National Childhood Network, and The Fermanagh Trust have been working in partnership since September 2017 to set-up and deliver the SFTS project, which was officially launched on 7th June 2018, and was originally intended to run until December 2021 and project closure by March 2022. *NB. Project delivery has now been extended to June 2022 and project closure to take place by September 2022. The extension is provided for from the underspend arising from the impact of Covid-19 (for example, reduction in mileage costs, reduced shared hours due to closures and restrictions, and reduction in expenditure for meetings and events). During this extension period children will participate in between 10.5 to 19.5 hours of Shared Education classes.*

SFTS offers pre-school settings the opportunities to engage in Shared Education, aiming to improve educational outcomes for young children and build good relations between children and adults from different backgrounds, in early years settings in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

PEACE IV outputs for SFTS:

- 99 educational settings in pre-school sectors in Northern Ireland and the Border Regions not previously involved in Shared Education.
- 9,914 pre-school children will participate in Shared Education classrooms.
- 157 teachers trained in an evidence-based programme with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education and participate in Shared Education classrooms.

Intended outcomes for children and pre-school educational practitioners:

- Children from different community backgrounds have direct, sustained, curriculum-based shared classes.
- Pre-school partnerships identify specific educational outcomes through shared development and action plans that meet their needs.
- Positive change in attitudes and behaviours of children to inclusion and exclusion.
- Practitioners have the confidence, skills, attitudes, and behaviours to facilitate and support respect for diversity and Shared Education.

Intended outcomes for parents/carers:

- Parents/carers participate in shared workshops and activities.
- Improved relationships with other parents/carers across the community divisions.
- Increased engagement with shared curricular activity in the home learning environment.

SFTS combines a focus on educational outcomes with a community development approach to ensure that involvement in Shared Education is both sustainable and connected through home, school, and community. As such, SFTS Project Partners designed the project to include additional outputs to enhance the wider societal outcomes, to include:

- 93 Boards of Governors/Management supported to develop/implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution.

- 1,100 parents will participate in shared workshops and activities aimed at building a supportive home-based culture for Shared Education activity.
- Build and develop SFTS Shared Education Pre-school Clusters.

2.2.2 Implementation Support

A team of five Early Years Specialists (EYS) provide ongoing support to each of the SFTS partnerships, with each having responsibility for approximately 20 settings. Key activities include:

- Providing initial training and follow-up mentoring support to all settings.
- Supporting partnerships to develop shared action plans for their SFTS activities. These action plans are aligned to settings pre-school development plans, therefore target agreed areas of the pre-school curriculum aimed at improving educational outcomes for pre-school children.
- Supporting and overseeing the development of curriculum content, training, mentoring support and materials for SFTS in line with the curricular and inspection requirements in both jurisdictions.
- Supporting partnerships at all stages – from planning, delivery and evaluation of Shared Education activity.
- Carrying out baseline and follow-up reviews of Shared Education in each setting to assess extent of progression.
- Supporting settings in the development of their respective inclusion and Shared Education policies and procedures.
- Informing the content and providing curricular and learning resources to settings (such as: baseline template, shared session development plans, information sessions templates for management and parents, information leaflets templates for parents and practitioners, newsletter templates to support the dissemination of information about Shared Education activities, online IT support resources).
- Facilitating peer cluster training – contributing to practitioners' knowledge, skills and confidence in delivering Shared Education.

Based on feedback from settings, the EYS tailored support has been instrumental in helping to sustain partnerships during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Section 3.3.3 for further details). In addition to the support to partnerships, EYS play a key role in providing progress reports and updates to the SFTS Programme Manager and the wider Project Partners and Steering Group, as well as contributing to the SFTS communications and advocacy strategy to aid the development and sustainability of the SFTS partnerships.

2.2.3 Training

SFTS offers wide-ranging training, mentoring and professional development for staff, as well as access to additional curriculum resources and professional expertise via a dedicated EYS who help settings progress quality standards set by the Inspectorate. The project also facilitates peer support and opportunities for learning and networking via pre-school clusters to aid wider collaborative working and sharing of good practice.

During Year 4, SFTS made an investment of £100,000 towards technology equipment, as well as facilitating online training to upskill early years practitioners in the latest resources and equipment, which has allowed staff to become more efficient in the use of technology to facilitate collaborative work.

There were also ongoing training and mentoring for practitioners to provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, for example Media Initiative for Children (MIFC) training (56 attendees, representing 27 settings), Virtual Connections (56 attendees, representing 27 settings) and Networking/Catch up session (41 attendees, representing 36 settings).

2.2.4 Communication & Advocacy work

SFTS Project Partners have a clear strategy and focus on promoting the benefits of Shared Education with the aim of embedding Shared Education in current settings and promoting mainstreaming of this work across the pre-school sector.

There is strong evidence of utilising the SFTS website for ongoing updates, along with using social media channels such as Twitter to share key learning from partnerships, with local newspapers also taking an interest in promoting activities – keeping the project visible in the wider community. Also, there is good use of video format to showcase case studies of good practice.

Furthermore, content created for seasonal newsletters is an effective means of sharing learning, showcasing shared class activity and practitioner training events, and as a general communication tool to help build a strong SFTS project base. SFTS Project Partners have continued to be proactive during the Covid-19 lockdown by providing ongoing support and guidance to pre-schools to reassure them and to help nurture partnerships developed throughout the project.

2.3 CASE

2.3.1 Overview



The Education Authority (EA) has been working with its partner Léargas since September 2017 to deliver the Collaboration and Sharing in Education (CASE) project. It was officially launched on 21st March 2018 and was intended to run until November

2022. *NB. Project delivery has now been extended to March 2023 and project closure to take place by June 2023.*

CASE operates across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, targeting schools with no or limited prior experience of delivering Shared Education. As such it complements the Delivering Social Change Shared Education (DSC SESP)⁵ project. Delivery is through the provision of direct, sustained, curricular-based contact between children and teachers from all backgrounds.

PEACE IV outputs for CASE:

- 280 schools in Northern Ireland and the Border Regions not previously involved in Shared Education.
- 135,000 school children will participate in Shared Education classrooms.
- 2,000 teachers will be trained in an evidence-based programme with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education and participate in Shared Education classrooms.

Intended outcomes

- To build a culture of good relations amongst children and young people in a primary and post-primary school-based setting and equip them with the skills and attitudes needed to contribute to society, where collaboration and co-operation are the norm.
- Through working in partnership, the participating schools will promote community cohesion, enhance educational opportunities for all pupils and provide shared professional development.

⁵ Details available at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>

2.3.2 Implementation Support

A team of eight Development Officers (DOs) provide a support to CASE schools in the development, co-ordination, management and implementation of Shared Education, with each DO having responsibility for approximately 50 schools. Key roles and responsibilities of DOs include:

- Developing effective working relationships with participating schools.
- Supporting schools to develop effective partnerships.
- Supporting leadership in the development of Shared Education.
- Providing advice and guidance on the use of resources to support the delivery of Shared Education.
- Working with school leaders, teachers and the CASE team to develop curriculum materials and relevant programmes.
- Promoting curriculum innovation in Shared Education.
- Assisting in the development of approaches to the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Shared Education in schools.
- Working with project team in identifying, planning and implementing a programme of Continual Professional Development (CPD).
- Supporting the establishment of professional learning communities for teachers and other professionals participating in the project to embed experience of sharing and best practice.
- Assisting partnerships to implement effective methods of self- evaluation.
- Liaising with other organisations who provide support to participating schools or pre-school settings in Shared Education.

Feedback from schools has been very positive, with the DOs ongoing support helping to sustain partnerships during the Covid-19 pandemic (see section 3.3.4 for further details). In addition to the support provided to schools, DOs play a key role in the strategic development of CASE contributing to the development and implementation of annual delivery plans, implementing monitoring and quality assurance procedures, and assisting in the evaluation of CASE and the promotion and advocacy of Shared Education activities under the PEACE IV Programme.

2.3.3 Training

CASE's Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) is a comprehensive training package for practitioner professional learning, including teachers, school leadership and Boards of Governors /Management Committees:

- TPL modules are offered to all CASE schools to build further the capacity of teachers and school leaders to deliver Shared Education. These modules cover strategic operational and curricular based topics and support teachers and leaders at all levels, for example: managing a Shared Education project; developing a shared vision for partnership; and delivering Shared Education in the classroom.
- CASE supports TPL at both a partnership and cluster level. Additional funding (known as 'Stage 2 funding') has also been made available through the project for teacher led Joint Practice Development (JPD), which uses an action-research/co-construction approach to achieve transformation of practice. It supports schools to develop their collaborative practice to address school improvement areas through partnerships.
- A total of **3,026 teachers** attended various TPL courses throughout Year 4.

2.3.4 Communication & Advocacy work

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

2.4 Monitoring & Evaluation

Both the SFTS and CASE models adopt key national frameworks and quality standards (Table 2.2) to support the implementation and self-evaluation of Shared Education. Lead early years practitioners and teachers plan, implement, and evaluate Shared Education activities using a template to document what they currently do (baseline) and to identify areas for further development which are then transferred onto an annual Shared Education Action Plan.

Using the self-evaluation frameworks and standards, pre-school and school leaders engage in reflective practice to assess educational and shared outcomes achieved against the Action Plan. This process is closely supported by EYS and DOs. As a result, the capacity of pre-school and school leaders has developed through Shared Education, with increased confidence in the use of quality frameworks to self-evaluate teaching and learning.

Table 2.2: Shared Education Frameworks & Standards adopted by Project Partners

Frameworks/Standards	Overview	SFTS	CASE
NI Frameworks: Partnerships based in NI:			
The Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) 'Developing Shared Education in Early Years Settings: A Framework For Collaborative Partnerships	ETI's Shared Education Framework is aligned to the four pillars of the Department of Education's (NI) Every School a Good School policy: (1) learner-centred (2) high quality learning and teaching (3) leadership and management and (4) community connections. Each partnership is required, through a collaborative and reflective process of internal self-assessment, to identify its baseline position across the four development stages of the Framework: 1. Defining (existing provision). 2. Developing. 3. Expanding. 4. Embedding (in-depth and high quality Shared Education).	√	
ETI 'Developing Shared Education: A Framework For School Partnerships			√
Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) for Pre-school Management Groups	The ISEF is designed to promote inspection and reflection about quality pre-school education. The Framework supports the management group with the development of their self-evaluation process and helps to identify strengths and areas for improvement.	√	
RoI Frameworks: Partnerships based in the Border Counties			
The Síolta Standards for early childhood care and education services	Síolta outlines 12 principles and 16 standards of quality. Five of these standards are used by SFTS pre-school settings located in Border Counties as a means of baselining and assessing Shared Education progression (i.e. (1) rights of the child, (2) parents and families (3) professional practice (4) identity and belonging (5) community involvement). These are mapped against four levels of practice to define stage of progression in Shared Education i.e., 1. Level 1: No evidence of quality. 2. Level 2: Some evidence of quality. 3. Level 3: Significant evidence of quality but some issues outstanding. 4. Level 4: Comprehensive evidence of quality.	√	

Frameworks/Standards	Overview	SFTS	CASE
School Self-Evaluation (SSE)	SSE is collaborative, reflective process of internal school review. It provides teachers with a means of looking at how they teach and how pupils learn to improve outcomes for learners – therefore complementing the pillars of the ETI Shared Education Framework.		√
The Inspectorate's 'Looking at Our School, A Quality Framework for Schools' [Primary and Post-Primary]	This Framework provides a unified and coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools: (1) teaching and learning and (2) leadership and management. The teaching and learning dimension will support schools as they engage in the SSE process.		√

3 ACHIEVEMENT OF PEACE IV OBJECTIVE & INDICATORS

3.1 Introduction

The PEACE IV Co-operation Programme and corresponding Performance Framework outlines the 'Specific Objective' for each 'Investment Priority' and expected results. Shared Education is one of four PEACE IV Investment Priorities and success is based on the achievement of the defined Specific Objective, output indicators and result indicator.

This chapter presents key findings against the Terms of Reference for the extent to which the overall Specific Objective and Output Indicators of Shared Education have been achieved.

The result indicator will be validated upon completion of subsequent School Omnibus Surveys in Northern Ireland and the Border Region i.e., the 2020 School Omnibus Survey was delayed, but is due to take place in October 2022, and the School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, whilst it has not taken place yet will be available prior to the end of the programming period⁶.

3.2 Key Achievements

3.2.1 Specific Objective

Terms of Reference:

Comment on whether, how, and to what extent the actions funded have contributed to the achievement of the Specific Objective and Output Indicators.

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

School/pupil participation began in January 2018 and by June 2021 there were:

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

Please note that the that achievement recorded in Table 3.1 overleaf is based on partnership declarations, some of which were not available until recently and therefore were not included in the SEUPB reporting during 2021.

⁶ The last Omnibus Survey took place in September 2018 which shows that there is at least 63% of schools in Northern Ireland involved in Shared Education (against a target of 69%).

Table 3.1: PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (up to June 2021)

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

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

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

The output indicators for the number of pre-schools/schools and the number of practitioners/teachers trained have been achieved within 3.5 years (up until June 2021), which is a testament to the commitment of SFTS and CASE Project Partners, as well as participating pre-schools and schools. Participation levels for children is on target to be met by the end of the programme period for SFTS (June 2022). CASE participation levels for children will continue to be closely monitored by Project Partners in the final phase of funding. An extension has been granted by the SEUPB for CASE to continue until June 2023 to mitigate any issues towards achievement of targets.

Whilst there are currently 454 pre-schools/schools involved in the projects (as of June 2021), there have been a total of **494** participating over the last four years, since the beginning of funding. The geographic spread reflects a split of 74% within Northern Ireland and 26% in the Border Region of Ireland. The majority (71%) of partnerships are comprised of a North-North collaboration; 20% of partnerships are comprised of a South-South collaboration; and 9% relate to cross-border partnerships. Partnerships are determined by factors such as those with no/limited experience of Shared Education, and those pre-schools/schools within close proximity to one another to make sharing between children feasible and practical.

A breakdown of SFTS and CASE participation level is provided in the following tables:

SFTS

In Year 4, a total of 31 settings withdrew from SFTS (i.e., 13 NI partnerships and 1 Border County partnership) due to ongoing pressures and uncertainty linked to Covid-19. Despite this, the remaining settings have continued to cement their partnership working and the number of practitioners training and children engaging in shared (online) classes has continued. A number of settings who withdrew in Year 4 plan to re-engage for the final year of SFTS, which is a positive affirmation to the ongoing support by EYS to encourage and support settings in challenging times, as well as settings desire to continue their Shared Education projects.

Table 3.2: SFTS - PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (up to June 2021)

Output Indicators	SFTS Output Target	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 ^a	Total	% achieved
Number of pre-schools involved	99	67	82	99	68	106^b <i>over 4 years</i>	107%
Number of trained practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	157	119	41	46	10	216^c	138%
Number of participants/children in Shared Education classes	9,914	1,863	2,521	3,167	1,670	9,221	93%

a. Year 4 figures pending verification from the SEUPB.

b. This is the unique number of pre-schools involved since the beginning of the SFTS project.

c. This is the unique number of eligible early years practitioners trained that have delivered 20+ hours of Shared Education.

CASE

The number of CASE schools engaged In Year 4 remained on par with the previous year, although 22 partnerships were not in a position to continue shared sessions, therefore the number of teachers trained and number of pupils in Shared Education classes decreased, this is to be expected given face-to-face restrictions under Covid-19.

School leaders have worked in difficult circumstances to sustain contact, albeit by virtual means, and have provided positive feedback about collaboration between their partners schools, as well as noting the valuable support provided by DOs to help schools sustain activities.

Table 3.3: CASE - PEACE IV Shared Education Output Indicators and Achievements (up to June 2021)

Output Indicators	CASE Output Target	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 ^a	Total	% achieved
Number of schools involved	280	211	376	384	386	388 ^b over 4 years	139%
Number of trained teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	2,000	514	719	436	208 ^d	1,877 ^c	94%
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	135,000	10,754	24,646	28,348	19,319	83,067	62%

- a. Year 4 figures pending verification from the SEUPB.
 b. This is the unique number of schools involved since the beginning of the CASE project.
 c. This is the total number of teachers that have delivered 20+ hours of Shared Education.
 d. Figure for Year 4 not yet complete – as data from 8 partnerships is still pending, therefore the total will likely increase.

On average, children participating in SFTS and CASE projects have benefited from 20-21 hours each per year of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes, as per the table below. Overall, the net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers.

Table 3.4: Shared hours (between children) achieved (up to June 2021)

Year	Period	Shared hours achieved per child	Notes
Year 1 – 2017/18	6 months activity from January 2018 to June 2018	20 hours	Delayed project approval resulted in Year 1 output target being reduced by the SEUPB to 20 hours to accommodate the reduced time for project implementation.
Year 2 – 2018/19	10 months activity from September 2018 to June 2019	30 hours	Normal project activity.
Year 3 – 2019/20	5 months activity from September 2019 to February 2020	18 hours	The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures resulted in pre-school /school closures for the final term (from early March to June 2020), greatly inhibiting Shared Education activities.
Year 4 – 2020/21	6 months activity between September 2020 to June 2021	12 hours (SFTS) 17 hours (CASE) See Table 3.5 overleaf.	The effects of the pandemic persisted in Year 4, resulting in shared classes being implemented via virtual means.
Average		20-21 hours	

Source: Project Partner Monitoring Data

Table 3.5: Summary of shared hours delivered (Year 4)

Shared Hours Delivered (Year 4 2020-2021)	SFTS		CASE	
	No. of pre-schools	No. of Partnerships	No. of schools	No. of Partnerships
0 hours	7	2	47	22
1 hour - 9.5 hours	3	2		0
10 hours	4	2		0
10.5 to 19.5 hours	42	20	2	1
20+ hours	12	6	337	145
Total schools / partnerships	68 pre-schools	32 partnerships	386 schools	168 partnerships
Total shared hours	830.5 hours	415 hours		2,910+ hours
Average	12.2 hours	12.9 hours		17.3 hours

SFTS: Year 4 data provided on a per pre-school basis (data showing specific shared hours delivered per pre-school – totalling 830.5hours. It is assumed that per partnership basis is 50% of this total (given approx. 2 pre-schools per partnership)
CASE: Year 4 data provided on a per partnership basis (shared hours grouped as 20+ hours, rather than specific number of hours).

3.3 Factors Impacting Achievement

Terms of Reference:

Identify and comment on the extent to which other external factors have impacted on the achievement.

3.3.1 Global Covid-19 pandemic halted progress

The main factor impacting achievement is the outworking of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020. Covid-19 has been an unprecedented disruptor to Shared Education, having a profound impact on the momentum gained for Shared Education over the last number of years under PEACE IV.

In Year 4 (2020/21) the restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic continued to hamper progress of shared session. Whilst pre-schools/schools were able to return to in-house learning from September to December 2020 (with an extended mid-term closure at Halloween) all shared classes with partner pre-schools/schools were postponed throughout this period. Further closures from January 2021 to March 2021 greatly inhibited Shared Education activities. Younger children returned to school in February and older pupils in late March 2021, with virtual contact resuming. Given this context, it is not surprising that all respondents to the survey highlighted Covid-19 as the biggest challenge, others noted (57%) the time commitment involved in planning and administering online shared classes, as well half (51%) reporting logistical and technology challenges in scheduling and delivering shared classes.

SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (challenges)

With the result of the pandemic Shared Education has been very challenging, although there was communication between both partners in the first term, we were unsure how to carry forward the shared classes until Christmas time which resulted with videos/ PowerPoint presentations. Then in January another lockdown, the Centre was closed in late February due to positive Covid cases, myself being hospitalised, only when reopened in March were both settings able to participate in a virtual shared communication, but this experience does not compare to the children meeting face to face for that shared interaction.

It has been challenging with the extra workload of Covid and the staff shortage with increased absence. We were apprehensive and under the expectation that the program year might be deferred. Our partner service has encountered changing staff and this makes continuation challenging.

It was a very difficult year, with a lot of demands on time, the Covid mitigations etc so it was an extra demand to fit in shared education. It was also more difficult for the children to make connections online

This year the impact of the pandemic has been especially seen in relation to children's behaviours with much demand on staff to manage behaviours, settle and resettle children in, adjust routines and follow up with families. In addition, the teaching workload has been heavy this year plus extra cleaning measures in place take up a lot of time beyond the teaching day.

The project can be challenging to implement through staffing changes and staff recruitment shortage but management appreciate the value and share enthusiasm.

When we started in September we didn't have IT equipment and we were trying to do our work on a small laptop, where only a few children could join in at a time. With the help of the IT equipment a lot of our challenges were overcome.

The challenging year with lockdowns and Covid meant that planned activities had to be rescheduled or cancelled, but we overcame these and by June were able to put together a program with a degree of normality although virtual connections.

Obviously online methods made everything more difficult and imposed limitations on educational and shared outcomes. Challenges were overcome by following as close as possible the children's interests in the partner group so to make it exciting.

CASE sample comments from teachers (challenges)

Because schools this year (September 20 - June 21) were so full of stress trying to remain Covid free - it was difficult to prioritise Shared Learning. Principals and Coordinators were often very engaged in other essential areas. We spent a full month (start to finish) dealing with two Covid cases - trying to get sub teachers to cover classes for online learning and subs to cover 5 other teachers who were close contacts - so it was truly difficult.

We had to focus on delivering online learning and Shared Education took a back seat.

Our partner school had a change in the teachers of the year group we were working. So I was trying to get to know the teachers from emails and during our Zoom meetings along with the class.

Timing was difficult this year. First time we got together was in the run up to Christmas and it was hectic and again towards the summer months when teachers were trying to carry out assessment and wind up for the Summer!

Due to our partnership with a Special School and the risk involved with their pupils surrounding Covid 19 it was difficult to meet with Shared classes. The schools did however stay engaged and worked on the plan out of Covid etc. It was also difficult as I had another new coordinator at [partner school] and had to work alongside him and our Action Plan.

The volume of work in doing on-line classes is huge and it was a challenge this year.

With the pupils being off for much of this academic year and our partnership only having pupils in on a shortened timetable (some pupils only in school 2 days a week) it was difficult to plan, action and organise face to face contact.

Many of our children appeared to have significant attentional and language deficits, following time out of school.

Our schools were very busy with their own leading teaching and learning, so it was difficult to motivate another initiative in a difficult circumstance. Our principals came together via Zoom, which could only take place in evenings and came up with plans for shared learning - no opportunity to meet face to face was difficult. Buy-in and involvement was mixed across the schools with some families more involved than others.

3.3.2 Use of IT as an enabler to facilitate the continuation of Shared Education

IT has acted as a significant enabler to allow Shared Education to continue, this along with the support of Project Partners and the willingness of partnerships to engage in extraordinary circumstances is a positive testament to the SFTS and CASE projects and recognition of the importance placed on continuing Shared Education.

Despite the challenges experienced in Year 4, partnerships have shown resilience and are endeavoring to sustain relationships throughout the pandemic by using technology to maintain contact. At an early stage, it became evident that many of the partnerships experienced barriers in accessing IT to facilitate sharing, therefore Project Partners engaged with settings/schools to identify skill gaps in the use of technology, as well as a review of what equipment was needed to sustain contact.

To address gaps, the SFTS Project Partners redirected programme funds towards increasing digital capability for settings to include €72,994 towards additional IT equipment and €25,994 for installation and training. For SFTS, a total of 72 settings availed of this funding with the following equipment dispatched and installed: webcam (72); laptop (20); TV/Stand (45); Data Projector (7); and Broadband (21). The majority of CASE respondents (69%) reported that they used existing IT equipment within their respective schools to advance shared activities, whilst 13 partnerships used a combination of both existing IT equipment in school and IT equipment provided by CASE.

3.3.3 Ongoing support from EYS and DOs

The EYS and DOs play an instrumental role in helping their respective SFTS and CASE partnerships to engage in reflective practice, identifying strengths and areas for development to enable corrective action to be made, where relevant, to enhance the self-evaluation process and consequently the impact of the Shared Education activities. Support is provided to aid settings and schools to review and evidence progression along the continuum of sharing from a baseline position towards developing and expanding activities, with the ultimate aim of school leaders reaching the skills and capacity, as well as the confidence, to embed in-depth and high-quality Shared Education to benefit children, practitioners/teachers and the wider community.

To mitigate some of the issues arising from Covid-19 and the transition to online activities, a key success factor positively impacting achievement is the ongoing tailored support and mentoring provided by EYS and DOs in helping settings and schools adapt during Year 4.

To help partnerships stay connected, EYS and DOs endeavoured to motivate and engage their respective partnerships, utilising a range of methods to communicate (for example, email, telephone, virtual calls, manuals/FAQs, training, webinars, vlogs, virtual cluster meetings). Similar to last year, 88% of respondents either strongly agreed (47%) or agreed (41%) that continuous mentoring support provided by EYS and DOs has helped to build early years practitioners and teachers' capacity to implement Shared Education.

CASE & SFTS sample comments from practitioners/teachers (support provided)

<p><i>As always, great encouragement from the Development Officers, when we felt that shared learning was impossible this year and were so entrenched in our own schools, it was beneficial to both staff and pupils to experience learning with others at a time when we were so confined to our own local area etc.</i></p> <p><i>Our Development Officer was great at helping us with our Action Plan, especially when it changed in January with school closures and ideas of how to implement shared online hours this year.</i></p>	<p><i>I feel very supported in Shared Education activities, there is always someone at the end of the phone/email to lend support and keep us right and nothing is ever too much trouble.</i></p> <p><i>I have always found the Development Officers extremely good to work with. They are aware of our schools and have been more than supportive in such challenging times.</i></p>	<p><i>We have very supportive Shared Education officers in Léargas and the Education Authority. They have been very encouraging and allowed us to think of new ways to engage in the programme.</i></p> <p><i>Support and online meetings with [DOs] greatly helped as when the paperwork was coming in. It gave us the push to get going.</i></p> <p><i>I think we were very lucky this year to have such a fantastic team looking after us.</i></p>	<p><i>Throughout CASE, face to face or online, it is great to know that support and guidance is only an email/phone call away and I want to thank all of the CASE team for their continued guidance and support.</i></p> <p><i>We received huge support from [DO] because this concept was very new to us. Through her patience and guidance, we were able to navigate "Peace Share the Walk" very successfully, which in turn, led to a sharing of digital story telling based on "Share the Walk".</i></p>	<p><i>I have to say I'm not great with computers and IT but with the training courses and EYS mentoring support we received it was of great benefit.</i></p> <p><i>Excellent support from EYS and all the zoom I could pick dates and times that best suited me and the other staff, more flexibility.</i></p> <p><i>Our Early Years Specialist goes above and beyond with her support.</i></p>
<p><i>It was difficult to plan our shared learning with the Covid restrictions and we struggled to think of ways to proceed and to formulate an effective action plan. Support and encouragement from [DO] helped us move forward. She is always on hand to answer our questions and offer advice.</i></p> <p><i>The CASE providers have been invaluable over the last year to help us to continue to provide the CASE project in our schools. We have been so lucky to have them at the end of an email or phone call, they were quick and responding and always came up with new ideas and projects for use to try out. Thank you to them.</i></p>		<p><i>The reaching out of the project personnel [SFTS] has facilitated the success of the project this year and has enabled teachers to grow in confidence in using new technology and to see the potential in engagement with our partner settings this year.</i></p> <p><i>Early Years Mentor is a great support to both settings.</i></p>		

3.4 Chapter Summary

The PEACE IV Programme has demonstrated excellent progress against the PEACE IV aims and indicators set for 2023, with SFTS and CASE having already exceeded targets for the respective number of pre-schools and schools participating. With a starting/baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact, a total of **494 pre-schools/schools** have been involved in the PEACE IV Shared Education projects over the last four years, with **92,288 children** having participated in shared classes, and **2,093 practitioners/teachers** trained with the capacity to deliver and lead Shared Education activities.

On average, children have benefited from 20-21 hours of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes. Whilst the target of 30 hours was only achieved in Year 2 (under 'normal', pre Covid-19 conditions), overall, the net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers. Despite challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, partnerships have embraced the use of IT as an enabler to facilitate virtual collaboration and Shared Education activity to continue. EYS (SFTS) and DOs (CASE) have been instrumental in helping to support partnerships in their transition to a virtual Shared Educational model during the pandemic. Partnerships will continue to use IT to its best effect, until face-to-face contact can resume upon lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. The extent to which progress can be made in Year 5 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector working under Covid-19 conditions.

4 BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, highlighting the positive impact on children’s education and the curriculum, and on the shared/reconciliation (societal) impact for children in terms of the extent of cross-community friendships formed and ability to deal with differences.

Key findings are presented at an overall programme level (i.e., SFTS and CASE) to include quantitative data illustrated in graphs, and a summary of key themes emerging from qualitative feedback with illustrative quotes.

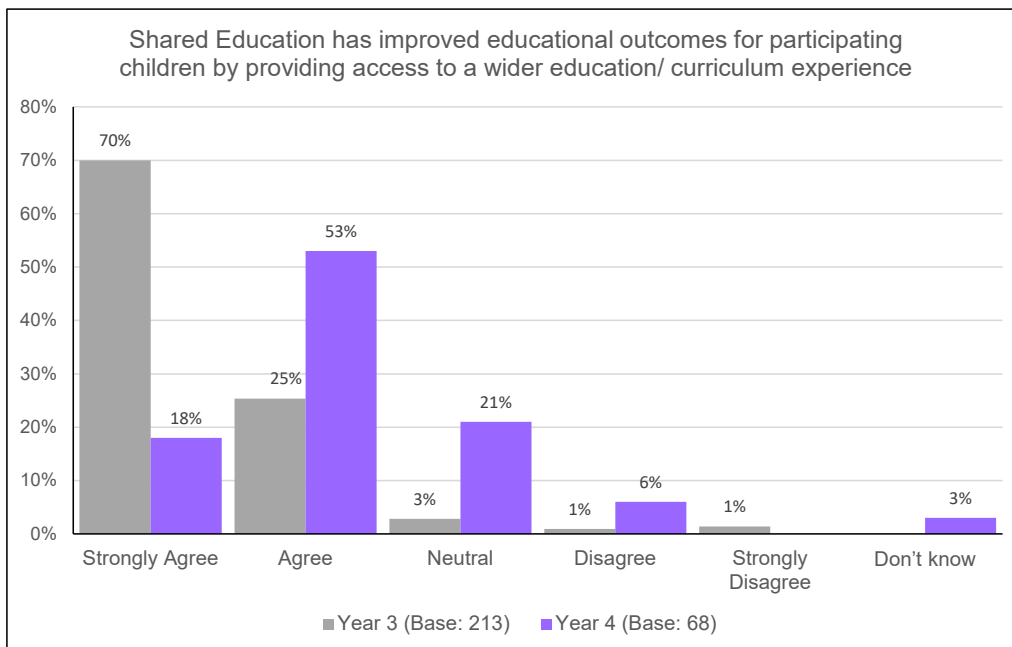
4.2 Educational Benefits for Children

Terms of Reference: Comment on the extent to which sharing in education becomes a central part of every child’s educational experience by providing opportunities for the sustained interaction of children from different backgrounds through their participation in curriculum-based common classes.

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with **92,288 children having benefited from curriculum-based shared classes** (64% of 2023 target achieved). Shared Education has had a positive impact on the curriculum by helping to meet and enhance the curricular focus of the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (RoI).

71% of respondents ‘strongly agree’ (18%) or ‘agreed’ (53%) that SFTS/CASE has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. This is a reduction from 95% from the previous year, which is not surprising given that children had less opportunities to engage in Shared Education classes and those who did participate were limited to online contact rather than face-to-face to comply with Covid-19 restrictions.

Figure 4.1: Benefits for Children - Educational Outcomes



CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results (compared to Year 3)

General format of online shared sessions:

- Live 'virtual' and 'pre-recorded' tours of settings/schools as an introduction for children prior to shared sessions – this provided an opportunity to introduce teaching staff, help to familiarise the physical environment of the partner setting/school and as an opportunity for children to meet each other.
- Live 'virtual' shared sessions: covering a wide range of activities, such as music, dance, storytelling, show and tell, arts and crafts, yoga/well-being sessions, circle time discussions.
- Combination of pre-recorded and live 'virtual' shared sessions: Each partner worked in parallel on the same activities in their respective class, with the results shared with partner setting/school via an online shared class session and/or recording of each class that was shared with the partner setting/school.
- Seasonal events: pre-recorded and live 'virtual' Christmas activities including songs, nativity plays, crafts. Christmas card exchanges. Other seasonal events were used as a focus to deliver 'live' online sessions, such as St Patrick's Day, Mother's Day and Easter.
- General exchange of work such as photographs, videos and cards between children in partner schools.
- A few SFTS settings were able to meet up outdoors (socially distanced) for a forest walk, contributing to outdoor play. Also, the CASE 'Share the Walk' initiative led to some primary schools being able to meet outdoors, with one partnership meeting at a local beach. These opportunities for face-to-face contact were rare (given restrictions), but very much enjoyed by participating settings/schools.

It is evident that Shared Education has the potential to permeate throughout all aspects of the curriculum and it is evident over the last four years that participation has provided access to a wide education/curriculum experience. In Northern Ireland pre-schools, Physical Development, Personal, Social and Emotional (PSE) Development, Arts, and the World Around Us (WAU) topics have provided the basis of shared classes. In the Border Counties, all four Aistear curricular themes featured in shared classes. (i.e., well-being, identity and belonging, communication, exploring and thinking).

SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (shared classes)

Virtual tour to enable children to see each other's setting and gain familiarity. Sharing photos throughout the time and between children ... allowed children to become familiar with peers and their names. Circle time was beneficial in providing children with the opportunity to listen to others from other setting and gave them the chance to speak to each other. We also found it very beneficial to allow the meeting to run while each setting continued with their individual routine, this gave the children the opportunity to make comparisons and have discussions in their own setting about what was happening elsewhere.

Children from each setting shared songs/rhymes with each other - some new and known - musical instrument time and physical time were very well received. We had joint St Patrick's Day/Festivals and Easter song time and movement which both really enjoyed.

Photographs and videos were shared and the children were able to familiarise themselves with each other - sharing pictures of their work

Taking part in art activities and show and tell, any method that allowed the children to talk and share crafts and stories.

Pre-recorded videos and photo sharing was less intimidating for the children and gave us time to reflect and discuss. Learning songs from partner groups and singing together. Also sharing photos our children loved the photos from partner service.

Story time/discussion time - children enjoyed listening to story from partner preschool and talking to them.

Children seemed more engaged in our story telling session and puppets I feel this was due to children making their puppets themselves which helped with the engagement.

Mindfulness sessions and sharing sessions - children keen to participate in both sessions. Loved being able to show their friends from the other setting something that belonged to them. Children still discussing what their new friends had.

We used our Tapestry online journals to share videos, stories, Christmas parties, singing etc

The circle time sessions at the beginning and end of each shared session and the sharing of work at the end of each session worked well.

We had a shared St Patrick's Day event, both settings children engaged in creating shamrock crafts, [partner setting] demonstrated their version of making playdough which our children commented how they made theirs differently and a member of my team demonstrated Irish dancing outside, with both settings taking part. Both settings taking part in story telling and the significance of St Patrick and the shamrock, with photos, PowerPoint and teams being used as a methods of communication.

All went very well and as the year went on things really improved with our St. Patrick's Day parade being a big hit with both groups.

The virtual tour was the most poignant aspect for the children as the first link in they showed most enthusiasm and awe with fond recollections and recognitions. This would be followed closely with the gardening and care taking aspect. Our partner service are an outdoor school we planted some plants and dropped these to the setting to have them care for them. The children show an interest in this aspect and curiosity in how the plants are progressing and the care taking role these partner children have in looking after them for us.

I think the art and design project where the children (and staff!) created pictures for each other during the virtual session. The children really engaged so positively and were keen to show their friends in the other setting. Every child made a picture which was sent to and displayed in the other setting. There was a lot of chat and excitement among the children about the work the children were doing. The children were also engaged in planning what they would need for their pictures and created a 'shopping list' of art supplies they thought would be special for their new friends.

For primary and post-primary schools, the learning areas of the curriculum in both jurisdictions provide the mechanism in which to roll-out and embed Shared Education. Shared class activities have been developed across wide ranging subjects to provide opportunities for children to interact and problem solve in groups, such as ICT, Art, Music, Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM), Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), Aistear, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Learning through Play/Activity based learning.

In Year 4, the CASE 'Peace Share the Walk' initiative increased the number of children actively engaged in outdoor learning within the current constraints of COVID-19. Each week the CASE team issued challenges to tie in with the pupil's well-being goals; as well as contributing to the PE and mathematical curriculum, and often include an environmental element. As schools reach a determined number of km/miles, they are invited to purchase trees which will be planted in the shared community spaces. 60% of respondents to the online survey agreed that the 'Share the Walk' initiative was very effective (25%) or effective (34%) in keeping their school connected with other CASE schools, and engaging children in outdoor learning – 32% did not take part.

CASE sample comments from teachers (shared classes)

The younger children got excited sharing their work in live sessions with each other, lots of work was needed beforehand to prepare the children but they became very proficient as time went on. The older children have been taking part in online collaboration before with our partner school so this was an extension of the skills they already had.

Zoom calls were super exciting for everyone to share work and projects and for the children to see each other in real life. The parallel activities were great to share afterwards as children had a common experience they could talk about.

We commenced our Peace IV shared education work in February with a wellbeing week within our partnership. This worked extremely well as we were all struggling with the Covid-19 pandemic and focus on wellbeing was our priority.

Our focus was on wellbeing, with lessons, competitions and content about this topic. On our return to school, we planned shared activities such as Active Week, Science Week, with shared lessons on a common theme, competitions such as Kahoot and poster competitions and online lessons.

Story time and group projects where groups were split worked really well. Our junior classes, for example, did a project on toys before Christmas. They were split into groups of 4- 2 children from each school. They worked to find answers and presented their projects virtually to all other children in the school.

We were all pleasantly surprised to find that we were able to continue with our Year 4 work and had a busy first term, meeting virtually for Shared Heritage in Education lessons, Christmas Performances and literacy workshops to name a few. Children also wrote letters and cards to one another. They eagerly awaited the arrival of the post- just like in 'olden' times!

The older pupils got greater benefit from live sessions and particularly enjoyed quizzes and competing against each other live.

Izak 9 and lessons involving practical maths manipulatives. Sharing of play in the foundation stage through photos and videos. Creation of shared PowerPoints using Google Classroom. Sharing of coding Spheros. Whole class reading of shared novel.

All activities were done in our own schools due to Covid-19 guidelines, however, each school participated in the same activities and the work was then shared with all students.

Creative writing online lessons, guided work on poetry writing, children completing work in class knowing they would be sharing it with our partnerships schools. As children were working individually in their own schools knowing they were sharing their poems to other schools, children put a lot of hard work and effort into it.

We worked collaboratively on a Share the Walk Project, participating in shared online classes where pupils talked via Zoom and teachers shared ideas for the plan.

Zoom talks between class groups and turn taking to discuss ideas for our project. Sharing places that the pupils in [partner setting] went to for 'Share the Walk' and finding out we'd actually visited the exact same places was interesting for the pupils.

Pupils collaborated on different projects: wildflower classes with a heritage expert, shared faith project and workshops. 6th class pupils from both schools worked together via Google Meet on "Transition to Post-Primary" topic and had several successful meet ups. Quizzes, exchanging cards and letters also.

We used Google drive to share our activities and we added a graph to motivate the kids in the Share the Walk initiative. Pupils were eager to log on to view the graph.

CASE sample comments from teachers (shared classes cont.)

All staff worked incredibly hard to ensure that learning outcomes were well developed and attainable for all children.

Online classes were well received, well organised and only feasible using devices bought with funding.

The project worked much better than I anticipated-down to the enthusiasm and work of staff involved. The outcomes were achieved but face to face will always be better.

All outcomes achieved but the face to face element was missed among staff and pupils.

Our programme has enabled the children to re-establish links made through previous years, and although there have definitely been many successes and in some ways easier to deliver and manage, the learning has not been just as successful as face to face sessions.

Sharing photos, discussion forums and our digital story telling experience (was a success) because it was experienced through an online platform which was new to us.

The oral language focus groups, the quizzes were enjoyable e.g. We split the groups into Girls vs Boys, which led for some very highly-charged (in a good way!) sessions!

Children actually achieved so many of our planned learning outcomes through the individual class work. Teachers planned for example creative writing workshops, poetry workshops and children created a poetry book. This activity took a lot of work in class before we were able to share the finished product (a poetry book) with our partnerships schools.

Sharing of completed LegoWe Projects and describing them worked well. The whole Share the Walk and the Daily Mile initiatives were successful in terms of sharing photos and experiences.

Developed ICT skills and communication skills = learning how to be brief and concise in interactions. We learned how to use new apps and how to create videos and presentations online. We have learned that doing parallel activities and reporting back our experiences is a new and exciting way to learn and to develop relationships with another school.

We worked together creatively to ensure the programme was effective this year. The children's ICT and presentation skills definitely improved. The pupils grew in confidence taking part in online collaboration sharing their work, but missed out in the connections we would have made if in person.

I believe the project Share my Walk was a huge success because it provided a good educational distraction from the sheer pressure of online learning. This was learning but active learning and could be done at any time in the day or evening. There was less pressure to submit daily and there was an active component of trying to achieve a group target.

Our online lessons were mainly through external facilitators, leading to access to the curriculum and a wider experience of the curriculum.

I think children really developed their online skills and also their confidence in using online communication methods this year. The really enjoyed learning from [partner] school and all the children and staff in that school.

Our year groups did a shared WAU topic and researched and learnt a lot in their own school. The pupils did enjoy webcam sessions at the end of the topic to compare what each other learnt and discuss their favourite part of the topic.

The students really enjoyed seeing photos and watching performances of their new friends. It was a nice way to keep channels of communication open between partner schools.

We have made a number of videos and shared them with the other school. The pupils have all got to watch these videos in their own time. This has been very effective, and no-one has missed out.

4.3 Shared/Reconciliation Benefits for Children

4.3.1 Cross-Community Friendships

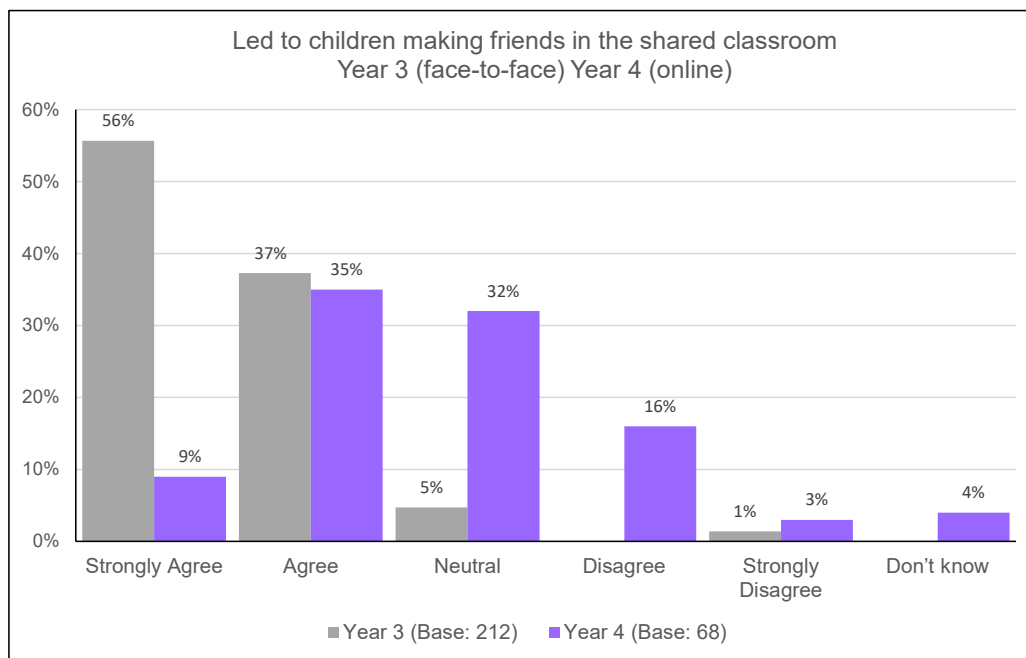
Terms of Reference: Comment on the extent to which sharing in education has led to the development of friendships and contacts on a cross-community basis.

The Programme aims to create opportunities for children to have sustained contact with peers from another community background within the existing educational structures. Reflecting on Year 4, 84% of respondents agreed that children feel comfortable and at ease when taking part in shared (virtual) classes. In terms of friendships, 44% of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ (9%) or ‘agreed’ (35%) that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, compared to 93% agreeing with this statement in Year 3 (pre-Covid). In Year 4, all contact was via virtual/online means and as a result has significantly impact the extent to which children can form friendships.

Amongst the 44% who agreed that children have made friends in Year 4, comments highlighted those children recognised each other, and could recall names and bonds appeared to be created between children during the shared session tasks. Some noted that young children were more comfortable in their own setting, giving these children the confidence to participate in the virtual class.

One of the key success factors in developing friendships in previous years (non-Covid-19) was opportunities for children to engage in more informal, natural mixing during leisure time (break/lunch and travel to joint outings) as a means of creating and sustaining friendships. Team working tasks and informal interactions were regarded as the optimum approach for nurturing friendships. However, these opportunities were stifled in Year 4, with only a small number of partnerships being able to see each other face-to-face from a distance, with mixing only occurring via virtual means.

Figure 4.2: Benefits for Children – Friendships in setting/school

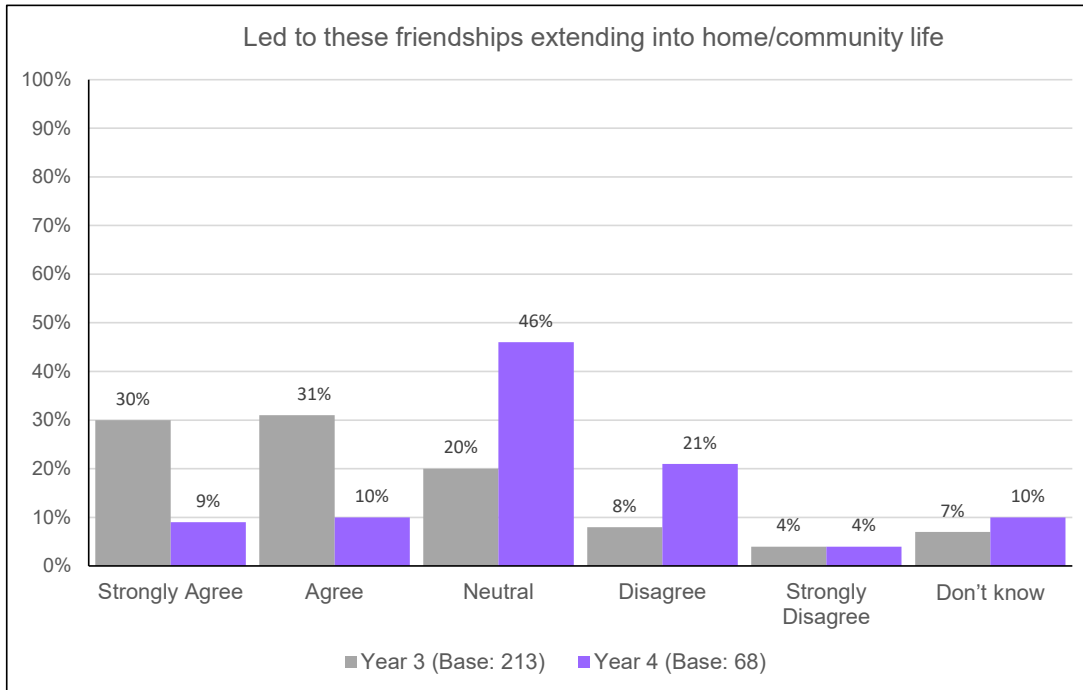


CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results (compared to Year 3)

19% strongly agreed or agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**, compared to 61% in Year 3. This reduction is a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions, removing opportunities for children to interact outside of their immediate family ‘bubble’.

In Year 3, connections were easier to establish and maintain for older children, who have had more opportunities to meet outside of school. It was also noted that these types of interactions are reliant on parents being engaged and facilitating opportunities for children to meet – which was not possible in Year 4 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Figure 4.3: Benefits for Children – Friendships outside of setting/school



CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results (compared to Year 3)

SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (friendships)

<p>As we didn't get to meet at all it was difficult to get the same connections for the children.</p> <p>It has been difficult for children to interact online with our partners with children's limited attention spans. Yes there was a degree of interaction with children of similarities and differences, during storytelling, activities such as arts and crafts, making playdough etc, it didn't have a big enough impact that friendships were made or extended into the home/community life</p>	<p>It was challenging to get some children to engage as they would in person as they feel self-conscious and exposed online.</p> <p>Children loved watching tours of other preschool settings. They loved meeting the children asking them what their names were.</p> <p>Children of preschool age benefit from face to face interaction and can become very disengaged when meetings are virtual. They definitely need face to face contact to form friendships.</p>	<p>There was no opportunity for children to form friendships which would extend into home/community life as we are a cross border partnership. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this was not possible and online methods made it more difficult anyway.</p> <p>Due to Covid there were very little if any community life activities going on. I am not sure if all the children realized who the other children were.</p>	<p>It is very difficult to build relationships virtually but it has been lovely for the children to be able to recognise their friends and be able to name them when they eventually were able to meet.</p> <p>All of the [activities] pre recorded so we could let the children see their friends over and over again. Better reinforcement and the children would ask to see their friends.</p>	<p>Sharing photos let each setting see/learn names of children/see same and difference of uniforms and setting layout.</p> <p>Online shared education was another way for the children to communicate and learn IT skills. The children were interested in the shared classroom and wanted to learn more about their friends and talked about similarities and differences ie same name, they had different tables and chairs in their classroom etc. However even through the children engaged in online shared education and had outcomes, face to face would have better outcomes.</p>
<p>Children at this age require face to face interaction to be able to form friendships - this unfortunately was missed this year because of Covid 19 - although they did discuss with parents at home their experiences of shared sessions and naming some other children from their partner preschool. They talked to and asked questions to their partner children, but we felt it was just not the same as in face to face interaction.</p>		<p>They need to be in the same environment to actually learn from one another and make the connections. Nothing can change the impact of two children holding hands and saying this is my friend from [partner setting]. The children don't have the same level of understanding and absorption of information as older children.</p>		<p>It is hard to judge how friendships will extend into community life as so many outside clubs are still not functioning so children haven't had the opportunity to mix.</p>

CASE sample comments from teachers (friendships)

<p>As we have been working within our partnership for a few years, relationships have already been built so children felt very comfortable within the online forum with partnership schools. However the real friendships/ relationships among children happen more easily and are better when face to face as children socialise within their groups and activities and lunch times together.</p> <p>P5 classes met and chatted on Zoom, forming new friendships. P6 and 7 were able to pick up existing relationships and discuss their work with children they were familiar with.</p>	<p>Oral Language workshops- a series of focus questions to each other e.g., "Tell me what your best day would be like, Tell me what your happiest day would be like." Above is just an example of one session- but there was quite a lot of room for open ended discussion, reflective thinking and real and meaningful ways to get to know each other on a deeper level.</p> <p>Children love to see each other and the excitement of receiving letters from their partner friends was great. They also loved the competitive connection when we did our running timed challenge. There are so many ways to keep the friendships alive. We just need to be creative with our planning.</p>	<p>It was more difficult for children to make friends in the online classroom as others were with them so they didn't feel as free as they would in person to communicate with one another. It definitely made the children more familiar and at ease with using new technology to communicate in a different context and showed them that there are other, effective ways to communicate.</p> <p>Children enjoyed the range of activities completed through Google Classroom. They were excited by Shared Education programme. There were limited opportunities to make friends in a 6-week programme this year.</p>	<p>Having being able to meet prior to COVID-19, the pupils were able to form friendships that were extended online. It would have been harder to create these friendships if we had not spent time together in previous years of the project.</p> <p>I do disagree with the children making friends in the shared online classroom. Pupils found it difficult to engage with each other and it was very much teacher led. I believe the children benefited more from face to face. However they did enjoy the different forms of communication in our shared partnership.</p>	<p>Due to Covid restrictions children were not able to extend their friendships into home/community life this year. Many families were conscious of keeping vulnerable relatives safe and so contact with friends, outside of school planned connections, was limited.</p> <p>The opportunities to share online were not really personal enough to allow for friendships to form. I feel contact would have to be more individualised for this....certainly for friendships to extend beyond the classroom.</p>
<p>I think a lot of outcomes were achieved but I do feel that for children to develop concrete friendships and for these to transfer into the community meet ups are essential. Children develop more through free play and not having us as teachers supervising them, I felt that a lot of the online stuff was quite structured, while this is essential and has benefits, face to face interactions also have other benefits.</p> <p>Inability to meet in person means that the lasting/out-of-school relationships were harder to form.</p>		<p>The older children were already familiar with each other and had developed friendships which made the transition to online interaction easier. The younger children, particularly P1, did not have the same familiarity with each other and the online sessions, whilst still productive and beneficial, were not as effective as face-to-face contact.</p> <p>This year has been a difficult one - but friendships have been formed that may extend into secondary school this coming September.</p> <p>Children went on to start in secondary schools with children they had met during Shared Education Programme. Making is easier to adapt into their new schools.</p>		

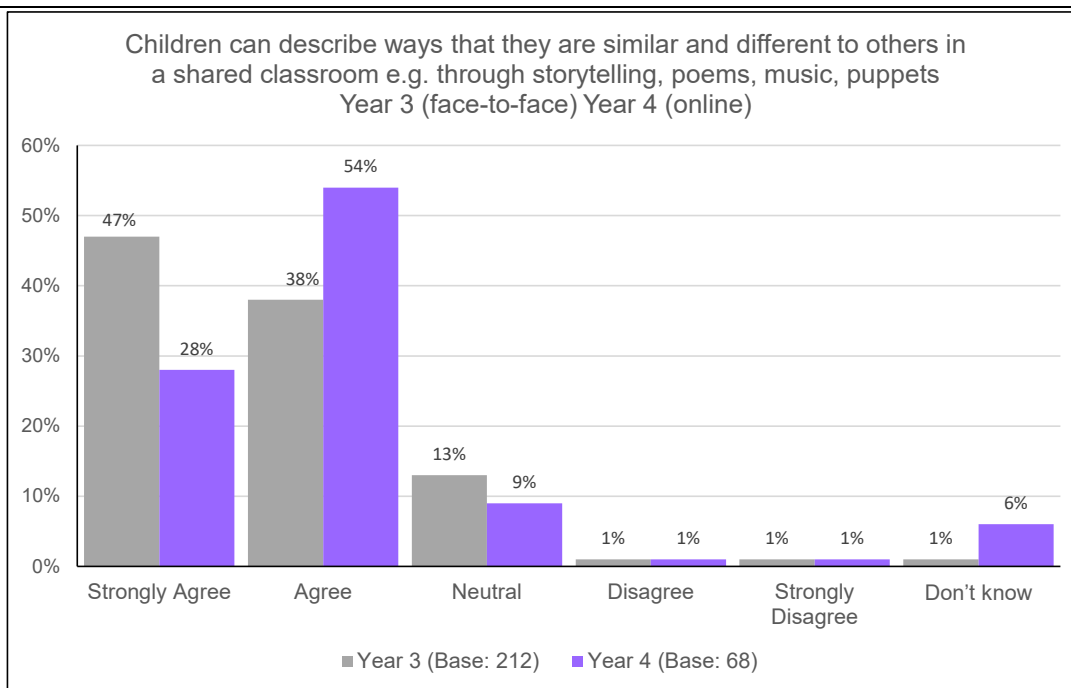
4.3.2 Dealing with Differences

Terms of Reference: Comment on the impact of Shared Education on pupils’ and teachers’ ability to understand and deal with difference in whatever form it occurs.

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

According to 82% of respondents, **children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others**, demonstrating that children are comfortable in each other’s company. Practitioners/teachers adopted activities such as ‘circle time’, group work, and curricular subjects such Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), Aistear, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Music and World Around Us (WAU) to explore similarities and differences, as well informal exchanges. Differences mainly focused on uniform, routines within school, with conversations encouraged during group work activities. The shared sessions have nurtured equality and diversity, allowing all children the opportunity to participate and learn from one another.

Figure 4.4: Benefits for Children – Societal Outcomes (acceptance of differences)



CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results (compared to Year 3)

Through delivery of the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC)⁷ SFTS partnerships were able to provide opportunities for young children to explore wider culture and diversity. The MIFC proved popular and offered techniques for practitioners to explore similarities and differences using puppets and storytelling, which the children enjoyed.

Older children can be more aware of differences between each other and schools, but through shared sessions pupils developed a better understanding and respect for differences with examples provided of positive connections made between children of different schools, along with an increased appreciation and awareness of their wider community.

⁷ The Media Initiative for Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme is an intervention programme aimed at improving long term outcomes so that children, practitioners/teachers, parents, and communities become more aware of diversity and difference issues and positively change attitudes and behaviours to those who are different. <https://www.early-years.org/respecting-difference#mifc-introduction>

Seasonal events (Christmas, Easter, St Patrick’s Day) provided opportunities to further explore and raise awareness of other cultures and traditions around celebrations, providing opportunities to examine differences and similarities, with the outcome being a greater level of self-awareness and understanding of others.

4.4 Limitations of Online Classes

70% of respondents stated that educational and shared outcomes achieved in Year 4 (Sept 2020-June 2021) were *‘less than last year i.e., outcomes not as well developed this year when compared to last year’* (Sept 2019-March 2020) prior to pre-schools closures.

The following outlines the benefits and challenges/limitations reported by respondents, with respect to the use of IT in the implementation of Shared Education and the achievement of educational and shared outcomes during Year 4.

Table 4.1: Benefits and challenges of using technology to implement Shared Education

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

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

SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (pros/cons of online)

For children with concentration issues or additional learning needs the online version did not reach them in the same way. All children spoke of the loss of going on outings the experience of going on the bus and going to places in the community. Discussing these from imagery wasn't quite the same experience. So much so that I would consider hiring buses for the bus experience alone and a drive by wave!

It is very good as it reduces travelling time for staff to meetings, trainings or with other groups.

Although the virtual sessions and contact has been brilliant for making connections this year, the face to face contact is an integral part of the success of the project and brings a richer experience for children, staff and families who get to meet in a more natural way on a more regular basis at each other's settings.

We were advised to not do online live streaming so we used our pre recorded Tapestry base which gave us 10 minutes of recording at a time. Very successful which meant parents and children could view and review at times that suited them.

Virtual connections are not the same, children sometimes struggled with the face to face interaction pre Covid so the fact that we did it this year through pictures and eventually Microsoft Teams, children did not get the same benefits. Yes it's a great resource to have and we appreciate it but it is also not the way that our children learn, they learn through hands on experience and physical social interaction.

An important aspect of the programme is meeting up with the children from the other setting and forming/building relationships. This is more difficult online.

Having the use of a webcam and the Teams software has particularly enhanced our connections and we have been grateful for the opportunity to maintain relationships with the other setting using these means.

Without the use of the awarded ICT equipment, we would not have been able to successfully participate in the programme, as small computer/laptops screens were too small and low volume, the children would have lost interest not being able to see/hear effectively. Having the large screen provided better experiences for children. We have been able to participate without additional costs to the setting.

It was not the same as being able to play together and some children were uncomfortable with sharing during the live sessions.

Online shared education was another way for the children to communicate and learn IT skills. The children were interested in the shared classroom and wanted to learn more about their friends and talked about similarities and differences ie same name, they had different tables and chairs in their classroom etc. However even through the children engaged in online shared education and had outcomes, face to face would have better outcomes.

We recognise the importance of IT as a support but it will never replace the face to face sessions and we recognise that our children are too young to make full use of online sessions.

Children were able to meet face to face for the majority of time pre pandemic therefore benefiting from better outcomes. We were able to share trips, visit each other's settings which reinforced friendships and educational outcomes.

Children got to star in their own videos and for those that participated previously they recognised familiar environments in the partner service and recalled past learning sharing information with their peers. It posed a beneficial distraction from Covid and the limitations the year otherwise brought. It introduced children to ICT in a more comprehensive manner that they would not otherwise have benefited from.

It promoted new ideas for educators. For a child going to a school located near the partner service it gave him an opportunity to learn the names and form introduction to new friends.

CASE sample comments from teachers (pros/cons of online)

I feel nothing beats face to face interaction for pupils where they get the opportunity to welcome partnership pupils to our school and in turn visit theirs. The excitement that is generated from such meetings can never really be replicated online.

IT and online methods are useful to an extent but the joy and excitement of pupils when getting the chance to go on a bus and have shared activities and fun together on a day out is unbeatable!

We had been thinking when funding comes to an end, we weren't sure how we would pay for the children to travel to each school. But with online methods we can still stay in contact and continue shared lessons.

Online classes have been great as it saves travel time where waiting for a bus and travelling to our partner school.

Online learning has brought more opportunities, opened other avenues and saved time in many aspects.

Being able to have informal chats and adapt as the situation arises in a face to face situation cannot always be replicated online. However, many activities lend themselves to online work.

Great to be able to connect at any moment on any day without organising buses and using a whole day.

We were unable to use our IT suite so the children were interacting with each other as a class, rather than individually or in small groups. This made it harder for them to communicate.

I think the shared face to face classes are much more beneficial for students in secondary school - they afford the students the opportunity to chat to each other and interact on a personal basis - on online classes this cannot happen.

I feel that for a genuine partnership experience for children, face to face shared lessons are vital. They need that hands-on collaboration and personal interaction for the project to come alive for them. They also need to get out into the yard and play!

Although we have benefited from and enjoyed our programme this year, our love of shared education has been the ability to get our pupils together - learning, working and playing together, which hasn't been possible in the same way remotely.

IT is improving all the time and communication between partner schools will be much easier to keep going when funding comes to an end. A strong bond has been formed in our partnership and I cannot see it ending.

Technology sometimes failed - or didn't work as well as expected and led to disruptions or a sense of disappointment for the children.

We had a number of issues with our internet where we would lose connection and this could take up quite a bit of our session. Therefore it was harder to cover as much online than when we were all together.

I felt that the children missed meeting up with the other children in person and as a teacher, it was more difficult to share good practice as that just happens naturally when you're in the other school environment by seeing how they operate and the methods they use compared to yours.

School administrators being able to meet face to face to plan would have benefitted the implementation of the programme. Planning online takes much longer and is not always easily managed.

4.5 Chapter Summary

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with almost **92,288 children** having benefited from shared class activity (64% of target achieved).

Shared Education has had a positive impact on the curriculum by helping to meet and enhance the curricular focus of the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (RoI). 71% of respondents agreed that CASE/SFTS has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. This is a reduction from 95% from the previous year.

Encouragingly, 84% of respondents agreed that children feel comfortable and at ease when taking part in shared (virtual) classes, with partnerships reporting improved IT skills. In terms of friendships, 44% of respondents agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, compared to 93% agreeing with this statement in Year 3 (pre-Covid). 19% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**, compared to 61% in Year 3. This reduction is a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions, removing opportunities for children to interact outside of their immediate family 'bubble'.

Based on the above results whilst it is clear SFTS and CASE could not have continued without the use of IT, it is evident from feedback that educational and shared outcomes for children are better achieved through face-to-face contact.

5 BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

5.1 Introduction

The CASE and SFTS projects provide a good balance of support to allow time to plan shared activities, access to teaching resources to enrich the learning experience, as well as opportunities to avail of training to deliver Shared Education. Access to a comprehensive training programme to include the concepts underpinning Shared Education, followed by more practical sessions on implementation help to support the effective roll-out of projects.

This chapter outlines feedback from early years practitioners and teachers, based on the online survey results, highlighting the impact on practitioner/teacher training.

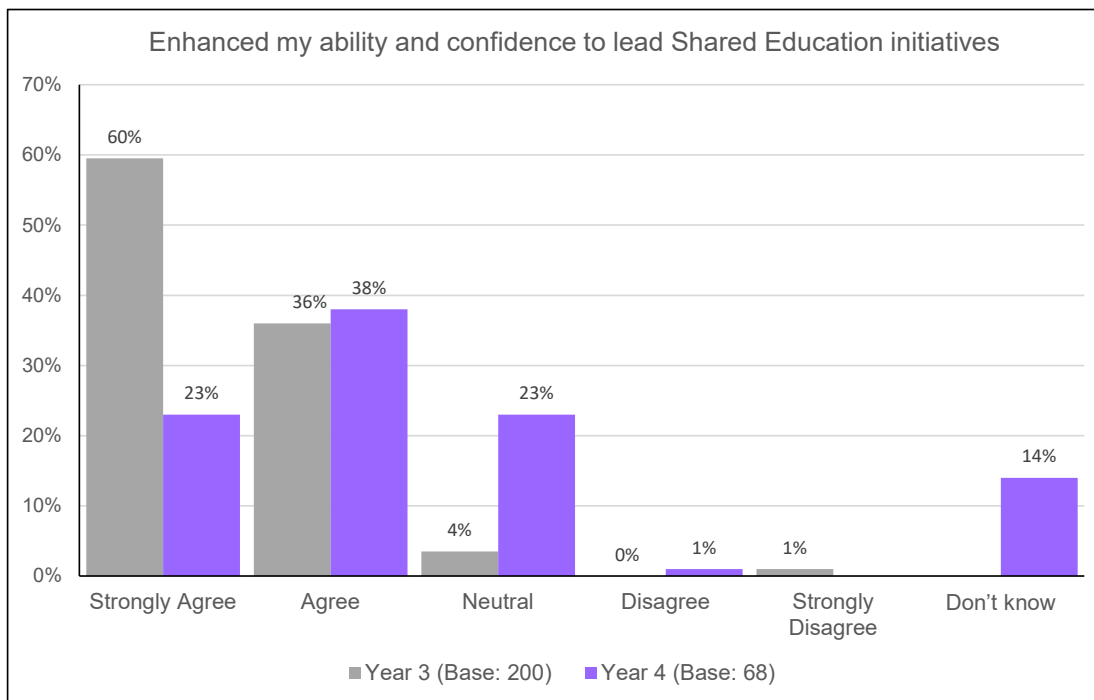
5.2 Key Findings

Terms of Reference: Comment on the impact of the support provided to school management and teaching staff to enhance their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives.

One of the key outputs of Shared Education is the development and delivery of related teacher training and professional learning initiatives i.e., the PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is almost met with a total of **2,093 practitioners/teachers** with the experience of delivering 20+ hours of shared classes.

In Year 4, 61% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that involvement in SFTS/CASE has **enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives**, one of the underpinning output indicators of PEACE IV. This is a marked decrease from findings from Year 3 (pre-Covid), which indicated that 96% agreed with this statement.

Figure 5.1: Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers – Training/ Educational Outcomes



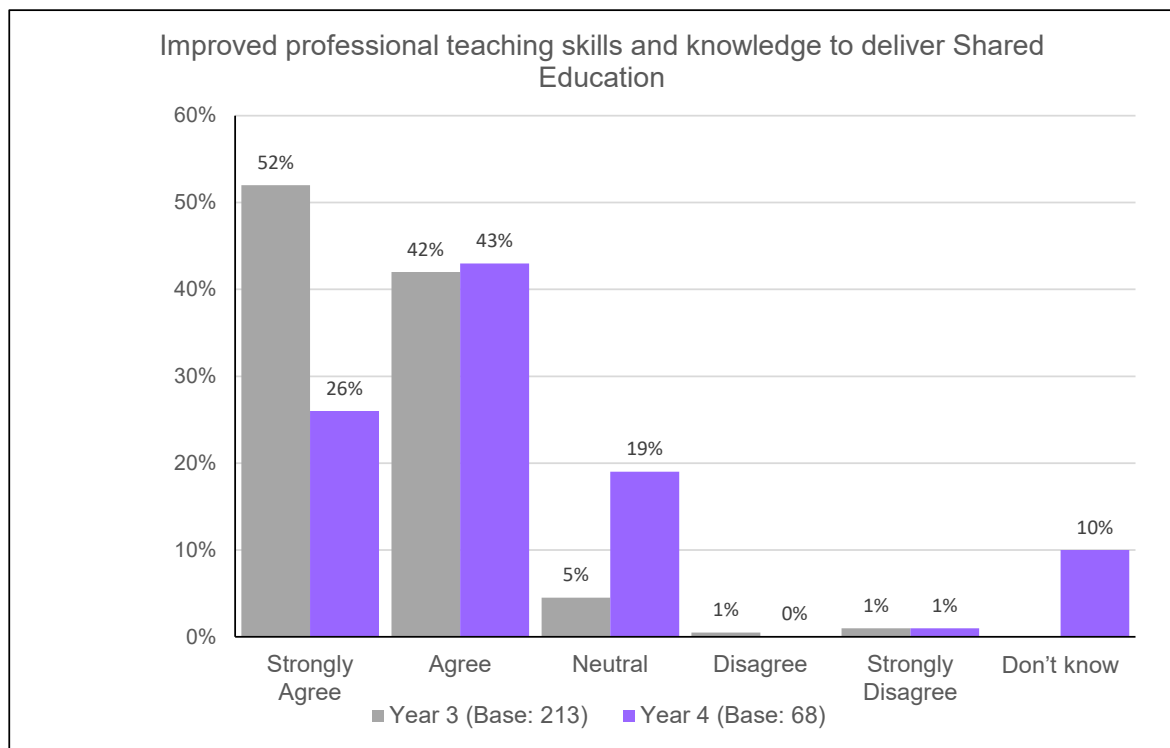
CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results (compared to Year 3)

As part of CASE’s Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) training package, in Year 4 a total of 3,026 teachers attended various courses (for example, ‘Online Collaboration’; ‘Sharing through Play’; ‘Understanding and supporting emotional well-being’). For SFTS, training opportunities included the Media Initiative for Children (56 attendees, representing 27 settings), and Virtual Connections (56 attendees, representing 27 settings) and Networking/Catch up session (41 attendees, representing 36 settings).

69% of respondents, reflecting on Year 4, ‘strongly agreed’ (26%) or ‘agreed’ (43%) that their **professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved** due to involvement in SFTS/CASE, compared to 94% in Year 3 (pre Covid). Specific examples of increased confidence in working ICT equipment, as well as benefiting from training and extra responsibilities around planning and coordination of Shared Education.

Some practitioners/teachers commented on their preference for face-to-face training events as they benefited from opportunities to network with others. The opportunity for formal and informal networking, and the space to acknowledge, celebrate and reflect on key successes is important to partnerships, who welcomed face-to-face contact to engage and disseminate key learning, unfortunately these networking opportunities were not available in Year 4 due to Covid-19 restrictions, which is likely to have impacted results.

Figure 5.2: Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers – Training/ Educational Outcomes



CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results (compared to Year 3)

During these exceptional times, the EYS and DOs have tailored their support and training to address any issues in the continued delivery of Shared Education throughout Year 4. EYS and DOs have worked closely with staff to empower them in their use of technology as an enabler to implement virtual shared sessions, they have also helped practitioners/teachers engage in reflective practice, contributing to improved use of self-evaluation frameworks thereby increasing standards across settings/schools. A focus on shared/reconciliation outcomes, as well as educational outcomes, has helped to focus attention on creating or enhancing inclusion and diversity policies within settings/schools.

In Year 4, the turnover and changes of staff is more apparent due to the outworking's of the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in the need for an uplift in the level of support required by partnerships to sustain Shared Education this year. Time pressures and competing demands has meant that it is not always the lead practitioner or principal attending the training, which can sometimes limit buy-in from other staff. Turnover in staff has also meant that training cycles have been repeated to ensure adequate coverage and that individuals feel confident in the Shared Education delivery model.

Additional training and support needs suggested by respondents include general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support using IT in the delivery of shared classes; leadership training, opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; advice on how to incorporate mental health and well-being into activities. Other suggestions related to ideas on how to deliver shared classes on subjects such as: animation/video production, computer coding, reading/literacy, building resilience, play-based learning, outdoor learning in the context of Covid-19; and a refresher course on setting up IT equipment for large virtual classes.

SFTS sample comments from early years practitioners (training)

<p><i>Training for IT was extremely fast and hard to follow and I found it easier to just practice and find my own way about the IT along with my chairperson who was invaluable in setting up and resolving any issues with IT.</i></p>	<p><i>Training for IT Microsoft teams was delivered very quickly and in-depth for 1st session - found it easy to practice and work out by myself. Did have to contact IT for support and was helped with issues around picture and sound successfully.</i></p>	<p><i>Lots of training was provided, some was repetitive resharing of information for less experienced or new staff this training served as a recap for others but didn't offer new information. The value depends on the individual. The teams training served to inform staff and support them in using the teams platform for linking in. WIFI connection proved a problem for both services and technical expertise was an issue onsite. We are appreciative of the distance support but our skills still caused issue on many occasions being unfamiliar with the digital apparatus.</i></p>	<p><i>I found with IT training we were not familiar enough with Teams to be able to appreciate the training properly.</i></p>	<p><i>Excellent support and all the Zoom I could pick dates and times that best suited me and the other staff, more flexibility.</i></p>
<p><i>I have taken part in Media Initiative in the past so this was not new.</i></p> <p><i>We as teachers were encouraged to develop our knowledge in certain subject areas that we focused on for Peace IV and our children benefited from that as well.</i></p>	<p><i>I feel we need an in-service digital expert to guide us in our times of difficulty.</i></p>		<p><i>Maybe a refresher on using laptop and setting up shared sessions to ensure good quality without spending hours trying to get set up.</i></p>	<p><i>I feel that more training could have been provided on the use of IT within the setting, we have struggled with equipment and how to set things up. Webinars or information sessions on the use of Microsoft Office would have been beneficial.</i></p>

CASE sample comments from teachers (training)

<p><i>Online CPD for teachers worked very well because we were well used to the Zoom environment as teachers at this stage.</i></p>	<p><i>I find training online quite difficult personally as I prefer the face to face approach.</i></p>	<p><i>The courses that are available are good and utilised by our staff periodically. Play-based learning is a popular CPD course.</i></p>	<p><i>Principals and teachers can plan effectively, initially face to face and with online follow up. Training can be equally as effective if given in a webinar, where there is an opportunity to pose questions, as when given face to face.</i></p>	<p><i>I enjoyed the Wellbeing training and felt it was beneficial for the 3 schools in our partnership.</i></p>
<p><i>The fact that we were more reliant on IT meant that the teachers from both schools had to engage in upskilling to prepare us better for online engagement. Initially it was a challenge but with the support of PDST and collaboration with our partner school, it was very rewarding.</i></p> <p><i>More leadership training would be helpful. Also maybe more ideas for how we can implement shared education in KS1 online.</i></p>	<p><i>We didn't really avail of CPD - teachers collaborated instinctively together and planning of lessons was tailored to suit our school contexts.</i></p> <p><i>CPD can now be done very effectively online. More schools could take part this way - less time away from school and less travelling etc - could be very cost effective for all concerned.</i></p>	<p><i>New staff members have joined the school since the beginning of this project. It would be great for them to get an opportunity to learn more about the project. Possibly an online webinar etc.</i></p> <p><i>My fellow principal and I were in touch with each other regularly in a supportive pastoral way. We have developed a real friendship and always try to support each other.</i></p>	<p><i>In working together and collaborating in our planning and reflections and by keeping a balanced and common sense approach we have been able to address our challenges together. As with last year, the staff in both settings work very well together and have themselves become friends beyond the project.</i></p>	<p><i>Through this we all found that we were initially very hesitant about the digital story telling but through PDST and through teacher/teacher collaboration and school collaboration, we all slowly developed IT skills, which we hope to further develop this year. These are lifelong skills we are acquiring!</i></p>
<p><i>Staff and pupils at both schools were very open to learning new skills and all proved to be very enthusiastic about Share the Walk project, once we understood what the concept was and this in turn led staff to seek IT support from PDST, which in turn led to teachers supporting teachers, teachers supporting pupils, pupils supporting pupils and school supporting parents.</i></p>		<p><i>I would like to see some courses aimed at improving literacy attainment (eg reading partners, sounds write phonics and talk for writing) and numeracy attainment (Numicon for intervention, numeracy recovery and catch up numeracy). Anything anti-bullying related.</i></p>		<p><i>I would like to expand knowledge on outdoor learning ideas as with Covid restrictions, meetings when they return will most likely be outdoors.</i></p>

5.3 Chapter Summary

The PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is almost met with a total of **2,093 teachers trained to date**.

Shared Education has had a positive impact on practitioners'/teachers' continuous professional development. In Year 4, 61% of respondents agreed that involvement in SFTS/CASE has **enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives**. This is a marked decrease from findings from Year 3 (pre-Covid), which indicated that 96% agreed with this statement.

69% of respondents agreed that their **professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved** due to involvement in SFTS/CASE, compared to 94% in Year 3 (pre Covid). Specific examples of increased confidence in working ICT equipment, as well as benefiting from training and extra responsibilities around planning and coordination of Shared Education.

It is evident that practitioners/teachers gained new experiences in delivering new subject areas, as well as using new resources/IT equipment, however challenges linked to Covid-19 and the move to online shared sessions and training has somewhat hampered professional development for some individuals. Continually upskilling will be required in instances of staff turnover/changes to ensure that virtual classes are delivered to best effect in current operating context.

6 BENEFITS FOR WIDER COMMUNITY

6.1 Introduction

Terms of Reference:

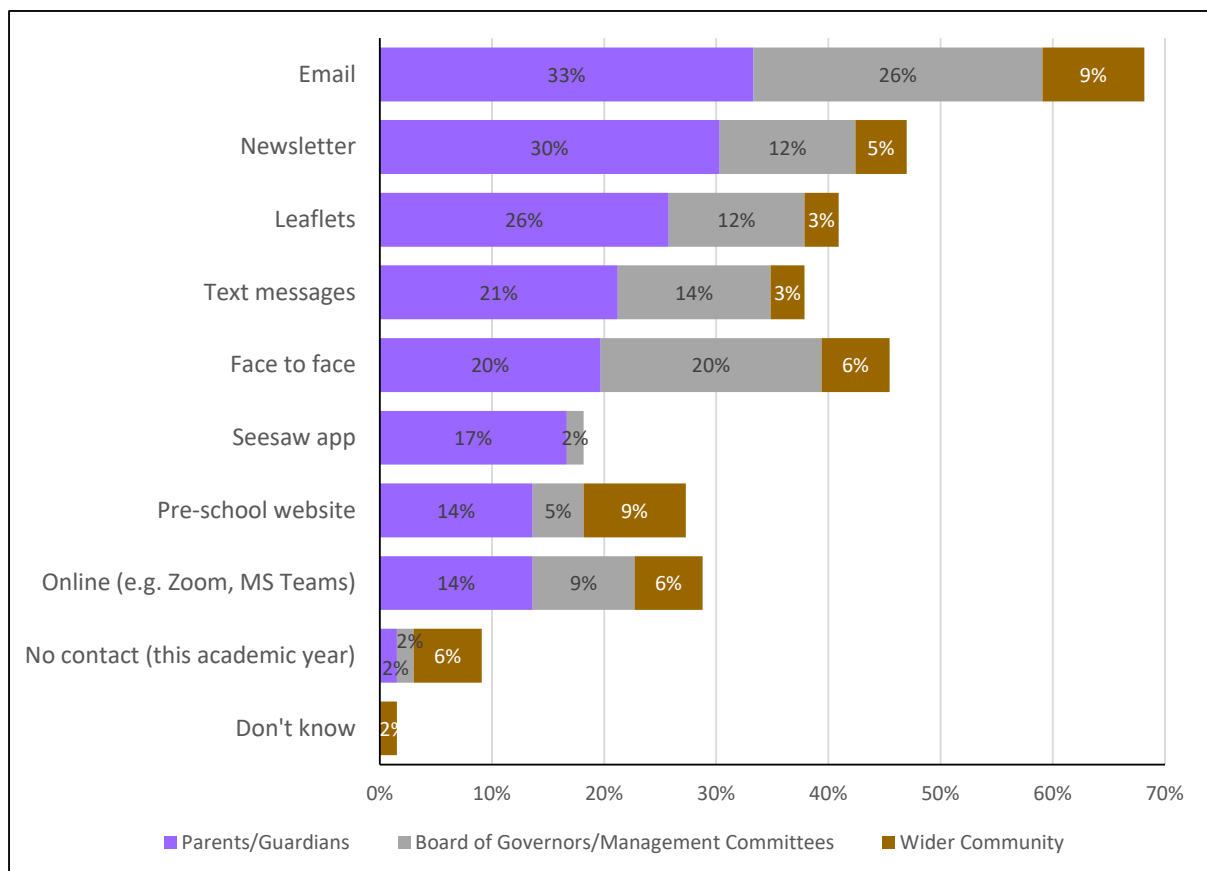
Comment on the impact of Shared Education on the wider school community including governors, support staff and parents who will be exposed to the principles and ethos of Shared Education. Comment on the quality of cross-border and cross-community co-operation.

PEACE IV Shared Education aims to result in attitudinal change in the wider school community including support staff, parents, and governors, who will all be exposed to the principles and ethos underpinning Shared Education, which in turn will contribute to and help sustain the positive impacts on children.

6.2 Key Findings

A wide range of methods have been used to engage/communicate with parents, governors, and/or the wider community about Shared Education. In Year 4, the most common methods were by email and setting/school newsletters which kept partners updated with respect to the settings/school's advancement of shared session during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 6.1: Wider Community – methods used to engage/communicate with parents, governors, and/or the wider community about Shared Education



CASE & SFTS: Year 4 results

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

Table: 6.1: Communication methods that worked best for parents/governors/community

Parents	Governors/Mgt Committee	Wider Community
Apps - Seesaw/ Tapestry	Email	Facebook/Twitter
School website – newsletters	Zoom meetings	School website – newsletters
Face to face meetings	Face to face meetings	Local newspapers
Zoom meetings		

6.2.1 Impact on Parents

Practitioners and teachers were asked to describe the general feedback from the parents of those children participating in SFTS/CASE about the impact of Shared Education, with 96% agreeing that feedback was ‘very positive’ (64%) or ‘positive’ (32%). Reassuringly, these results are on par with last year (97%).

CASE did not focus on delivering activities specifically for parents. Due to the large number of schools and primary/post primary aged children involved, activities are less focused on parents. In general, parental engagement is linked to ad-hoc or one-off events such as launch or celebration events. In the latter part of Year 3 and all of Year 4, these events were restricted and therefore direct parental involvement was limited.

The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement, with an additional target of 1,100 parents to participate in shared workshops. Since the project inception parents have been engaged as a core part of SFTS delivery. Parental involvement is particularly important for young children as educational outcomes are more likely to be achieved with parental engagement.

In Year 3, SFTS parents volunteered to attend/support shared sessions, as well as volunteering to facilitate demonstrations e.g., fitness, preparing food, ‘show and tell’. There were also other more passive forms of parental engagement, involving parents attending shared events such as: launch event, concerts, sporting events, celebration event/showcasing children’s work.

In Year 4, parental engagement was understandably limited, with engagement relating to updates on shared sessions. Whilst some partnerships endeavoured to issue home learning from shared classes, the response was varied, and the setting/schools did not want to put pressures on parents during a difficult period in the peak of the pandemic.

Interestingly, a number of partnerships commented that parental engagement has actually improved and increased this year, as online methods are easier for working parents to engage via mobile apps and zoom meetings.

CASE & SFTS sample comments from practitioners/teachers (parental engagement)

Parents love to hear that their children are involved in different initiatives. The culture of CASE is well embedded in our school at this stage e.g. 5th class pupils and parents expect that there will be lessons in LegoWe Do.

Many of our parents are returning parents who have older children who attended the session and took part in previous sharing from the start years, they have seen a big change from previous years to this year and feel that their older children got more from the experience and communicated more about activities.

Some pupils did not complete some of the Home Learning activities and parents didn't encourage their children to get involved during the Home Learning period. Perhaps some parents working during lockdown and found it difficult to get all of the Home Learning lessons completed for all subjects.

Parents felt more included this year as pupils were involved with a Homework Task as part of their shared topic work.

Much better parental involvement and more communication and sharing of comments than ever before.

The parents love the idea of shared education, their child getting the experience of going on these funded outings. It can be challenging to get them on board with some aspects, physically attending the outings in the past to join the learning. We found that once they do attend most thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Some shared concern that online was just not the same in offering new learning experiences.

Parents were able to meet and join in sessions pre-Covid therefore had the experience to make friendships and form relationships with people from many different backgrounds.

Hard for parents to fully understand the impact as all sessions have been done online compared to the previous year where children meet face to face which engaged parents more.

The parents shared concern in relation to the online value and whether this actually achieved the outcome intended. With Covid restrictions parents were almost excluded this year in that they lacked enthusiasm for distance learning and confidence to engage remotely.

Positive feedback from parents/committee and the input from staff to the programme has been very appreciated - it was a pity that we weren't able to go on outings or visit each other settings as parents could have engaged more deeply with the experience.

Feedback from parents was very positive and appreciative - congratulated settings on participating and delivering the programme during such testing times with Covid-19 restrictions - giving their children the opportunity to participate.

Our school uploaded samples of our completed work to the school Facebook page and website. The Parents Association discussed the progress of the programme at their AGM and the BOM were also notified of the success of the project at regular BOM meetings.

Parents were glad of initiatives which gave them the chance to focus on exercise and wellbeing. During a stressful time, shared learning gave the opportunity to connect with others outside our 5km, who were experiencing similar events to us and share our friendships. Upon our return to school, shared learning provided a fun way to focus on learning, again connecting us to others in our community.

Overall, parents were kept informed and were supportive of their child/ren participation. Going forward, relationships with parents of participating children will be further developed to strengthen relationships between home and school and will build on the successes of previous years. Benefits of parental involvement include:

- Parents' support or otherwise is an important influencing factor on their children, and with their support can continue to drive forward the premise of Shared Education and contribute to the longevity of the outcomes achieved.
- Creates a ripple effect so that Shared Education can be extended to home, where parents and children can openly talk about their shared experiences.
- Provides opportunities for parents to meet in a different pre-school/school, thereby creating the space to communicate with other parents leading to increased understanding and appreciation of different communities. This can help reduce attitudinal barriers to participating in Shared Education and minimise any concerns of parents/wider community.

6.2.2 Impact on Governors

Boards of Government/Management Committees are committed and engaged and have also relayed feedback as to the wider benefits of CASE/SFTS, in terms of generating support for cross-community activities and creating a shared future. The vast majority of respondents (94%) described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as ‘very positive’ (64%) or ‘positive’ (30%).

SFTS committed to an additional output relating to a target of ‘93 Pre-school Boards of Governors/Management Committees will be engaged in workshops and supported to develop and implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution’. As such, it is evident that progress has been made throughout the four years of the project with governors volunteering at shared sessions and/or attending joint SFTS meetings/events with partner settings; and/or attending SFTS training. SFTS monitoring records indicate that 90+ pre-school governors/management committee members have engaged to date. This has helped to build support for Shared Education and to develop the capacity of leaders and management to contribute to sustaining shared activities in the future.

6.2.3 Connection to the wider community

Practitioners and teachers were asked to describe the general feedback from the wider community about the impact of Shared Education, with 70% agreeing that feedback was ‘very positive’ (34%) or ‘positive’ (36%), with the remaining 30% stating that they did not know.

In Year 4 opportunities for wider community involvement was limited to passive forms of communication via the settings/school’s social media, newsletters on website, and some coverage in local newspapers. There were a few examples of cases where community groups, or services (such as Fire Service) engage in a ‘virtual’ tour of their premises to engage children, which worked well in the context of face-to-face restrictions.

CASE & SFTS sample comments from practitioners/teachers (wider community engagement)

<i>Use Facebook to show the wider community all we are doing as part of the programme.</i>	<i>Letter sent specifically about the project signposting families to the project website for further information.</i>	<i>Everyone in the small community is delighted to see children mixing together to complete projects.</i>	<i>It has been about our parents/community appreciating the outdoor learning curricular approach to education, about the urban service meeting the rural service, about town workers meeting predominantly farming communities, and developing relationships with each other and sharing different cultural traditions when our newcomer families were willing to celebrate insight into their nationality and heritage. It has opened mindset as well to respect those who wish to be seen as the same, not different.</i>	<i>Wider community enjoy having the services come together for shared learning....There isn't a huge divide in these services where children are of mixed religion. The community aspect is different to that in the North than in ROI primaries.</i>
<i>We sent articles about CASE to our local newspaper and they published a wonderful article about our partnership and the wellbeing week we participated in together.</i>	<i>Outdoor notice board for photographs and notices.</i>	<i>It is such a positive project for everyone involved, parents and the community can clearly see how it is beneficial for the children, the staff and the school. Well done CASE team.</i>		
<i>Used Twitter and Facebook predominantly to share items of interest with the wider community.</i>	<i>We used Social Media and a local newspaper to communicate more effectively with the wider community.</i>	<i>Information was shared to the wider community through our Facebook page, about our shared learning and photos of Share the Walk etc.</i>		
	<i>We publish news, photos and information about all our activities on our school website.</i>			

In previous years, there were many opportunities for children to have a greater sense and connection with their wider community, as follows:

- Exploring their local area through shared learning activities, travelling on a bus to partner pre-school/school, and gaining awareness of different areas and confidence using different community venues in their locality and beyond.

- Children benefited from nature trails and various team building excursions within their locality, again furthering their appreciation of a wider sense of their own environment.
- Greater appreciation for the wider community in terms of knowledge of customs, festivals, and celebrations was also a benefit of participation.
- Pre-school/school has become more visible in community, from visiting residential homes, links to local theatre, utilising community space/halls and resources, involving local community centres and sporting groups, and extending invitations to the wider community to facilitate and/or attend shared events (e.g., Police, Fire Service).
- The use of local venues to facilitate some shared classes/sessions has also contributed towards changing the perception of parents. Both communities now feel more comfortable utilising venues, associated with 'the other community'.
- Partnerships involved in cross-border linkages (i.e., 18 partnerships) have the added dimension and benefit of children experiencing a wider sense of community, outside their own jurisdiction. Respondents commented on the benefit of working with partner(s) in a cross-border context, where appreciation was gained for the similarities and different context, as well as opportunities to learn from each jurisdiction to enhance the curriculum, as well as contributing to practice development.

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

6.3 Chapter Summary

Community Connections is one of the four pillars of the Shared Education Framework. The involvement of the wider community ensures that Shared Education extends beyond the confines of the immediate pre-school/school community.

The vast majority of respondents (94%) of respondents described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as 'very positive' (64%) or 'positive' (30%). This positivity extends to parents with 96% of respondents agreeing that feedback from parents was 'very positive' (64%) or 'positive' (32%). In terms of the wider community 70% agreed that feedback was 'very positive' (34%) or 'positive' (36%) with the remaining 30% stating that they did not know.

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. Connections with the wider community can also provide an important vehicle in which to build a shared and cohesive society, and as such will be a focus of future Shared Education interventions under PEACE Plus.

7 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECTS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines feedback on the key success factors and sustainability of projects based on a range of qualitative data including feedback from early years practitioners and teachers via the online survey; interviews with Project Partners; interviews with EYS and DOs; and a review of monitoring information.

7.2 Key Findings

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

- Effective leadership generates whole-school buy-in and helps support implementation.
- Aligning shared class activities to the existing curriculum meant that practitioners/teachers were able to embed Shared Education into normal planning and curricular delivery.
- Effective partnership working between pre-schools/schools, involving ongoing communication and a collaborative approach to planning, and delivering shared activities, leads to better outcomes.
- Professional development opportunities and access to support for practitioners/teachers leads to effective implementation of Shared Education.

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

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

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

In a post-funding phase, the key learning and good practice from Shared Education will be sustained and can continue to be embedded into the curriculum, school development plans and inclusion policies. Furthermore, practitioner/teacher training aims to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills to ensure that sharing is sustainable once PEACE IV funding ends. Friendships and connections between early years practitioners/teachers across the partnerships have also been established and can continue to flourish post funding.

CASE & SFTS sample comments from practitioners/teachers (key success factors)

<p>Collaboration is key to success and if this is not present in a consistent manner, the quality of the experience is reduced.</p> <p>Professional relationships are well developed which allowed for a successful Shared Education programme.</p> <p>I think the key to our success was the planning and organisation into the content of our lessons and how we could facilitate them remotely/online</p> <p>Key lesson is that we can adapt to the changes required and incorporate ICT in an educational format within the early years education.</p>	<p>Using technology is the way forward and a blended approach will be very effective in delivering our Shared Education.</p> <p>The success was due to prior proper planning and support from whole school communities.</p> <p>Online methods of communication are here to stay with regards to better time management and better communication with our partners to further develop shared education.</p>	<p>This year has thrown all sorts of changes at the children and they have succeeded with the help of their ever flexible teachers. ICT has been a life saver and without it the Shared Education project would not have been possible.</p> <p>We all had no choice but to adapt to online remote learning. Teachers have always the children at the centre of everything and anything we planned had the children at the centre. We wanted to provide rich learning experiences for them and I think unless you try new things out, you won't know how easy it is to adapt...</p>	<p>We have still been able to build relationships with our partner group practitioners and have been able to discuss concerns, etc with each other on other issues.</p> <p>Teachers also had an opportunity to share Home Learning ideas with partner schools and will use these ideas and resources in future lessons.</p> <p>We have formed a relationship with our partner school which extends further than our Action Plan. The use of Google Drive will be an integral part to sharing resources with our partner school in the future.</p>	<p>I think the blended approach is good as different skills are developed online and face to face. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages and for us to move on I think a blended approach is the way to go - we will continue to develop our online and ICT skills and saving time/money by online methods but get the added benefits that come with the face to face interactions which we feel are essential on a project like this.</p> <p>Education has moved towards an online platform in many ways. Staff are more confident in using these platforms and delivering lessons and sessions in such a way.</p>
<p>To be a success, it takes a lot of hard work and planning. The planning days have been invaluable for the principals of the three schools to work together. However a lot of time goes into planning the activities outside of this. I have found WhatsApp messaging a great form of contact for last minute communications with the teachers from my partnership.</p>	<p>We worked together to plan and deliver lessons. I cannot commend my staff and those at [partner school] for making the programme such a success again this year.</p>	<p>I think face to face conversation with other teachers within our partnerships and Board of Managements is better. For the shared classes, I think blended learning could be incorporated well into our next action plan. The lessons can be more rewarding when children have worked on a given topic within their own classroom (planned collaboratively) and then sessions face to face would be great.</p>		

Reflecting on when Covid-19 restrictions come to an end, practitioners/teachers were asked which of the below methods they would use to continue Shared Education (Table 7.1). Given the experience of using IT to facilitate sharing, there is recognition of the benefits of a 'blended approach' to include a combination of face-to-face and online/virtual contact as part of the delivery model. The context of this finding is important, as qualitative data suggest weighting towards face-to-face contact as preferred method for children.

Table: 7.1: Future approach to implementing Shared Education

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

A 'blended model' discussion will be a focus of the next evaluation to explore these findings in more detail.

The future PEACE Plus (2021-2027) Programme overview references that the digital based approaches will be used as a means of developing and sustaining Shared Education partnerships. There is a need to further explore various models of 'blended' delivery i.e., combination of face-to-face contact and digital based solutions – considering the pros and cons of each delivery approach for stakeholders (i.e., partnerships, children, teachers/practitioners, parents, wider community), as well as considering the weighting of face-to-face and virtual contact for each stakeholder and the extent to which educational and shared/reconciliation outcomes can best be achieved.

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Conclusions & Recommendations

Achievement of Aims & Output Indicators

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

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

With a starting/baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact, over the last four years a total of 494 pre-schools/schools have participated in PEACE IV Shared Education projects (141% of target achieved), along with 2,093 teachers/practitioners trained (99.7% of target achieved). SFTS and CASE projects have collectively involved 92,288 learners from all backgrounds joining for curriculum-led shared classes (64% of target achieved). Based on the achievement to date, SFTS and CASE have met or are on target to meet output indicators, therefore these benefits will continue to grow, with building the capacity for partnerships to be sustainable a key focus of Project Partners.

The inclusion of Shared Education in the PEACE IV Programme has provided a significant uplift in the number of pre-schools/schools having the opportunity to experience Shared Education. By targeting pre-schools/schools with no prior experience of Shared Education, PEACE IV contributes to meeting the aims outlined in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – therefore positively contributing to the legislative and policy focus in NI to encourage, facilitate, and promote Shared Education. Whilst there is no similar legislative or policy focus specifically on Shared Education in the Republic of Ireland, there is increasing recognition of the benefits of Shared Education in meeting a range of relevant policy objectives, contributing to enhancing learning and achievement, well-being, identity and belonging and the wider diversity and inclusion agenda particularly given changing demographics.

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

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

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

Based on the impact data over the last four years, there is strong evidence of improved educational outcomes as well as shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships

and friendships between children, as well as between practitioners/teachers in partner schools. This coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established will create a legacy of the funding.

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.

Impact of Covid-19

The emergence of Covid-19 has been an unforeseen and unprecedented disruptor to Shared Education, having a profound impact on the momentum gained for Shared Education over the last number of years under PEACE IV. From the latter stage of Year 3 (March – June 2020) and for Year 4 (Sept 2020 – June 2021) partnerships have experienced closures and staff shortages resulting from the pandemic and it is having a continued impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes. This poses a risk to achievement, however despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive to help support pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established.

Project Partners have demonstrated resilience and perseverance to ensure the sustainability of activities, and as such agreed with the SEUPB new proposals to advance shared activity in Year 4 and in Year 5 (September 2021- June 2022). This has involved re-allocation of funds towards IT equipment to facilitate virtual training and shared classes, as well as an extension of activities to meet original PEACE IV targets, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the educational and societal benefits that have been achieved to date.

Partnerships have generally adapted well to Covid-19 conditions, and whilst some settings/schools withdrew or 'paused' shared sessions in Year 4 due to feeling overwhelmed by the pandemic (14 SFTS and 22 CASE partnerships), the vast majority continued their Shared Education projects (to varying extents). Many of the partnerships that withdrew/paused activity have re-engaged in Year 5 (from September 2021) and are being supported by EYS and DOS. Partnerships will continue to use IT to its best effect, however the extent to which progress can be made by SFTS/CASE in Year 5 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector working under Covid-19 conditions.

Implementation Support

A key success factor positively impacting the achievement of output indicators is the training packages offered by SFTS and CASE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). This coupled with the tailored mentoring support provided by EYS and DOs has allowed Shared Education to continue, with feedback from partnerships being very complimentary.

The EYS and DOs play an instrumental role in helping their respective SFTS and CASE partnerships to identify strengths and areas for development to enable corrective action to be made, where relevant, and to enhance the self-evaluation process and consequently the impact of the Shared Education activities.

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

Suggested recommendations to improve training delivery and support include:

- **Recommendation:** Given the variation in resource support between the different SFTS and CASE models (five EYS supporting 20 settings each vs eight DOs supporting 50 schools each), it would be interesting to explore the levels of support required in the development, co-ordination, management, and implementation of Shared Education – to inform any future programming activity.
- **Recommendation:** The model relies on effective leadership from pre-school/school management, senior leadership teams, and being able to generate whole-school buy-in. Therefore, it is suggested that training is strongly encouraged for school leaders (e.g., principals, representative from Management Committee / Board of Governors, lead coordinators etc.).
- **Recommendation:** Ensure that all staff involved in Shared Education take part in at least one information session and initial training to ensure ‘whole-school’ buy-in. Consider extending training to include support staff/classroom assistants, and special educational needs coordinators, as these individuals play an important role in the logistics and delivery of shared classes and would value training in Shared Education.
- **Recommendation:** Continually upskilling will be required in instances of staff turnover/changes to ensure that virtual classes are delivered to best effect in current operating context (Covid-19).
- **Recommendation:** Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e., general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support using IT in the delivery of shared classes; leadership training, opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; advice on how to incorporate mental health and well-being into activities. Other suggestions related to ideas on how to deliver shared classes on subjects such as: animation/video production, computer coding, reading/literacy, building resilience, play-based learning, outdoor learning in the context of Covid-19; and a refresher course on setting up IT equipment for large virtual classes.

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

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

Recommendation: There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcome/impact indicators (rather than solely outputs) in the future programming period (PEACE Plus), and how the intervention contributes to the overall aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, our survey results and evaluation findings provide evidence of the types of educational and societal outcomes achieved (Figure 8.1) and should be considered as indicators for any future Shared Education interventions, with a focus on research capturing attitudinal and behavioural change.

The model adopted by SFTS includes a community development aspect, recognising the importance of actively involving parents and the wider community to enhance societal outcomes. A parental/community engagement model should be more widely adopted as a means of embedding the ethos of Shared Education – by promoting the benefits and allaying the concerns of those not receptive to the premise of Shared Education this will aid the sustainability of activities and will result in longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes. It is noted that some partnerships were beginning to develop these school-community links in Year 3; however, progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the move to remote working at the end of Year 3 and all of Year 4.

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

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

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

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

Figure 8.1: Suggested menu of outcome indicators for future Shared Education projects under PEACE Plus

Education outcomes: *Proportion agreeing that Shared Education has...*

Children:

- *Improved access to a wider education/ curriculum experience.*
- *Improved children’s communication skills e.g., use their senses to explore, interact/play together, co-operate, take turns, share, and help one another in their shared environment.*
- *Improved children’s social skills e.g., children can solve problems and resolve conflicts with peers.*
- *Improved children’s confidence.*

Practitioners/Teachers:

- *Improved professional teaching skills and knowledge.*
- *Enhanced ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives.*
- *Increased access to curriculum resources.*
- *Increased access to Continual Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and training.*
- *Increased opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice.*

Societal/Shared/Reconciliation outcomes: *Proportion agreeing that Shared Education has...*

Children:

- *Increased level of comfort and ease when taking part in shared classes / when in their partner school(s)*
- *Improved sense of similarities and differences in a shared class setting e.g., through storytelling, poems, music, art.*
- *Led to children making friends in the shared classroom.*
- *Led to these friendships extending into home/community life.*
- *Improved sense of the wider community for example, explore the wider community through shared learning, knowledge of different areas in the locality, travelling on a bus, customs, festivals, celebrations etc.*

Practitioners/Teachers:

- *Fostered cooperation between practitioners across partnership.*
- *Improved cross community understanding and relationships.*

Parents/Wider Community

- *Increased integration of school within the wider community i.e., enhanced community connections.*
- *Increased opportunities for shared/cross-community engagement for parents.*
- *Enhanced cross-community relations/awareness and respect for diversity.*