



# PEACE IV Programme - Shared Education Impact Evaluation

## Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE)

### Case Study Report 2022: Primary School Partnership

Scoil Mhuire, St. Columb's National School and Donagh National School, County Donegal



## Approach

As part of the wider Impact Evaluation of Shared Education<sup>1</sup>, a number of partnerships were invited to host a case study visit in 2020 and again in 2022. Case studies were identified by CASE Project Partners (i.e. The Education Authority and Léargas).

The case-study outlines examples of activity where the coming together of schools from different backgrounds as part of curricular-based shared classes has helped to normalise contact between children, teachers, and across the school community. Embedding Shared Education into the schools' curriculum should be seen as a key marker of the projects' success, as sustained contact has led to bonds and friendships being developed, which will contribute to reconciliation benefits in the longer-term.

### The specific objectives of the case studies are:

- To provide examples of good practice i.e. projects which have shown improved educational and shared outcomes for children; enhanced teacher training and partnership working; and projects which demonstrated engagement with parents and the wider community.
- To enrich the Impact Evaluation of Shared Education by capturing real-life stories of funded projects.

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation is being undertaken by SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National

- To document how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the delivery of the initiative and how schools/other settings adapted their delivery in response.
- To contribute to the wider dissemination efforts to showcase the work funded under the PEACE IV Programme.

### This case study included the following research activities:

- A group interview with a number of school staff including one principal, one vice-principal, a Shared Education coordinator and class teacher.
- Review of existing partnership documentation including the partnership application form, yearly action plans and evaluations.
- Reviews of activities delivered and photos of activities.

### The case study report is structured as follows:

- Background to the partnership and motivations for getting involved;
- Previous experiences of Shared Education;
- Model of sharing;
- Benefits: for the child, school, parents and wider community;
- What has worked well and why;
- Challenges and barriers;
- Looking forward: sustainability and future plans; and
- Final reflections.

Children's Bureau, and on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

## Background to the partnership and motivations for getting involved

Scoil Mhuire is the largest school in the partnership with a pupil enrolment of 122 in 2021/22. This is just under two-thirds of the total enrolment of the three schools in the partnership. At the time the partnership was formed (in 2017/18) 88% of children at Scoil Mhuire were from a Catholic background, 3% were from a Protestant background and the remainder (9%) were from an 'Other' background. The school has 11 staff in total (of which five are class teachers), and it is located in the village of Gleneely on the Inishowen peninsula in the north of County Donegal. As of the 2016 census, the village had a population of 236 people (a substantial increase from the 166 recorded in the 2006 census).

School name	School type	Enrolment 2021-2022
Scoil Mhuire	Catholic	122
Donagh National School	Church of Ireland	37
St. Columb's National School	Church of Ireland	46

Donagh National School is a Church of Ireland school and had a total

enrolment of 37 children in 2021/22 or c. one-fifth of the total number of children in the partnership. The vast majority of children (89%) are from a Protestant background, whilst the remainder (11%) are from a Catholic background.

The school has three staff in total, two of which are class teachers. Donagh National School is located in Carndonagh, a town on the Inishowen peninsula and is one of six primary schools in the immediate area. With a total population of just under 2,500, the town is home to a number of musicians, artists and writers and to the Inishowen Carnival Group, Carndonagh Musical Society, Brass Band, and the Inishowen Gospel Choir.

Finally, St Columb's National School had a total pupil enrolment of 46 in 2021/22. The school is a Church of Ireland school with the vast majority of children (94%) from a Protestant background, whilst 4% are from a Catholic background and 2% are from an 'Other' background. The school has four staff in total, of which two are class teachers. The school is located in Merville, a coastal town located on the Inishowen Peninsula of County Donegal and close to the northern tip of the island of Ireland. It is the first coastal town of the Wild Atlantic Way when starting on the northern end. According to the 2016 Census, the town had a population of just under 2,500 people.

In terms of deprivation, Scoil Mhuire has always been a designated DEIS (Delivery Equality in Schools) rural

school from the start of the partnership, but Donagh has recently been informed that they too have now been granted DEIS urban status. DEIS is an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills aimed at lessening educational disadvantage and bringing about social inclusion in primary and second level education. Traditionally, fewer students from these schools go on to third level education.

There is quite a distance between schools. Donagh National School and St. Columb's National School are furthest apart at 20kms, whilst there is 10km distance between Donagh National School and Scoil Mhuire and a similar distance between St. Columb's National School and Scoil Mhuire.

Bringing both teachers and children together and creating equality of opportunity was the primary motivation for getting involved in Shared Education. The small size of two of the three schools and the rural location of all of the schools, located as they are on the Inishowen peninsula, means that without initiatives like Shared Education, schools would probably have continued to work in isolation and children would not have the opportunities to meet their peers.

**“ We are a small school and teaching can be quite isolating in a small school. For us, it was just the coming together for both staff and children. We have children coming from a wide area and often they did not**

### **know children in other schools. (Principal)**

Another key motivating factor was the desire to develop more of a community spirit. By children meeting each other in Shared Education they would be able to maintain that contact where there are opportunities for them to meet in the local shops or local sports facilities. This was viewed as being particularly important within small communities where the schools are located.

**“ I find the children are going to the local shops and it's the simple things of recognising each other and being able to meet and greet each other there. They are taking part in sports training after school in the local community. Shared Education certainly helps to develop a sense of community. It helps everyone to understand each other better. Children have been given the opportunity to visit new places as prior to Shared Education, very few pupils knew the other schools even existed.  
(Deputy / Assistant Principal)**





## Previous experiences of Shared Education

Whilst none of the schools in this partnership had previous experience of formally collaborating with each other in same way they currently are through Shared Education, the principals from each of the schools had known each other through attending principal network meetings. These meetings were largely informal and did not look specifically at the curriculum or other areas that Shared Education covers. One of the deputy principals, who had a child in another school in the partnership, set the ball rolling by contacting this school.

**“We had a few principal / deputy network meetings previously, but it wasn't curriculum or pupil based. I had children in [one of the other schools] when we reached out to them about this programme.”**  
(Deputy Principal)

In terms of previous experience of initiatives such as Shared Education, one of the schools participated in the PEACE III programme and partnered with another local Gael Scoil.

**“Many moons ago, we were involved in the PEACE III Programme, and we teamed up with the local Gael Scoil. It was the same sort of thing as Shared Education (under the PEACE IV Programme).”**

It is important to note that the schools like others, experienced significant disruption as a result of the pandemic, including school closures. From March 2020 onwards all schools gradually adapted their delivery and moved many of their shared activities online using platforms such as Google Classroom. They also encouraged children to undertake walks along with their parents in the Mizen Head to Malin Head Challenge.



## Model of sharing

The table below sets out the model of sharing over the five years of Shared Education delivery within the partnership. In 2017/18, all children across all three schools participated in Shared Education and this has remained consistent over the last five years.

	Year 1 – 2017/18	Year 2 2018/19	Year 3 2019/20	Year 4 2020/21	Year 5 2021/22
Pupil enrolment: Scoil Mhuire	119	130	123	125	122
Pupil enrolment: Donagh Primary School	36	32	31	31	37
Pupil enrolment: St. Columb's National School	52	50	54	44	46
<b>Total pupil enrolment</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>205</b>
% of children involved	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Model of sharing	34 hours of shared sessions comprising 7 sessions of between 4 and 9 hrs duration	35 hours of shared sessions comprising 7 sessions of 5 hours duration		30 hours of sessions comprising 6 sessions of 5 hours duration	

The focus of activities in Year 1 (2017/18) was science and the environment, specifically Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), and Physical Education (PE). Activities included a team building day (5 hours) at the start of the school year, followed by five meetings focusing on SESE and PE activities. The school year ended with an educational tour to W5 in Belfast.

In Year 2 (2018/19), there was a continued focus on SESE and delivering activities relating to the

Green Schools environmental programme and the Department of Education and Skills' Active School Flag initiative, helping schools to achieve a physically educated and active school community. Additionally, there was a new focus on the development of literacy skills. A total of six sessions (of five hours duration) were delivered in addition to children participating in an educational tour of five hours at the end of the school year. The Junior pupils went to

Lurgybrack Open Farm while the Senior pupils went to Foyle Arena.

In Year 3 (2019/20), health and well-being became the primary focus of the Shared Education sessions. This included workshops on mindfulness and a range of activities including Friends for Life activities, health and hygiene as well as a number of practical activities including yoga, dance and judo.

In Year 4, due to the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, activities had to be largely delivered using online methods. Six themed collaborative projects were delivered that engaged with different aspects of the SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) / PE / Art / Music and Religious Education curricular areas.

Activities included:

- Christmas, well-being and gardening collaborative projects, all undertaken using Google Classroom and email;
- An active collaborative project which incorporated a shared lesson using GSuite for Education.
- An animal-themed collaborative project using GSuite for Education.
- An Inishowen themed project, incorporating shared work and lessons using GSuite for Education, combined with a celebratory trip to Culdaff Beach.

In Year 5, a hybrid approach to delivery continued with a combination of distance learning and outdoor pupil meetings. A total of six collaborative projects were delivered with a variety

of themes. Collaborative projects 1 and 2 focused on nature, linking in with National Tree Day and 'Easy Treesie' tree planning initiative, as well as looking at native wildlife and habitats. Collaborative project 3 comprised Santa's workshop and a series of Christmas themed activities. Collaborative project 4 incorporated a pupil meet at Carndonagh Community Gardens. The project will end in June 2022 with a celebratory event at St. Columb's Park House for Forest School Activities.

**Culdaff Beach Trip Challenges**

***Coming Together By Staying Apart!***



Donagh N.S.



Scoil Mhuire  
Mel an Oighe  
The Faighin St  
Gleneely



ST. COLUMBS N.S.  
1897

Choose 5 challenges  
to complete on your trip to Culdaff Beach  
& share your photographs with everyone!

● Beach Scavenger Hunt	● Relay Races
● Beach Art	● Chill out Time
● Beach Ball Race	● Racket Sport Fun
● Sandcastle Building	● Noughts & Crosses
● Make a Mermaid / Merman Tail	● Who can dig the deepest hole?
● Frisbee Golf	● Beach Dance Party
● Fly a Kite	● Limbo
● Sand Pictionary	● Framed Motto
	● Sand Sculpture

***Photo: The Partnership found many innovative ways of getting children involved even through the pandemic. This activity involved children travelling to Culdaff beach with their schools to complete challenges.***

## Benefits for the child

**Access to a wider curriculum and different teaching styles:** As well as taking children outside their immediate and everyday school environment, children got to experience a broader curriculum and extra-curricular activities beyond what they would have experienced. In addition, children took part in activities delivered by a larger number of teachers, giving them experiences of a wider array of teaching styles and techniques, thereby helping to meet a broader range of learning needs.

**“ Shared Education helps take pupils outside of their own environment where they would have the same teacher most of the time. Children get to go somewhere else. It's curriculum-based but they get to experience lessons in which each teacher is delivering a different lesson and it's rotated (prior to Covid 19). They have the chance to experience many different teachers and teaching styles. (Deputy / Vice Principal)**

**“ They got lots of new experiences such as a variety of PE activities, with different tutors and instructors. They also got to experience other**

**activities across the curriculum e.g. science experiments such as lighthouse circuits, a planetarium visit and drama and music workshops. (Class Teacher)**

### **Learning about their area:**

Undoubtedly Covid-19 had a significant impact on the delivery model. Prior to Covid-19, children from across all three schools were able to meet up and participate in a range of shared activities.

However, the partnership managed to adapt a lot of their activities and some of these were particularly successful in terms of how they engaged children and their families. One example involved schools developing a walking initiative for children and parents where families from all 3 schools were challenged to walk the distance from Mizen Head to Malin Head collectively and take photos of their experiences for sharing with others.

This provided children with plenty of opportunities to engage in physical activities and develop their photography skills whilst also getting to learn more about their locality.

**“ In the last two years, we tried to get the families involved. The first time Covid set in, we came up with a walking initiative for all family members to get involved and track how far they walked. That was a great success and the children**



**took photos of their walk and were able to learn about the locality, whilst doing it with their parents and grandparents. (Deputy / Vice-Principal).**

**Skills and confidence:** A number of the activities involved celebrating key festivals such as Halloween and Christmas. Children from all classes got an opportunity to make scarecrows and spooky characters for a local farmer's market. As well as developing new skills, this provided a talking point for parents. These were on display for parents and others to see.

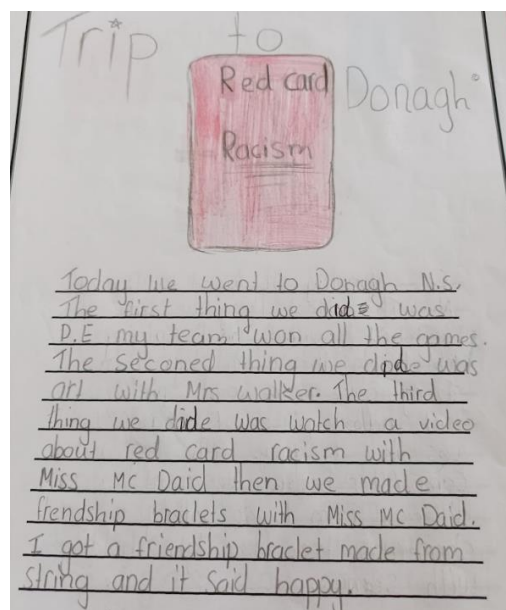
**“ My class enjoyed making scarecrows. Many of the children attended the Local Farmer's Market with family members to see the scarecrows on display. (Teacher)**

Shared Education also provided opportunities for all of the staff and children in the partnership to develop their IT skills and confidence in using a range of IT software. Both the staff and children were trained in how to use Google Classroom and SeeSaw – the latter of these is an application that children can use to store and share photos, videos, drawings, text, PDFs and weblinks. This is something that would not have happened in the absence of funding.

**“ All of the kids are working on SeeSaw and Google Classroom. Their confidence in using them**

**has improved as we have participated in the training. (Deputy / Vice Principal)**

**Development of friendships and social connections:** Shared Education provided valuable opportunities for children to develop their friendships and wider social circle. Prior to Covid-19, plenty of opportunities to develop social connections materialised with children writing and exchanging letters with elderly residents in a local nursing home – a connection that schools have maintained. In addition, children got an opportunity to write cards and exchange them with their peers in their partner schools.



**Photo: A pupil's reflective diary documenting a Shared Education visit to another school in the partnership. One of the activities was developing friendship bracelets.**

**“ In the year before Covid-19, they exchanged letters with nursing home residents. Some of**

*them received letters back. It helped to make the link for them, and friendships were created - it was a shared experience. The other classes exchanged cards and letters between themselves as well. (Principal)*

Over time, friendships between children have developed and deepened with staff pointing to examples where children interact with each other by playing video games. These friendships and social contacts have helped to improve children's social skills and confidence.

**“** *It has opened a lot of doors for children and friendships have developed outside of the classroom. They have become more confident in speaking to each other when they meet in the local community and online. (Deputy / Vice Principal)*

With the onset of Covid-19 and subsequent school closures and re-openings, opportunities for meeting each other reduced considerably.

Alongside this, children became less confident to interact socially and schools had a considerable challenge in terms of building this back up. Whilst they were largely successful, it is still a work in progress.

**“** *They didn't have the opportunity to see each other, and it was almost back to the beginning. The pupils' confidence*

*decreased and it took a while to get this confidence back. We will have to work a lot more in terms of team building next year. (Teacher)*

**Respecting difference:** In terms of understanding and respecting those from a different religion, those interviewed did not believe that children gave too much thought to this. Staff drew on one example from a trip to Derry where children made a connection between those from a Catholic and Protestant background. The focus for schools has largely been about supporting children to understand and value their similarities and what they share in common.

**“** *In terms of respecting differences, the kids aren't aware that there are many differences. However, once on a trip to Derry, a child identified the Protestant and Catholic areas of the city so we discussed this. We don't spend a lot of time looking at differences, instead we focus more on the similarities. (Deputy / Vice-principal)*

The fact that children are part of a Shared Education partnership has meant children have had lots more opportunities to meet with children with disabilities – this was important for children from the smaller schools in the partnership where there would be

few, if any, children with a physical disability. Coming together in one group meant that some of the schools became more aware of the needs of children who require wheelchair access and it also provided learning to children about the importance of inclusion.

**“There is a diversity in the children. We are a small school and there is a lot more diversity in the bigger school in terms of children with disabilities. Our children are now mixing with children with varying needs and abilities, which is very important. (Principal)**

**“Bringing children to other schools helps them to become aware of pupils with varying needs. There is a lot of preparatory work done in advance to make sure that this is done properly. It was a good example in terms of diversity and integrating the kids. (Teacher)**

## Benefits for parents and the wider community

All schools within the partnership have developed an array of mechanisms to keep parents informed of the activities undertaken. Mechanisms included distribution of news and information on

Shared Education through school newsletters, websites and via Facebook as well as by sharing information for publication in the local press.

Prior to Covid-19, schools also invited parents, the Board of Management and local press to joint celebration events and created videos where children's work was celebrated.

**“Parents have always been involved. All schools publish information on their website and via newsletters. The Boards of Management are also invited to some of the sessions. (Teacher)**

Beyond this, parents were involved in Shared Education in a myriad of other ways. Examples ranged from parents going on trips to different schools in the partnership, and also parents being invited to attend a parenting and well-being talk delivered by an external facilitator. Many of the opportunities happened prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**“We actually had parents involved in the pupil meets and they accompanied us on outings to the other schools. (Teacher)**

**“Pre-Covid, we had a well-being talk that was open to parents and the community. The theme was positive parenting and well-being. It was delivered by an external facilitator face-to-face.**

***We hired a venue and provided teas and coffees. You need to have that down time where they could mingle and have a chit chat. (Principal)***

As well as the previous examples, one parent gave a talk to children about dental hygiene and health which drew on their professional background within this field. As one member of staff pointed out, the involvement of parents in this way helped to add another level of enjoyment for the children.

Since Covid-19 commenced, schools have sought to identify more innovative ways of getting, and keeping, parents involved. As highlighted above, schools worked hard to include parents and members of the extended family in the walks from Mizen Head to Malin Head. The activity incorporated a number of elements beyond the walk – including the compilation of a slideshow of photos submitted by parents and children, and provision of feedback to sustain interest in continuing to explore their area. This helped to improve children's knowledge of the history and geographical landmarks in their locality.

***“When we were doing the walks, we got the families involved... all families sent in photos of their walk which we put together in a slideshow to share with everyone. Updates were provided throughout the***

***day of the distance walked to date. This kept their engagement up. The children learned about well-known landmarks, so there was history and geography built into it. (Vice/Deputy Principal)***

## **Benefits for the school**

Prior to Covid-19, staff had a number of opportunities to attend CASE training sessions. One of the last training activities that staff attended was first aid, which staff lobbied for, and which was viewed as critical given the amount of outdoor activities taking place. Overall, staff commented that this training was really useful.

***“First aid training was one of the events we took part in. We fought hard to get it because all three schools felt it was vitally important, given the amount of outdoor education we engage in. There was some really positive feedback on this training. (Vice / Deputy Principal)***

Another of these sessions was curricular based and focused on sharing through play. As all three schools are based in Donegal, they felt the training was not as relevant to them, as the training focused on the Northern Ireland curriculum which they were unfamiliar with.

**“ We signed up for a CASE workshop a few years ago. We did feel like outsiders as the presentation was based on a different curriculum. The course looked at Sharing through Play... but it was based on the Northern Ireland curriculum. (Deputy / Vice Principal)**

Aside from this, however, there were plenty of further upskilling opportunities for staff to learn new skills from their colleagues across the partnership. A key benefit of the partnership was the ability of teachers to learn from other teachers who have different skills and teaching styles.

**“ All of the staff have different levels of skills and skill sets. Everybody stepped up and we were able to learn from others and upskill ourselves. People were able to experience different teaching styles. (Teacher)**

Staff also had opportunities to enhance their IT skills repertoire and were able to participate in training to enable them to make effective use of Seesaw and Google Classroom to deliver live lessons and online collaborative sessions. As one member of staff pointed out, this was a big win for the schools as many other schools did not have these opportunities available to them.

**“ We have completed the training for G Suite for Education and Google Classroom. All**

**aspects of the curriculum have benefited through the PEACE IV Programme funding - all staff were trained on how to deliver live lessons and online classrooms. It was a big win for all three schools. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

In terms of joint planning of activities, this has significantly strengthened over time as staff have become more confident in how they plan and deliver activities. Overall, there is a feeling amongst staff that the dynamics of the personal relationships have evolved substantially and are very positive and this has resulted in staff having a better understanding of their strengths and what works best in terms of content for the sessions.

**“ I think we all liaise very well, and planning days are more open and successful now. There are a lot of shared values and we have a better idea of our strengths and what works well when we are planning our groupings - the dynamics are good. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

This openness in terms of communication and spirit of collaboration has permeated through the entire school staff, including secretaries and Special Needs Assistants. In practical terms, it means that staff are sharing lesson ideas and resources for literacy and numeracy activities that are not Shared Education specifically.



**“ At school, we reach out to each other in terms of planning our lessons and activities. We have asked for advice on various things both at a classroom and management level. There's lots more communication across all staff including secretaries and SNAs. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

**“ We share lesson ideas and resources for literacy and numeracy with each other outside of the CASE Peace IV Programme. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

Beyond the positive benefits identified above, Shared Education has also helped to improve awareness of diversity amongst staff from across the three schools. One example provided related to religious practices on particular days such as Ash Wednesday where members of one religious community would typically not eat meat. This provided a point of discussion for staff and an appreciation of the diversity of staff backgrounds.

**“ When you are mixing with other schools, you become aware of different things. Some staff tend to forget that on Ash Wednesday, some people don't eat meat. It's great to see that diversity. (Principal)**

## What has worked well and why?

A smooth application process and ongoing support from their CASE Officer greatly enabled the staff to get off to a good start and keep up-to-date in terms of their paperwork. This, coupled with an openness and receptivity of staff to make it work, alongside significant planning in the first year, helped put Shared Education on solid ground.

**“ The CASE officers have been a great help - they have supported us to keep us on track, give advice, share ideas as well as help us fill in our documents. And ultimately the funding has enabled everything to happen. (Vice/Deputy Principal)**

**“ I think everyone was open-minded and willing to put the time and effort in to get it set up behind the scenes and to make it a success. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

A whole-school approach was critical to the success of this partnership. From the outset, the Board of Management and all of the school staff bought into Shared Education. This included all staff such as Special Needs Assistants, secretaries and cleaners who have been involved and included across the partnership and critical to its success.

**“There has been huge support from the Board of Management right through to the cleaners. The cleaners have to do more because we have more people coming and going. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

A whole array of other factors played their part in contributing to the success of the partnership. Examples given included the development of WhatsApp groups to facilitate ongoing dialogue and sharing of information; the implementation of a shared drive to enable exchange of documents and other information, and development of a Shared Education policy.

**“We set up WhatsApp groups and we also have a shared drive and shared policies. There's lots of planning and discussions going on outside of school hours. (Vice / Deputy Principal)**

Overall, however, the designated planning days was singled out as being the most critical factor in helping to make the Shared Education partnership a success.

**“I would underline the importance of the planning days because if we didn't have those it wouldn't be possible [to implement Shared Education]. (Principal)**

## Challenges and barriers

A number of challenges arose, particularly in the earlier years of the partnership. Over-planning lessons was one of the biggest challenges according to one of those interviewed, which meant that children were involved in lots of activities but were not given sufficient free time to relax and enjoy the activities. In the second year, staff changed their practices and focused on delivering fewer activities and giving children more time to relax and have fun.

**“In Year 1, I found it difficult starting off as I was over-planning and not giving the children the time they needed to enjoy the activities. We changed that in Year 2 and the whole experience became far more enjoyable. Less is more! (Teacher)**

Whilst cover for the planning days was very much welcomed and vital in helping to establish and embed the partnership, the way in which the teacher cover for planning days was allocated across the partnership was challenging at the beginning.

Each school was allocated teacher cover for nine planning days each. This was an issue for the largest school in the partnership which had eight staff in total, and which meant that one planning day per staff almost totally absorbed their allocation, whilst others schools who had much fewer staff had

many more days cover allocated to them. Whilst the schools found ways of sharing their allocation, staff shared their view that the teacher cover for these planning days should be allocated to the partnership as a whole rather than on a per school basis.

**“The only issue I have with the planning days is the allocation of them. Nine days are allocated to each school for cover and in our school, there are eight teachers so if they had one day each, they are almost gone. To give our teachers the extra days needed, other schools had to give us their days. It would be better if the 27 days are allocated to the partnership as a whole, otherwise it makes it awkward if there is a query. (Deputy / Vice Principal)**

Other challenges presented themselves. The additional work associated with getting quotations was burdensome at the outset. Added to this was the challenge associated with getting transport that could facilitate those children with a physical disability. Notwithstanding this, one of those interviewed noted that these became less burdensome over time.

**“There's extra work. The biggest challenge was the buses as it was hard to coordinate initially because of the diversity within the three schools. We had to get quotes from a number of bus companies and some of them**

**could not facilitate children with disabilities. Once we got through that it got easier over time. (Principal)**

## Looking forward: sustainability and future plans

The schools within the partnership believe that some elements of Shared Education could be sustained. One such area is giving staff time to continue to reach out and share their collective knowledge. Without the funding, however, it would be difficult for schools to find the resources to pay for transport so that the children can meet each other and get involved in shared activities.

**“We would sustain the staff working together, reaching out and passing on the learning to each other. That could probably be facilitated without financial support. We wouldn't be able to get the children together. But hopefully their parents could bring them to meet up at local events. (Deputy / Vice Principal)**

## Final reflections

This partnership provides plenty of examples of how they have built up their expertise over time and used the learning to adapt their offering. Despite the pandemic, the partnership found innovative ways of involving not only the children in activities but also

their family. One good example of this was the walking plans that staff developed to encourage the children to get out walking with their family.

The additional resources that schools could purchase, the joint planning days and the level of buy-in from teaching and non-teaching staff has been critical to the success of this partnership. The ability for staff to jointly plan, deliver and evaluate activities was particularly important given the relative rural local location of the settings and the lack of opportunities for schools to come together outside of this initiative.

The schools in this partnership have not specifically addressed cultural differences through lesson content. Rather, their goals for inclusion have been to allow this to happen naturally by getting to know one another through sustained contact. For this partnership, raising awareness of inclusion in terms of disability and additional needs has also been a focus, with some children having the first opportunity to meet a child who is a wheelchair user. The practical requirements of facilitating accessible visits has also expanded staff knowledge and thinking on inclusion, which will impact their wider approach.

At the beginning, staff were perhaps too ambitious in the scale of activities planned, but they quickly learned and adapted their activities to maximise time for children to have fun and get to know each other. Overall, it has been worth it:

**“Children get so much out of it and friendships between staff have blossomed. The staff really go above and beyond! I would definitely recommend it to other schools. (Principal)**



*This report was produced by SJC Consultancy and National Children's Bureau, as part of the wider Impact Evaluation of Shared Education (PEACE IV Programme, Specific Objective 1, Action1)*

*August 2022*

