



PEACE IV Programme - Shared Education Impact Evaluation
Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE)
Case Study Report 2022: Primary School Partnership
Sacred Heart Primary School and Ballysillan Primary School in Belfast



Approach

As part of the wider Impact Evaluation of Shared Education¹, a number of partnerships were invited to host a case study visit. 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.

- 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

- An in-depth interview with the Principal of one of the partnership schools.
- Group interview with the Principal of the other Shared Education school alongside Shared Education Coordinators in each school.
- A pupil drawing activity with eight P6 children, four from each of the two schools.
- Review of existing partnership documentation.

The case study report is structured as follows:

- Background to the partnership;
- Previous experiences of Shared Education and motivations for getting involved;
- 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.

¹ The evaluation is being undertaken by SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, and on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Background to the partnership

This partnership involves two schools located in Ballysillan in North Belfast.

| School name | School type | Enrolment 2021-2022 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sacred Heart Primary School | Catholic Maintained | 157 |
| Ballysillan Primary School | Controlled | 234 |

These two schools are based in North Belfast about 1.6 miles distance from each other. North Belfast has a population of 105,625 as at June 2020². Whilst dated, according to the 2011 census there is an almost even split in terms of the proportion of the population who are Catholic (47%) and Protestant (46%)³.

In terms of the religious background of children, almost all (95%) of those attending Sacred Heart Primary School are from a Catholic background and 5% from an 'Other' background. In comparison, over two-thirds (69%) of children attending Ballysillan Primary School children are from a Protestant background, while 3% are from a Catholic background and 28% are from an 'Other' background.

Prior to Shared Education both schools had no shared experiences. One of those interviewed indicated that historically there has been little mixing between families across the two communities with many growing up, and staying within, their own areas.

The schools are located in areas of high deprivation and according to one interviewee this means that many families are unable to afford the range of outdoor and recreational activities that Shared Education has provided for their children.

The lack of financial resources within families has meant that prior to Shared Education there were limited opportunities for tangible shared learning and social experiences.

“Our areas are very deprived... and there are high levels of poverty with many single parents having little disposable income. (Principal)

The other challenge for one of the schools involved in terms of collaborating with schools from outside their sector has been the reluctance and resistance of some parents for their child(ren) to engage in shared activities with children from other communities.

This reluctance was attributed to a number of factors including transgenerational trauma and continuing impact of the troubles.

“Northern Ireland is a unique place and there is a lot of transgenerational trauma. We did have difficulty in the beginning encouraging children to embrace each other's culture especially with parents. (Principal)

² Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Population Estimates 2020 for Belfast North Assembly Area. [Online] available [here](#)

³ Census 2021 figures are not available until Autumn 2022.

Motivations for getting involved

A range of motivating factors for participating in Shared Education were identified in the partnership's application form and also through the interviews with school staff. These are detailed below.

To increase opportunities for contact between children: Given that children and families do not tend to go outside of their own communities, a key motivation of the school for participating in Shared Education was to provide sustained opportunities for children to interact and socialise with children who are from a diversity of backgrounds.

“On reflection of their current practice and learning experiences, children are lacking opportunities to link, learn and socialise with children from a different religious and cultural background. (Shared Education Application Form)

To promote empathy and understanding: One of the big motivations is for each of the schools to help promote better knowledge, understanding and empathy of children in their school towards those of a different background.

“Children lacked an awareness and empathy towards a different way of school life and learning and community. (Shared Education Application Form)

To develop the curriculum and learning opportunities: Both schools viewed Shared Education as an excellent opportunity to develop the curricular offering for their children by providing a broader range of learning experiences for their children. Both schools were already developing the World Around Us (WAU) curriculum; this initiative provided an opportunity for staff to undertake joint planning in relation to this with a specific focus on the delivery of the STEAM agenda which helps to promote improving children's interest in science, technology, arts and mathematics.

“Teachers in both schools are developing World Around Us (WAU) within [the partnership], specifically STEAM with a Global Learning ethos. We are both Global Learning schools and the lead teachers recognised the value of developing that cross-community connection as there previously was no provision to partner with a school. (Principal)

To enhance the resources available: Both schools stated that their own funding has always been a challenge in terms of being able to provide children with opportunities for sustained contact. In addition, most parents themselves do not have sufficient income to be able to send their child on school trips and outings. The funding has been viewed as vital to enabling the schools to enrich their curricular offering and broaden the experiences of the children.

Model of sharing

The table below illustrates the year groups involved in each of the schools in Years 1-5 alongside the proportion of children from each of the respective schools involved in Shared Education in each year and the delivery model used.

Activities were mainly delivered face-to-face prior to the pandemic. Each of the settings hosted shared activities with staff from both schools co-delivering the sessions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, sessions moved to online delivery with a small number of sessions undertaken face-to-face. Since the March 2022, sessions have reverted back to face-to-face delivery.

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---------|
| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| Year group(s) involved | P2 | P1-3 | P1-5 | P1-7 | P1-7 |
| Total enrolment (all schools) | 358 | 353 | 381 | 372 | 391 |
| Total no. of children involved | 54 | 194 | 278 | 372 | 391 |
| % children involved | 15% | 55% | 73% | 100% | 100% |
| Model of sharing | 30 hours of contact: - 1 day 'getting to know you' session. - 7 x 3-hour sessions. - 1 celebration event. | 30 hours of contact: - 5-6 sessions of 5-6 hours each. | 30 hours of contact: - 4 x collab. projects of 6-7.5 hours each - 1 meet up per year group of 5-6 hours. | 30 hours of contact: - 4 x collab. projects of 6-7.5 hours each. - 2 x meetups per year group of 5-6 hours per meet up. | |

The partnership started with one year group, namely P2, in 2017/18 and focused on developing and implementing the STEAM curriculum. STEAM is an educational approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. STEAM is part of the World Around Us (WAU) curriculum.

As the partnership developed confidence and experience in the delivery model, they felt equipped with the skills and experience to increase the level of shared education and over subsequent years, increasing numbers of children from a wider number of year groups have become involved in Shared Education. From 2020/21 onwards, all children from both schools were involved.

In Year 5 (2021/22), the delivery model has involved an initial meet up at the start of the year for children in each of the year groups (i.e., seven meet-ups – one for each year group). During Covid-19, year groups who went on trips could not mix and were kept separate. The trips were nonetheless beneficial for the children as one teacher stated:

“The trips during Covid were amazing... they love it as they are outdoors. (Co-ordinator)

During the 2021/22 year, four themed collaborative projects were planned for delivery including Anti-Bullying Week in November, Christmas collaborative work in December, Internet Safety Day in February and a session on reading and sharing stories.

Each of these activities were of c. 7.5 hours in duration. The delivery model adopted by the school has been one of compressing delivery over a shorter period of time rather than delivering short activities over the entire school year. This was viewed as an effective aspect of their delivery model as it enabled teachers in each of the schools to effectively plan the sessions jointly whilst also sustaining the children’s interest and supporting the developing of deeper friendships.

“I feel like a lot of schools... they were doing their projects very spaced out over the school year. We delivered it in a block over eight weeks. This meant that they were seeing each other regularly. It was beneficial for us as we were able to plan better. (Co-ordinator)

At the end of the school year (in June), specific themed activities (such as a visit to W5 at the Odyssey) are taking place for each year group to bring the yearly Shared Education activities to a close.

“This year the end of year activities is themed. The P1-P2 groups are visiting the Ark Farm and Streamvale Farm; P3 and P4 year groups are going to W5; whilst P5-P7 are going to the Crawfordsburn Scout centre. They love that as its outdoor and there is archery and an assault course. (Principal)

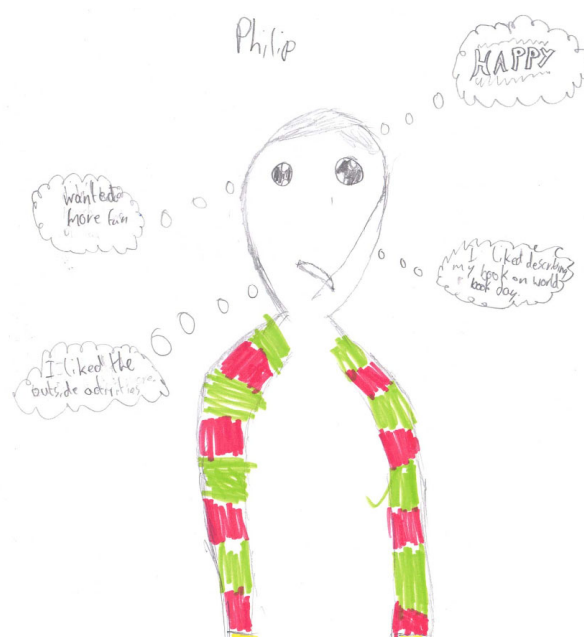


Photo of children’s drawing activity: This illustrates one pupil’s views on what they liked. Describing their book on World Book Day was what this young person liked best!

Benefits for the child

Educational: All staff interviewed agree that involvement in Shared Education had enabled a richer and more modern curriculum to be provided than would otherwise not have been the case. Both schools received funding to introduce Numicon into their respective schools. Numicon is a maths programme that offers teachers a wealth of resources that can be used across their year groups.

Numicon encourages children to explore maths using structured imagery and apparatus in order to understand and explain mathematical concepts. The settings have used Numicon to help Children to:

- identify patterns and ordering them: for example, finding shapes that match and stacking them, and putting the shapes into sequence from the smallest to largest number.
- Counting each hole in each of the shapes to find out what number the piece represents.
- Using the pieces to solve simple mathematical problems.

The teaching staff stated that without the funding they would not have been able to introduce this to their schools.

“With regards for funding, we definitely would need it for the likes of Numicon and associated training and resources. (Co-ordinator)

Numerous benefits to using Numicon were identified in particular for those who are visual learners as it enabled children to learn in more practical and visual ways.

“It was very old school the way we taught at Key Stage 2 before we introduced Numicon. With Numicon, it helps our visual and kinaesthetic learners: they can put numbers down and see it visually. We use the lesson plans and assessment with it. (Principal)

“We wouldn't be doing it if there was not the finance. This is a luxury. The equipment has transformed learning in both of our schools. Numicon is used in every classroom.” (Principal)

Social: Many of the parents and their children tend to stay in their local areas and rarely mix with others of a different community background. The fully funded opportunities provide young people with lasting memories of experiences and social interactions that they associate with children from the other community.

“The children get so much out of this. They are able to mix with other children, show them respect and also have fun. They are able to have expensive trips and our children would never have been in the likes of Crawfordsburn. Our children don't tend to get outside their local area. (Principal)

“They will associate these times with children from the other area. These experiences create lasting memories. (Co-ordinator)

Involvement in Shared Education also means that children are able to recognise and meet each other and their teachers when they are out and about and visiting areas that both communities share such as the local supermarket.

“I met Sarah* [not her real name] in the shop and that would never have happened. We live three miles apart but we have the same local Tesco. It’s those small steps where we are moving forward. (Co-ordinator)

Promoting an understanding and appreciation of diversity: A number of the activities delivered to the children explore difference and diversity. For example, staff from a programme called PeacePlayers came into their schools. This is a basketball training programme that builds in conflict resolution education and leadership development activities. This programme was viewed positively in terms of promoting understanding and valuing of differences.

“They love PeacePlayers... they are all coached in basketball. We go to [Local] leisure centre and they do lots of different games and they discuss how we are similar and how we are different. (Co-ordinator)

“They understand the differences and that they are from a different background and religion to other children. The PeacePlayers programme talks about that straight on. They are talking verbally about different religions and emblems and they are taught the importance of respecting one another. (Principal)

Community Relationships in Schools (CRIS) was also delivered as part of Shared Education. CRIS is a multi-disciplinary, education charity in Northern Ireland specifically established to support and promote greater sharing, understanding and reconciliation for all. CRIS activities included six sessions and had specific sessions exploring diversity and empathy and celebrating different identities.

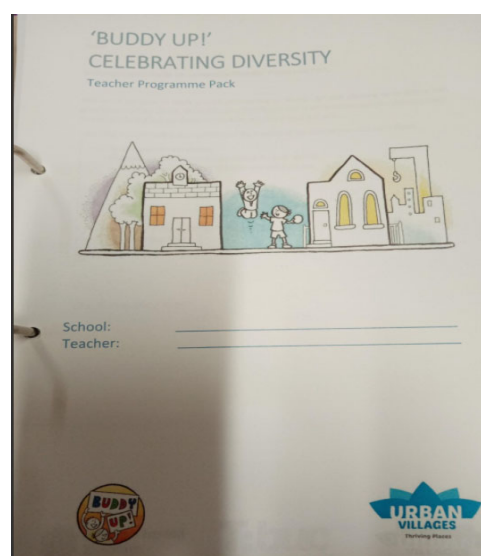


Photo: Teacher programme pack for CRIS

Creating a more positive classroom dynamic: Involvement in Shared Education has altered classroom dynamics in a positive way. Those who might have tried to dominate discussions in the classroom have been healthily challenged by their peers from the other school and the overall dynamic has become more conducive to learning with fewer distractions.

“I think it is good for children to be challenged by others as it creates a different atmosphere, and some children have to step up. They challenge themselves. The ones who dominate come down a bit in terms of their behaviour. In a classroom, the dynamics have positively evolved. (Co-ordinator)

Friendships: Staff from both schools noted that Shared Education has had a positive impact on children in terms of helping them to develop more diverse friendship groups.

Numerous examples were provided of where this happened prior to Covid-19 and they noted during Covid-19, the formation of friendships has been limited due to the lack of social contact.

“Before Covid-19, some of them played with each other on the Play Station. That was 2-3 years ago and before Covid. It was difficult during Covid because even though all of our trips were together... we had to have separate groups and the numbers going on the trips was reduced. (Principal)

A number of the pupils themselves identified this as one of the highlights of the programme.

“I made loads of new friends because of the programme. (Pupil feedback from the pupil drawing activity)

“I felt nervous because I'm not used to people from different religions. I've made new friends. (Pupil feedback from the pupil drawing activity)

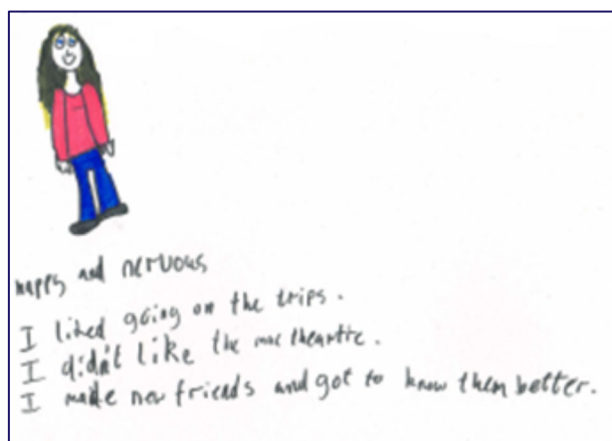


Photo of pupil drawing activity: One P6 pupil reflecting on what they liked about Shared Education – getting to make new friends was one their highlights!

Benefits for the school

Reduced silo working: Without Shared Education funding, it is likely that the schools would have continued working in isolation within their own school. Involvement in Shared Education has helped teaching staff to see how things are done in each other's school and this has provided an opportunity for staff to see how they might innovate and adapt their teaching and learning strategies.

“The school and our classroom can become our little cell. I think it was good for our staff to look at displays in other schools and they can see how they might adapt these for their own teaching. It has been good and helps teachers to become more creative. (Principal)

Training and Continued Professional

Development: Whilst Covid-19 has impacted on opportunities to meet up, prior to Covid-19, Shared Education provided many opportunities for staff to meet each other and undertake joint Continuing Professional Development (CPD) days. The introduction and embedding of Numicon became a key focus for the School Development Plan with teachers coming together to receive training in it.

“*The Numicon training took place before the pandemic. The funding was used to make Numicon a focus in our School Development Plan. We did the training together and we changed our whole school assessment in relation to numeracy. All teachers shared the training, planning and assessment time. It gave us time to plan and assess and meant we were more confident in our teaching. (Principal)*

Joint planning and delivery of lessons:

The extent of joint planning and delivery of lessons face-to-face was reduced due to Covid-19. This naturally meant that teachers had to focus on their ICT skills to ensure that Shared Education continued to be delivered. This sustained contact between schools helped to enhance teachers' ICT skills as well as continually stimulating new ideas of how they might plan and deliver activities online.

“*My ICT skills have improved because we continued to do workshops. It is good to see how others approach things and to get ideas from this. (Coordinator)*

In the last number of months, opportunities for face-to-face planning and delivery of lessons and other activities have improved. In March 2022, teachers from both schools jointly planned and delivered lessons. Teachers had reciprocal roles, with one teacher leading the joint lesson and the other facilitating and vice-versa. This rotation of responsibility was viewed positively in terms of teachers being able to learn new skills and develop their practice further.

“*It's great to see that teachers are learning skills off each other. We have a state-of-the-art sensory room and one of our teachers was released to deliver a programme to teachers in the other school for six weeks. It was great as teachers were getting different ideas from other teachers and were learning new skills from each other. (Principal)*

Enhanced communication, collaboration, and information sharing: Involvement in Shared Education has led to enhanced information sharing and communication across both sites. Schools tag each other on social media for events that happen throughout the school year such as Anti-bullying Week (ABW) and Internet Safety week.

“*The most important thing is the increased communication, collaboration, and information sharing. We tag each other on Facebook in everything that we do. We are two different schools but work on the same things, such as Anti-Bullying Week. (Principal)*

Benefits for parents and the wider community

Since 2017/18, the partnership's focus has been on provision of opportunities for children to interact with each other and this has remained unchanged. The schools have struggled to get parents involved more generally and not just in relation to this initiative. No activities have been delivered directly to parents; however, some informal activities did take place:

“*Each school had a joint display and parents could put something in a comments box. The extent of parent involvement has been limited. (Coordinator)*

The schools have been reluctant to get parents involved directly in the activities being delivered, particularly the school trips, as they feared a potential confrontation between a few of the parents.

Getting permissions from parents for their child(ren) to take part in the programme has been a particular challenge in one of the schools. These challenges have ebbed and flowed over the five years of the schools' involvement in the programme. The affected children had to receive specific lessons separately whilst their peers engaged in Shared Education sessions.

A small number of parents (two in total) withdrew their children from Shared Education and raised their concerns about shared activities to the Board of Governors. These parents also tried to generate support from a wider group of parents, however, this

did not occur as other parents were more receptive to shared classes.

This example highlights the need for Shared Education as a mechanism to normalise cross-community activities and to help positively influence attitudes and behaviours across the school and wider community. However, principals acknowledged that some parental views are somewhat entrenched, and it will take time to change long held views.

What has worked well and why?

A variety of factors helped make Shared Education a success in this partnership. Key things that contributed to this included:

Support from CASE development officer:

The schools believed the timeliness and quality of support provided by their CASE development officer was important in terms of getting the partnership established initially.

“*I have to say that the Development Officer has been very supportive and enabling. (Principal)*

Funding: The funding was critical to being able to buy learning resources such as Numicon and undertake a wide range of activities inside and outside of the partnership schools.

“*The funding was so important. Thanks to the funding for things like Numicon, we were able to make it our focus in our School Development Plan. (Principal)*

Mix and quality of activities: The mix of activities comprising outdoor adventure activities and in-school curricular activities was viewed as being critical to the success.

Many of these involved bringing staff from outside organisations such as PeacePlayers, Community Relations in Schools (CRIS), and Young at Art. Young at Art is a not-for-profit company and seeks to encourage children and young people under 18 to enjoy the arts.

The mix of these activities was critical to making Shared Education work for the children. In addition, the purchase of play equipment has significantly improved the learning opportunities open to children.

“The Peace Players... the young at art, this will be greatly missed. We also bought good quality outdoor play equipment. (Coordinator)

Teachers sharing practice: One of the biggest enablers has been the opportunities Shared Education has provided for teachers to learn from each other. New connections have been formed through joint CPD and staff training and this has benefited teachers and principals personally and professionally.

“The teacher I connected with in the other school – she and I met together in a teacher training course and we saw each other when the PeacePlayers was being delivered. (Principal)

Challenges and barriers

Parental support: As discussed above there were some challenges in getting all parents on the same page and signed up to Shared Education. For the two parents who would not give their consent for their child participating in the shared activities, this meant greater workloads for staff as extra teacher capacity was needed to deliver lessons to the children who could not participate in these activities. Whilst the resource implication was an issue, the principal felt more disappointed that these children were not given an opportunity to interact with their peers in other schools.

However, the fact that the wider group of parents resisted calls from these parents to withdraw their child(ren) from shared activities was viewed positively.

“Some of the parents resisted calls from others to take their children out of the activities. They have to be commended for continuing with Shared Education. (Co-ordinator)

Admin and bureaucracy: The schools noted the extent of the demands placed on them in terms of administration and paperwork involved. Specific things such as the requirement to get two quotations for a bus was viewed as being burdensome although there was an acknowledgment that this is part of the process that all schools and settings have to go through. In addition to that, there is significant resource requirement in developing action plans and undertaking evaluations of the activities.

“I know the funders need two quotations for the bus company, but we usually go with one bus company that we have used in the past. Having to get the quotations is time consuming. Add to that the time involved in creating the action plans and undertaking the evaluation. (Principal)

Staffing: Ensuring continuity of staff was identified as a challenge. One of the schools, for example, had three school principals over a five-year period. Staff turnover posed a challenge to this school; however the other school had a lower staff turnover which helped in terms of ensuring continuity throughout.

In addition to this, getting substitute teachers was a particular challenge during Covid-19 to enable to get children together for individual sessions but this has been less of an issue more recently.

“Getting substitute teachers to let the children get together... before Covid it wasn't a big challenge. (Principal)

Looking forward: sustainability and future plans

Both schools indicated that there was a willingness to maintain elements of Shared Education, in particular programmes such as CRIS and PeacePlayers given how successful they were in engaging the children in each school.

In addition, there is a commitment to continuing some of the other activities such as Zoom meet ups and a few school trips. However, there is an acknowledgement that without the funding, the scale and quality of activity that is possible will reduce.

“I would say that we would sustain some of it. I think we could do some Zoom meet ups and a few school trips. We could also maintain contact with the Peace Players and keep that and we should be able to collaborate with our clusters. But with regards for funding – we would need it for Numicon specifically for the training and resources. (Principal)

Final reflections

Reflecting on the five years of Shared Education, principals and school staff noted the many tangible and intangible benefits that Shared Education has afforded their partnership.

Firstly, there is no doubt that the funding has helped the schools to purchase valuable learning resources such as Numicon that they would otherwise not have been able to afford.

Shared Education has also enabled children to engage a range of programmes and activities – CRIS, PeacePlayers, Young at ART – that they would not have been able to get involved in due to their cost. Shared Education not only enhanced children's educational and learning experiences, but many were able to make new friends with children from different backgrounds which helped to enrich their social circle beyond the confines of their own community.

Shared Education also provided many opportunities for teachers across both schools to come together and add to their existing repertoire of teaching skills.

The schools are determined to continue with Shared Education and see their mission as trying to break the intergenerational transmission of values away from viewing difference negatively and towards valuing differences. As one principal noted, this is not always easy, and it may take a long time.

“It is difficult to break the cycle. We are working so hard, and we do so well inside school and then it goes outside of school.

Changing community perceptions of those from a different background is not a one-off task, however Shared Education has already made a substantial contribution to this task, one which the schools hope will continue and be funded into the future.



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)

June 2022

