



5th Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly

May 2026

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MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

I am delighted to lay before the Assembly, the fifth report on Advancing Shared Education, in accordance with the requirements set out in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. This latest report covers the period April 2024 to March 2026.

Shared Education has been, and remains, instrumental in helping to build a more united and inclusive society within Northern Ireland. The vision for Shared Education – where educational settings working collaboratively to ensure that children and young people from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds have opportunities to learn together – is one which underpins our efforts across the Executive to sustain peace and nurture a prosperous future.

My Department has continued to advance Shared Education, guided by an established policy and legislative framework and progressing a ‘mainstreaming’ agenda which seeks to embed a shared approach as normal and accepted practice right across the education system.

We can be under no illusions that significant work still lies ahead. The scale of the challenge facing our society is evident in many respects, underscoring the need for Shared Education and the vital role it plays in promoting respect, mutual understanding and fundamentally trust within our communities. Shared Education must continue to be at the heart of efforts to build more cohesive and welcoming communities in which all our children and young people can feel safe and thrive.

The commencement of projects supported through the cross-border PEACEPLUS ‘Shared Learning Together’ programme in late 2024 marked a significant milestone in the ongoing expansion of Shared Education, enabling new and less experienced partnerships in both jurisdictions to cultivate strong relationships and build capacity and confidence in sharing.

This encompasses two projects in the formal education sector, the main Education Authority led PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme which is supporting shared provision in pre-schools and schools, and a distinct North-South school civic exchange programme. Crucially, for the first time, three dedicated non-formal projects are also currently being progressed allowing for collaboration between youth organisations on a cross community and cross border basis.

As made clear in my Five Year Budget Strategy, published for consultation earlier this year, there is a deepening education funding crisis in Northern Ireland and we must respond to such through a series of proposed key structural reforms. Despite the extremely difficult financial climate that we find ourselves in, I remain committed to the sustainable delivery of Shared Education.

I acknowledge the limitations that the wider financial context imposes on our educational settings and the range of challenges that brings when striving to deliver the very best outcomes for children and young people, families and communities. Immense credit must go to those individuals directly involved in, or working to support, shared education partnerships for your unwavering dedication.

That is why the investment via PEACE programmes over the coming years is so critical. It is evident from the interest in projects under the current PEACEPLUS cycle that there is continued appetite and demand for support and services in this area. I had the pleasure of helping to officially launch these projects and have also had the chance to hear directly about the important opportunities they are providing for participants, including enabling leaders and practitioners to network, develop their professional learning and exchange best practice.

Following the successful opening of the first Shared Education Campus in Limavady in 2023, I am also eagerly anticipating the completion of capital projects currently under construction at Ballycastle Shared Education Campus and the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh, a landmark development that will stand as a powerful symbol of a pioneering approach to delivering Shared Education across the region.

As we look forward, including a landscape beyond PEACEPLUS, it is imperative that we consolidate the progress achieved to date and maintain the momentum necessary for long-term success, remaining steadfast in our collective efforts to ensure that our children and young people can learn, grow and prosper together. Every child deserves to have that opportunity.

To make that possible, we will continue to advocate for appropriate resourcing and explore any additional available funding options in support of Shared Education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Givan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

PAUL GIVAN MLA
Minister of Education

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALBs	Arm's Length Bodies
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CnaG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
CSSC	Controlled Schools' Support Council
CSTS	Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
DSC SESP	Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project
DE	Department of Education
EA	Education Authority
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
GBA	Governing Bodies Association
IM	Irish-medium
KLT	Kids' Life and Times
MSE	Mainstreaming Shared Education
MSEOG	Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
OBA	Outcomes Based Accountability
PEACEPLUS	
ASPIRE	PEACEPLUS 'Advancing Shared Partnerships through Inclusive Relationships in Education' Project
Rol	Republic of Ireland
SECRT	Shared Education and Community Relations Team
SEC	Shared Education Campus
SESS	Shared Education and Sectoral Support
SEUPB	Special European Union Programmes Body
SSEC	Strule Shared Education Campus
T:BUC	Together: Building a United Community
TEO	The Executive Office
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
YCNI	Youth Council for Northern Ireland
YLT	Young Life and Times

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Shared Education builds upon existing education structures within Northern Ireland. It provides an overarching approach in which two or more education providers, working in partnership on a cross sectoral basis, support the education together of children and young people across religious and socio-economic divides (as defined in legislation) through regular, purposeful curriculum-based contact. In doing so, individual schools or settings retain their own identity and ethos.

1.2 The applicable legislation (i.e. the Shared Education Act Northern Ireland introduced in 2016) places a statutory obligation on both the Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority (EA) to “encourage, facilitate, and promote” Shared Education, ensuring also that it is considered in both policy development and operational delivery. It also places a requirement on DE to lay a report before the Northern Ireland Assembly on the operation of the Act every two years. This is the fifth such report, covering the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2026.

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

1.4 The Northern Ireland Executive has demonstrated a commitment to Shared Education over recent years, reflected as part of the 2020 *New Decade, New Approach* agreement, successive Programmes for Government, and the aforementioned Shared Education Act 2016. Section 2 ‘Reporting Requirements and Methodology’ provides further detail on the specific legislative requirements outlined in same.

1.5 Throughout the reporting period, DE continued to give effect to relevant statutory duties and wider commitments as above, including Shared Education’s contribution to the cross-cutting Executive Children and Young People’s Strategy and DE’s Corporate and annual Business Plans.

- 1.6 Previous reports laid before the Assembly have outlined significant progress in developing the concept of Shared Education and growth in related participation facilitated via key prior investment programmes including the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC SESP) and PEACE IV.
- 1.7 Building on the success of those now concluded programmes, a key focus of DE's work over recent years, as indicated in the last report (2024), has been to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders and continue implementation of the long term *Mainstreaming Shared Education (MSE) Strategy*¹ which seeks to secure sustainable delivery arrangements for sharing which are affordable and accessible to all.
- 1.8 Underpinned by the existing legislative and policy framework for Shared Education including the preceding *Sharing Works*² policy (2015), the MSE Strategy was developed through a process of co-design and published in 2022. The Strategy draws on learning from earlier time-bound funded programmes, aiming to create the conditions in which a shared approach to education delivery is embedded as normal and accepted practice right across the system.
- 1.9 Progression of the mainstreaming agenda is being taken forward on a phased basis through a series of Delivery Plans which have at the centre a desire to enhance participation levels in Shared Education through both maximising pupil engagement in existing partnership arrangements and the establishment of new or additional partnerships across formal and non-formal educational settings. A key driver for this during the reporting period has been the advent of the PEACEPLUS programme and associated support therein for shared learning.
- 1.10 Both the MSE Strategy and PEACEPLUS are explored in more detail within this report. The report also outlines the continued investment provided by DE to support those experienced partnerships which have already made the transition to a 'mainstreamed' environment, and work to progress capital infrastructure projects including the Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC) and the Shared Education Campuses (SEC) Programme.

¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/mainstreaming-shared-education-strategy>

² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sharing-works-policy-shared-education>

2. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND METHODOLOGY

Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (“the Act”)³

2.1 The [Shared Education Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#) provides a consistent statutory definition of Shared Education, identifying the minimum essential components for its delivery. As defined:-

Shared education means the education together of –

- a) those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and*
- b) those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not,*

which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.

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

2.3 The Act places a duty on both DE (Section 3⁴) and the EA (Section 2(3)⁵ of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to “*encourage, facilitate and promote shared education*”. Section 4(2) of the Act also confers the power to “*encourage and facilitate shared education*” on other educational bodies⁶.

2.4 In addition, the Act places a duty on certain education bodies⁷, including DE and the EA, to consider Shared Education when (a) developing, adopting,

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/contents>

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/section/3>

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/12/section/2>

⁶ These are the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), Youth Council Northern Ireland (YCNI), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and any sectoral body (one recognised by DE as representing the interests of grant-aided schools of a particular description and to which grants are paid under Section 4 of the Education Act (NI) 2014).

⁷ Relevant education bodies are defined as DE, EA, CCMS, CCEA and YCNI

implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans; and (b) designing and delivering public services.

Reporting Requirement

2.5 Section 7 of the Act⁸ requires DE to lay a report on the operation of the Act before the Assembly “*at intervals of not more than two years*”.

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

- a) *the extent to which the Department of Education has complied with its duty under Section 3;*
- b) *the extent to which the bodies listed in Section 4(2) have exercised their powers under that Section;*
- c) *the extent to which the Education Authority has complied with its duty under section 2(3) of the 2014 Act;*
- d) *the level of participation in shared education and the extent to which there has been any increase or decrease in participation;*
- e) *the extent to which the purpose of shared education set out in Section 1(2) has been achieved.*

2.7 The Act, at Section 1.2⁹, defines the purpose of Shared Education as:

- (i) *delivering educational benefits to children and young persons;*
- (ii) *promoting the efficient and effective use of resources;*
- (iii) *promoting equality of opportunity;*
- (iv) *promoting good relations; and*
- (v) *promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.*

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/section/7>

⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/section/1>

Methodology

- 2.8 DE gathers data relating to the reporting period internally across teams within the Department, those bodies named in the Act and those which meet its definition of “sectoral body”, and from third parties. Primarily this informs completion of the ‘Progress Over Reporting Period’ section at Chapter 3.
- 2.9 As was the case for the last report, DE Heads of Teams were required to complete formal “statements of compliance” in respect of the reporting period, confirming adherence to the duty to consider, and where appropriate, to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education.
- 2.10 Data on Participation in Shared Education during the reporting period (Chapter 4) is based on information supplied by relevant partner organisations, namely the EA in respect of the MSE funding stream and as lead agent for the key PEACEPLUS Advancing Shared Partnerships through Inclusive Relationships in Education (PEACEPLUS ASPIRE) programme.
- 2.11 As in previous years, information relating to the impact of Shared Education is drawn from a range of established evidence sources, including regularly scheduled surveys and reports such as the Young Life and Times (YLT), the Kids’ Life and Times (KLT) and DE School Omnibus Surveys. In this reporting period, these have been supplemented by findings from the longitudinal evaluation of the Limavady SEC and Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) Report Cards produced by the EA in respect of relevant Shared Education cohorts. This is explored in Chapter 5 ‘Extent to which the purpose of Shared Education has been achieved’.

Format

- 2.12 In a change of approach from earlier iterations, the narrative within this report has been significantly condensed and simplified for ease of consumption. Chapter 3, for instance, seeks to summarise key activity taken forward over the last two years by each respective body, as reported.

3. PROGRESS OVER REPORTING PERIOD (April 2024 - March 2026)

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

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

Compliance with Statutory Definition

3.2 Shared Education requires both a mix of children or young persons across the religious divide and of those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, i.e. both conditions must be satisfied. These criteria are applied in approving partnerships in all Shared Education programmes. The current school structure continues to provide scope to satisfy the statutory definition of Shared Education, i.e. there remain high levels of religious segregation across schools and a social mix within schools. Data in Tables 2a, 2b, 3a and 3b at Appendix 1 refer.

Raising Awareness, Supporting & Monitoring

3.3 Responsibility for advising on the Act and overseeing its implementation rests with DE's Shared Education and Community Relations Team (SECRT). During the reporting period, SECRT worked collaboratively with a range of teams across the Department, the inspectorate, and other key stakeholders to help advance Shared Education, ensure it is adequately considered in the Department's work, and aligned with wider government policy such as The Executive Office's (TEO) Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy (including ongoing review thereof). This includes reciprocal representation on related governance structures e.g. Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group (MSEOG), Strule Programme and 'Go-Live' Project Boards, TEO Good Relations Programmes Board.

3.4 DE contributed significantly to the development of the PEACEPLUS 'Shared Learning Together' Programme which became operational in late 2024 and continues to engage on an ongoing basis with policy colleagues in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to

ensure successful delivery of related projects.

3.5 DE also, in conjunction with colleagues from the Northern Ireland Office, organised visits earlier this year in advance of a meeting of the East West Council enabling Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Minister Matthew Patrick and Minister for Early Education Olivia Bailey to see first-hand examples of excellent Shared Education practice in pre-school and school settings in South and East Belfast.

Funding to Advance Shared Education

3.6 Over the reporting period (i.e. 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years), DE provided £4m in earmarked resource funding via the EA in support of the first cohort of partnerships (around 315 schools) involved in MSE. Maintaining this level of funding as in previous years (i.e. £2m per annum) represents a positive outcome given the significant wider financial pressures facing the education budget. It is however acknowledged that there is a shortfall of some £1m-£1.5m of MSE funding annually to meet optimal/desired levels of pupil participation and quality of shared learning experiences.

3.7 Through the co-funded PEACEPLUS cross border co-operation programme¹⁰, almost €48 million (approx. £41.7m) has been secured to date (funding awards made during 2024) for shared learning initiatives through to 2029. This is further covered at from paragraphs 3.23 onwards.

3.8 Capital funding also continues to be made available in support of Strule and delivery of projects approved to proceed in planning under the SEC Programme.

3.9 During the two-year period, TEO provided a total of £660k of T:BUC funding to DE in respect of the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years to help support associated resource costs for the campus projects. This has facilitated joint planning/preparation for the new facilities and, in the case of Limavady, operation

¹⁰ PEACEPLUS is funded in partnership by the European Union, the UK Government and the Irish Government via the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), with match-funding from the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

of joint campus arrangements following the conclusion of construction of shared infrastructure in 2023.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy

- 3.10 Following the completion of Phase One (2022/23 academic year), Phase Two of delivering the MSE Strategy (covering the period September 2023–June 2025) focused on providing continued support to experienced partnerships (formerly supported under DSC SESP) and the development of the new PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme following the cessation of PEACE IV supported projects in 2023.
- 3.11 Significant progress was made during this time across all six key thematic areas identified within the MSE Strategy including Participation and Collaboration; Capacity Building; Resources; Communications; Monitoring and Evaluation and Governance and Accountability. During 2025/26, work was taken forward jointly by a working group made up of DE and EA personnel to develop a successor, long term Phase Three Delivery Plan covering the five-year period September 2025–June 2030. This plan considers areas of enhancement and any other gaps/priorities still to be addressed and is designed to be high level in nature, outlining the strategic objectives for furthering Shared Education over the coming years.

Mainstreaming Shared Education Oversight Group

- 3.12 The MSEOG, established in 2022 and made up of DE representatives including senior officials, the EA, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and TEO, continues to meet regularly. The Terms of Reference for the MSEOG were reviewed during 2025 including a refreshed membership with a view to enhancing collaborative efforts and engagement between relevant teams across the Department. Other changes endorsed included frequency of meetings, venue rotation and partnership visits. The MSEOG had the opportunity to visit and hold its meeting at the first SEC in Limavady in April 2025.

Strule Shared Education Campus

3.13 SSEC is a flagship programme located in Omagh which will bring together five post-primary schools and one special school comprising almost 4,000 children and young people from all backgrounds to learn together on a single, vibrant and dynamic campus.

3.14 The SSEC construction contract commenced in September 2024 and is currently 30% complete. The campus is designed around shared infrastructure that supports cross community interaction and reconciliation. The following facilities are capable of being separately identified within the contract:

- **Shared Education Centre** – A central educational facility designed to be the campus ‘front-door’ and accommodate joint learning and collaborative programmes between pupils from different school sectors and community backgrounds.
- **Shared Sports Centre** – A cross-campus indoor sports facility promoting joint participation in sport and sustained cross community engagement.
- **Shared Pavilion** – A shared pavilion supporting outdoor sport, events and wider community use beyond the school day.

3.15 The Go-Live Project has taken significant steps to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education by working to embed shared learning and activities into the educational, operational and governance foundations of the Strule Campus. Work is progressing on developing a shared curriculum and aligning timetables across all six schools. Full campus opening is scheduled for 1 September 2028.

3.16 In February 2026, TEO confirmed that that they were content for flexibility to be applied to the use of T:BUC funds within the existing resource allocation made available to DE for the 2025/26 financial year. This was most welcome as those funds (worth £30k) are providing the Strule schools with resource to enable collaborative staff planning for delivery for future campus opening.

Shared Education Campuses Programme

3.17 In support of a headline action contained in the [T:BUC Strategy](#) (2013), DE has taken forward the SEC programme which provides capital assistance to applicant schools through new or enhanced facilities to allow for shared educational use, or shared infrastructure where the schools are co-located. Capital funding secured under the Fresh Start Agreement has allowed two projects to proceed to construction:

- ❖ Construction commenced in 2021 on Limavady SEC (Limavady High School and St Mary's High School, Limavady), with works completed in August 2023.
- ❖ Construction at the Ballycastle SEC (involving Ballycastle High School and Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle) commenced in May 2024 with some sports facilities completed and handed over in May 2025. The main school campus building is programmed for completion in summer 2026. The remaining works (sports hall, pitches, changing pavilion) are programmed to complete end of 2027.

3.18 As the Fresh Start funding stream ended in March 2026, the remaining works at Ballycastle will be funded through DE's major capital budget. Work is also continuing on one primary school project through DE's major capital budget:

- ❖ The EA is currently developing the business case for Brookeborough SEC (which involves the two primary schools in the village - St Mary's Primary School and Brookeborough Primary School).

3.19 Management of the SEC programme (resource element only) transferred to SECRT as of Summer 2025.

3.20 Inspection services were provided across a range of educational institutions including district engagement, thematic evaluations, and the publication of phase insight reports. Importantly, this reporting period saw the resumption of inspection work in schools with 10 March 2024 marking the end of a long period of disruption in schools due to Action Short of Strike. Shared Education is embedded within the inspection approaches set out in ETI's new framework for inspection, *Empowering Improvement*, which was published in May 2024 and updated in September 2024. This includes the contributory areas of Collaborative Networks and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. There are specific questions about Shared Education in the pupil and parent questionnaires. Inspectors report on the quality of Shared Education within inspection reports. Key data from the questionnaire responses and evidence around the impact of Shared Education emanating from published inspection reports are highlighted in Chapter 5.

3.21 The ETI also continued to advise, provide objective observations and exercise a challenge function on the development of Shared Education through participation on the DE MSEOG and as attendees at the Strule Campus Programme and 'Go-Live' Project Boards.

3.22 The ETI continues to report on shared education in schools and plans to disseminate further examples of effective shared education.

PEACEPLUS

3.23 The PEACEPLUS programme aims to promote peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and six border counties, representing extensive funding worth approximately €1.14bn across 22 Investment Areas under six Themes.

3.24 DE acts as the 'Accountable Department' for two Investment Areas under Theme 3: 'Empowering and Investing in Young People', namely the Shared Learning Together programme (Investment Area 3.1), and a separate Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing programme (Investment Area 3.3). As alluded to

in the previous report, a total of five projects have been approved to date under 3.1. (between March and June 2024), comprised of two shared learning projects within the formal education sector (pre-schools and schools) and three within the non-formal (youth) sector, with a combined total value of €47.8m. All five projects are now operational and delivery is progressing.

3.25 Of those shared learning projects, the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme is the most significant (current award worth €34.473m), delivered by a cross-border consortium led by the EA working alongside Léargas, Early Years – The organisation for young children, National Childhood Network and Fermanagh Trust.

3.26 The project is made up of three broad strands; pupil engagement supported through local cross community or cross border Shared Education partnerships (strand 1); professional learning and development (strand 2); and community and stakeholder engagement (strand 3).

3.27 The project commenced operation in late 2024, with pupil engagement mobilised in early 2025. Provision for pupils includes 30 hours of contact per academic year, delivered through a combination of face-to-face and online engagement.

3.28 Seeking to consolidate, enhance and amplify on the achievements of previous previous PEACE IV projects, PEACEPLUS ASPIRE also incorporates additional opportunities to support learning through, for example, activity to help address educational disadvantage, improved use of digital technologies, greater engagement with parents and communities, building capacity at partnership level, support for dealing sensitive and controversial issues and enhanced collaboration at system level. Programme design is in line with the aims and vision set out in DE's Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy.

3.29 Extremely encouraging results were recorded in the first year of the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme (2024/25 academic year), with additional settings joining in Year 2, further expanding its reach. This will be examined further in the Participation and Impact sections (Chapters 4 and 5).

- 3.30 The funding announcements in respect of relevant PEACEPLUS projects, and associated official launch events, including PEACEPLUS ASPIRE held on 8 April 2025 at Monaghan Peace Campus, provided valuable opportunities to promote shared learning. These events featured attendance or recorded video messages of support from the Ministers of Education in both jurisdictions.
- 3.31 Individual projects, including PEACEPLUS ASPIRE, also have dedicated communications resource funded through the programme. Notably, PEACEPLUS ASPIRE hosted collaborative events such as the Good Relations Professional Learning Symposium held during Good Relations Week 2025 with workshops facilitated by organisations with relevant expertise. This day also featured introductory videos of support from each Education Minister. Further promotional activity via PEACEPLUS ASPIRE include regular newsletters highlighting partnership work and an inspiring series of podcasts including interviews with practitioners and experts focused on topical issues and insights related to shared education.
- 3.32 A further North/South civic exchange programme led by Co-Operation Ireland entitled Shared Education for Positive Innovation worth approximately €3.9m, was officially launched in October 2024. This project involves clusters of schools operating on a cross-border basis to enable young people from diverse communities to collaborate on joint solutions-focused projects designed to address specific local business challenges related to climate change, culminating in an end of year showcase. A second element relates to sharing of best practice and professional development for school leaders and staff via an annual conference and sub theme seminars.
- 3.33 Positively, for the first time, dedicated funding is available via PEACEPLUS to specifically support shared education in the Youth sector and build capacity in the youth workforce, through delivery of three distinct projects entitled United Youth Initiatives, Ignite Community and Shared Agenda for Peace.
- 3.34 Engagement between DE, SEUPB and corresponding RoI policy colleagues (Department of Education and Youth) continued during the reporting period and

will be maintained throughout the duration of the PEACEPLUS programme and beyond.

3.35 Updates on PEACEPLUS are provided through biannual North South Ministerial Council education sectoral meetings and Ministers recently had the opportunity to hear a presentation from delivery partners on progress being made through the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project as well as a shared choir performance from pupils attending participating schools North and South.

Duty to Consider Shared Education (DE)

3.36 As part of the latest exercise conducted in February 2026, DE Heads of Teams were asked to confirm that Shared Education had been considered when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans; and/or designing and delivering public services for which the respective team is responsible.

(ii) Education Authority Compliance with the Act

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

3.37 As with DE, the EA has a duty to *encourage, facilitate and promote* Shared Education and to consider as part of policy and operational work. Key actions in compliance with these duties, as reported by the EA, are summarised below.

Shared Education Delivery

3.38 Throughout the reporting period, the EA's Shared Education and Sectoral Support (SESS) Team led on planning, implementing and evaluating Mainstreamed Shared Education and other actions across relevant delivery plan phases, continuing to support and challenge participating MSE partnerships in each of the respective academic years (315 schools/133 partnerships in 2024/25 year). The team collaborated with counterparts in DE (SECR) to co-design the new MSE Phase Three Delivery Plan and developed annual Report Cards based on monitoring and evaluation data submitted by

schools using an OBA approach. Other key EA achievements during April 2024 to March 2026 included securing significant funding through a successful application submitted to the PEACEPLUS Shared Learning Together programme and mobilising the subsequently approved PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project at pace, which as already mentioned, has attracted strong levels of interest from pre-school and school partnerships.

3.39 Digital resources and communications were further developed including through continued development of the EA's Shared Education Hub platform used to share learning, engage educators and promote Shared Education including update to Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) modules and supporting the transition to the corporate EA Learn system; publication of the third edition of the Sharing Works magazine and termly Sharing in Action newsletters; and working with TEO and the Community Relations Council to support Good Relations Weeks in 2024 and 2025. A review of the Pupil Pathway shared education curricular resource for teachers was taken forward, as was work to re-configure partnerships including development of a mapping tool to track participation across Northern Ireland schools. SESS also co-delivered other small-scale SE initiatives including Stena Line and Pupil Voice projects in collaboration with District Councils.

Cross-Directorate Collaboration

3.40 It is reported that Area Planning, School Governance, Community Use of Schools, Locality School Improvement and TPL teams and the Head of Professional Learning and Development have all engaged with SESS over the reporting period to consider and integrate Shared Education within a range of complementary EA processes and programmes and assisting where appropriate with the planning and ongoing development of the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project. The Education Information Solutions (EdIS) Programme has sought to incorporate Shared Education into strategic planning and consider bespoke needs with the new digital solution, while EA TV have produced video and media content to showcase shared practice and capture the voice of pupils, educators and wider community.

3.41 Specialist support services, including SEND Local Impact Teams, Nurture Advisory Support Service and Education Otherwise than at School contributed to inclusive participation and collaborative working with a view to ensuring all children and young people could fully engage in shared activities and meaningful education experiences with others from diverse backgrounds. EA Youth Service has developed resources to guide youth organisations to engage in collaborative work and continued to embed Shared Education and Community Relations, Equality and Diversity across youthwork programmes and funding opportunities, promoting a culture of mutual understanding through engagement and interaction between children and young people from different community backgrounds.

Supporting Shared Education Infrastructure and Governance

3.42 Ongoing support and input to the development of the SEC projects is also highlighted by multiple teams including SESS and Major Capital Works. It is also reported that advice has been provided by Facilities Management in support of governance, processes and procedures for Strule including representation on relevant working groups. Legal Services have assisted with lease and license documentation within Strule and with similar detailed legal work in respect of Ballycastle SEC.

3.43 The People Directorate reported contributions through assistance with recruitment, HR Business Partnering, e-learning statutory duties training for staff reflecting Shared Education requirements and updated Equality Screening processes to ensure Shared Education is considered in line with EA duties under the Act.

Finance and Corporate Services

3.44 Shared Education remained embedded via finance functions and EA corporate business planning and performance reporting including incorporating performance metrics for PEACEPLUS ASPIRE for 2025/26. Updates on Shared Education are provided biannually to the EA's Performance and Engagement Committee.

(iii) Other Education Bodies Compliance with the Act

3.45 As outlined at paragraph 2.3, the Act provides a power to ‘other bodies’ to *encourage and facilitate* Shared Education. This includes CCMS, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the Youth Council Northern Ireland (YCNi) and other sectoral bodies including Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), the Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC), the Catholic Schools’ Trustee Service (CSTS) and the Governing Bodies Association (GBA).

3.46 Additionally, the Act also places a duty on CCMS, YCNi and CCEA, to ‘*consider Shared Education*’ in policy, planning and service delivery. The non-operation of the YCNi since April 2019 has meant that the duties and powers placed on YCNi through the Act have not been actioned since that time. A review of the current Priorities for Youth policy has been undertaken, and a draft revised policy is expected to issue for public consultation, following approval by Minister. The draft revised policy includes consideration of the role of YCNi.

3.47 The Department, through the annual business planning process, requires its Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs) to include actions in relation to the duties and powers provided by the Act. Each of the applicable ALBs 2024/25 and 2025/26 business plans and quarterly updates were reviewed by SECRT to consider progress on identified actions regarding Shared Education, adopting a challenge role as necessary.

3.48 Key or selected highlights from the inputs provided by each of the education and sectoral bodies impacted by the Act are summarised below.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

3.49 CCMS reported that it continued to support schools’ engagement in shared education, as follows:-

- 127 schools in the Catholic Maintained sector participated in Mainstreamed Shared Education in 2024/25 out of a total of 315 (40%),

involving in the region of 18,000 pupils. In addition, 119 CCMS schools participated in the new PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme in 2024/25.

- Worked with the EA and DE to support the delivery of Shared Education, in particular the development of the SECs.
- Despite the absence of core DE funding for shared education work during the reporting period, CCMS officers continued to work to support the campuses where resource allowed.
- Work on shared governance of projects, in conjunction with the EA, continued where possible in terms of EA and school engagement including supporting SEC schools as appropriate to their project stage and need, and membership and participation in Strule Project Boards.
- As projects progress, and dependent on resource availability, work also includes: providing technical support to the Senior Responsible Officer and Trustees and advice to same in respect of capital, asset and legal matters; attendance at Project Board and/or Project Team meetings, assistance in developing or updating associated legal and governance documents; participating in design/construction review processes and implementation of recommendations; as well as assisting with a range of other aspects.

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

3.50 Key activity reported by CCEA during the reporting period in support of Shared Education includes:-

- Design and publication of a primary video on Shared Education in 2024/25.
- Developing content for a post primary video on Shared Education published in 2025/26.
- Refreshing guidance and updating curriculum resource materials on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding for use in Shared Education partnerships.

- Promoting above resources through social media and CCEA newsletter and improving digital access and search functionality to CCEA learning resources including those specifically developed for Shared Education.

Sectoral Bodies

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

3.51 Throughout the reporting period, CnaG worked closely with the EA to support the expansion of Shared Education within Irish-medium (IM) settings. This included regular engagement with a Teacher Developer appointed in the EA SESS team and assisting with development of an IM layer as part of a review of the Pupil Pathway curricular resource, to help ensure immersion pedagogy is reflected in Shared Education activities, to support English and IM schools to work collaboratively and to support wider understanding of what immersion education is and its context in Northern Ireland. Subsequent to that, CnaG also collaborated with educational partners as part of a cross-organisational workshop to further progress the review of the Pupil Pathway document to enhance access and inclusion.

3.52 The organisation also supported MSE and PEACEPLUS ASPIRE officers in the EA by collecting and sharing stories and podcasts of best practice from existing IM schools involved in SE, published in CnaG's monthly newsletter to encourage increased participation in sharing across the sector.

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

3.53 NICIE reports strong collaborative working with the EA SESS team, sharing expertise and resources to support peace and reconciliation and Shared Education within Integrated Education. NICIE continued to encourage all eligible Integrated schools, including those engaged in the Transformation process, to participate in Shared Education programmes. Key highlights include:

- Forty five Integrated schools, representing 59%, participated in Shared Education through mainstreaming or PEACEPLUS ASPIRE.

- Joint work with EA officers to develop a Framework for Integrated Education, incorporating Shared Education elements to support school self-evaluation and an associated support programme.
- Review and updating of the Joined Up Developing Good Relations in the School Community resource with partners, identified as beneficial to Shared Education partnerships.
- Collaboration with wider education bodies, including contribution to the cross organisational update of the Pupil Pathway document and participation in related events, visits and workshops.

Controlled Schools' Support Council

3.54 Throughout the reporting period, CSSC reported it sought to raise awareness of Shared Education across the controlled sector and support controlled schools to participate, assisting with funding applications, and representing the sector on Shared Education strategic groups. Related activity included:

- Participation on assessment panels for T:BUC Camps applications.
- Working alongside EA School Improvement Professional to support a school partnership collaborating on a cross sectoral basis through the Pathways to Partnership programme.
- Maintaining ongoing commitment to supporting the development of shared campuses at all levels.
- Attendance and participation at a range of related events, conferences and groups including representation of senior officials within governance structures associated with the Strule campus.
- Continued promotion of shared education through its communications activity including coverage of relevant initiatives and infrastructure projects across the controlled sector on CSSC social media platforms, videos showcasing shared education partnerships, and publication of articles on SEC projects.

Catholic Schools' Trustee Service

3.55 During the reporting period, CSTS reports that it continued to encourage schools to engage in collaborative working including engagement in more formal Shared Education projects; has updated its policy on Shared Education; continues to engage with the Strule Project and host engagement sessions with Principals and Governors to actively encourage schools to engage in Sharing as part of a collaborative model of education provision.

Governing Bodies Association

3.56 It is reported that a range of articles on Shared Education were shared regularly through E-newsletters issued to Governors and Principals of GBA schools, featuring linked pieces on the Shared Education Hub, PEACEPLUS funding including PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project opportunities, Outdoor Learning, CCEA Shared Education resources, T:BUC Camps Programme, Shared Education podcasts, Post-Primary Shared Education Partnership interviews and guidance on leading a highly effective Shared Education partnership. Shared Education was also actively promoted during visits to 50 member schools, and further engagement took place through GBA participation in the Pupil Pathway for Shared Education Workshop held on 5 February 2026.

Summary

3.57 Overall, drawing on associated returns and contributions, the evidence presented in this chapter indicates continued compliance with the respective duties and exercising of powers set out in the Act across DE, EA and relevant education and sectoral bodies.

4. PARTICIPATION IN SHARED EDUCATION

4.1 The participation data presented in this section is drawn from the main funding streams that applied during the two-year reporting period as set out below, which includes MSE, PEACE IV and PEACEPLUS. Some commentary is provided on the participation levels noted, including how they have changed over time.

Participation Level Data

4.2 Table 1 below illustrates a breakdown of the settings and pupils participating, by Shared Education funding stream, and across phases, updated to reflect the position at the latest full academic year end (i.e. as at June 2025), indicating the change in participation rates since that last reported to the Assembly (i.e. June 2023). This update is based on information supplied by the EA for the 2024/25 academic year.

4.3 It has been necessary to also reflect PEACE IV here as was included the last time around, however it should be noted that related projects ceased in 2023 hence why numbers for June 2025 are now zero. PEACE IV has in effect now been replaced by the new PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme which became operational in 2024/25.

Table 1: Setting and pupil participation June 2023 and June 2025

Phase	Settings			Pupils		
	30 June 2023	30 June 2025	Change between June 2023 and June 2025	30 June 2023	30 June 2025	Change between June 2023 and June 2025
Mainstreaming Shared Education¹¹						
Pre-school	11	11	No change	1,698	1,366 ¹²	-332
Primary Schools	229	218	-11	28,498	28,419	-79

¹¹ Mainstreaming Shared Education funding introduced in September 2022 supporting cohort of experienced partnerships previously supported by the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (2015-2020) and Shared Education Transition Phase funding which followed (2020-2022).

¹² Note Pre-school pupil participation figures include both those attending stand-alone settings and nursery units attached to primary schools.

Post-primary Schools	93	78	-15	11,094	12,543	+1,449
Special Schools	8	8	No change	343	326	-17
Sub-total	341	315	-26	41,633	42,654	+1,021
PEACE IV¹³						
Pre-School	56	0	-56	1,591	0	-1,591
Primary Schools	210	0	-210	25,246	0	-25,246
Post-primary Schools	12	0	-12	399	0	-399
Special Schools	10	0	-10	348	0	-348
Sub-total	288	0	-288	27,584	0	-27,584
PEACEPLUS ASPIRE ¹⁴						
Pre-School	0	70	+70	0	2,068	+2,068
Primary Schools	0	238	+238	0	14,000	+14,000
Post-primary Schools	0	16	+16	0	850	+850
Special Schools	0	12	+12	0	427	+427
Sub-total	0	336	+336	0	17,345	+17,345
OVERALL TOTAL	629	651	+22	69,217	59,999	-9,218

4.4 Table 2 below provides the breakdown of the overall number of schools and pupils supported by the Shared Education funding streams, across phases, and the change in the level of participation between June 2023 and June 2025.

¹³ PEACE IV Shared Education programme was comprised of CASE school project for which pupil engagement ended in March 2023 and Sharing from the Start pre-school project for which pupil engagement ended in June 2023.

¹⁴ PEACEPLUS ASPIRE funding was introduced in term 1 of the 2024/25 academic year. Numbers of schools and pupils presented here relate exclusively to Northern Ireland. Note also that the pupil numbers reflect those pupils which have been reported by settings as having completed the requisite 30 hours of shared activity in the academic year.

**Table 2: Levels of participation compared to total setting/pupil population¹⁵
June 2023 and June 2025**

Phase	Schools				Pupils			
	June 2023		June 2025		June 2023		June 2025	
	No. of schools participating in SE	As % of school population	No. of schools participating in SE	As % of school population	No. of pupils participating in SE	As % of pupil population	No. of pupils participating in SE	As % of pupil population
Pre-school ¹⁶	67	15%	81	20%	3,289	15%	3,434	16%
Primary Schools	439	56%	456	59%	53,744	31%	42,419	25%
Post-primary Schools	105	55%	94	49%	11,493	7%	13,393	9%
Special Schools	18	46%	20	50%	691	10%	753	10%
Total	629	43%	651	46%	69,217	20%	59,999	17%

4.5 As shown within the tables, as at the end of June 2025, a total of 651 schools and pre-schools were participating in Shared Education, enabling approximately 60,000 pupils across 282¹⁷ partnerships to be able to learn with and about their peers from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

4.6 With the advent of PEACEPLUS, the overall number of participating formal settings has pleasingly increased by 22 over the past two years, although this has been accompanied by a reduction in overall pupil engagement across all settings of just over nine thousand in that time. This can be attributed to the differing stages of development of the two PEACE programmes referenced i.e. 2023 represented the final year of PEACE IV delivery whereas PEACEPLUS ASPIRE was in its first year in 2025. The latter also has had to employ a cap on pupil numbers to enable it to live within programme budget.

¹⁵ Source: Northern Ireland school census

¹⁶ voluntary and private pre-schools and Nursery schools

¹⁷ Includes 133 partnerships in MSE 24/25 plus 149 partnerships within PEACEPLUS ASPIRE (out of 195 partnerships in total) which include at least one partner school located in Northern Ireland.

- 4.7 Special schools remain a key part shared education, with 20 schools now participating, representing 50% of all special schools.
- 4.8 The EA reported a slight drop in the number of settings taking part within Mainstreamed Shared Education. Conversely however we also see an increase in the number of pupils engaged via that cohort over the two-year period, with the increase mainly occurring in the post-primary sector despite fewer post primary schools participating in MSE.
- 4.9 Setting and pupil participation in Shared Education is dependent on the availability of dedicated funding, either through funded programmes or from central budgets. As is clear from the tables presented, MSE and the current PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme have driven participation over the two-year period outlined.
- 4.10 While it is DE's aim that every child and young person should have the opportunity to participate in Shared Education during their education, it is recognised that it is not practical for every pupil to be involved every year.
- 4.11 Enhancing participation levels and the quality of shared education provision as far as possible and practical within the confines of available funding remains a key priority in line with continued implementation of the MSE Strategy and associated delivery plans.

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

Overview of Evidence

5.1 A range of evidence, relating to or made available, during the reporting period continues to demonstrate how Shared Education is meeting its statutory purpose, as defined, against each of the following:

- delivering educational benefits to children and young persons;
- promoting the efficient and effective use of resources;
- promoting equality of opportunity;
- promoting good relations; and
- promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

5.2 Selected findings and observations from these key evidence sources are highlighted within this section, including information and datasets drawn from:

- Northern Ireland YLT/KLT Surveys 2024 (and associated DE research briefing publication)
- DE School Omnibus Survey 2024
- Limavady SEC five-year longitudinal study (Interim Reports for Year 1 2023/24 and Year 2 2024/25 respectively)
- OBA Report Cards relating to Mainstreamed Shared Education partnerships (2023/24 and 2024/25) and PEACEPLUS ASPIRE (2024/25)
- ETI published inspection reports and questionnaire data

Northern Ireland Young Life and Times/Kids' Life and Times Surveys 2024

5.3 As summarised in the DE research briefing: [Attitudes to Shared Education- Findings from the 2024 Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times Surveys:](#)

- Fifty-six per cent of YLT and 62 per cent of KLT respondents said they had been involved in Shared Education.

- Doing projects with pupils from other schools was the most common activity (71% of YLT and 48% of KLT respondents). This correlated with the latest DE school omnibus survey (2024) in which respondent schools that partnered in Shared Education in the 2023/24 academic year reported that the most common activity was project(s) with pupils from other school(s), making up 24.9% of all Shared Education activities (470 in total).
- Whilst very positive overall, YLT respondents enjoyed doing projects (77%) and sharing facilities with other schools (77%) slightly more than having classes (72%). KLT respondents also enjoyed sharing facilities (84%) and this was followed by doing projects (76%) and having classes (73%).
- Forty-five per cent of KLT and 35 per cent of YLT respondents had made at least one close friend from a different religion as a result of taking part in Shared Education. This was an increase from the earlier 2022 surveys in which 38% of both sets of respondents reported same.
- Approximately two thirds of KLT (65%) and 58 per cent of YLT respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they were better able to respect the views of other people since taking part in Shared Education.
- Just over half of YLT (53%) and 44 per cent of KLT respondents said they were very favourable or favourable about Shared Education. However, more KLT respondents said they did not know (18% KLT) compared to their older YLT counterparts (5% YLT).

The research briefing concluded "...the evidence from the 2024 YLT and KLT surveys suggests that, as in previous years, the majority of children and young people who had taken part in Shared Education were positive about their experiences. They particularly like the fact that sharing enables them to make new friends, mix with those from different backgrounds to themselves; enhance learning opportunities, and have access to a wider range of activities and subjects than they would otherwise have. Among respondents to both surveys, the aspect of sharing that was liked the most was being with children and young people who had a different ethnic background to them. A majority of children in both surveys also strongly agreed or agreed that they were better able to respect the views of other people since taking part in Shared Education. Taken together, these findings suggest that taking part in Shared

Education has been beneficial for these children and young people, both academically and socially, increasing their opportunities to mix with, and learn to respect the views of, people who have different backgrounds to them, one of the key purposes of Shared Education.”

5.4 Full detailed findings from the YLT and KLT are available via the following link- [2024 - Northern Ireland Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times Shared Education Research Report.PDF](#)

Limavady Shared Education Campus Five-Year Longitudinal Study (Interim Reports Years 1 and 2)

5.5 Emerging findings from the Limavady SEC five-year longitudinal study (undertaken by the National Children’s Bureau working alongside Queen’s University Belfast) are encouraging. Interim reports for Years 1 and 2 examine progress across successive years of delivery since the campus shared infrastructure has been fully operational (2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years). The final report is due in 2028.

5.6 The reports available to date reveal considerable levels of shared classes within the campus, with the extent of sharing progressing as students move up -in particular, Years 13 and 14 have substantially higher levels of class sharing in comparison to other year groups, increasing from 14 in 2019/20 to 27 in 2024/25. Overall, 60% of Year 14 students stated they had 11 or more shared periods per week.

5.7 It also highlights how the partnership enables a broader subject choice available to students. In addition, a range of new subjects have been introduced e.g. Engineering, Life and Health Science, Systems Software Development and Sport at Level 3 (single and double award) some of which would not have been possible without the new facilities afforded by the SEC.

“There was a lot more choice in what I could choose for A-Level. I was really interested in film and we didn’t have that over here. I was able to go over to the other school and find out about that course and get on to that course. If we didn’t have that option, I would have had to choose something I would not like doing.”
(Year 13/14 student, student focus group)

5.8 Year 1 reported a solid foundation was in place in terms of collaboration between staff within, and across the schools, with inter-school collaboration particularly strong amongst staff from both schools who use the SEC more frequently than others. In Year 2 findings show that collaboration between staff is the default option rather than the exception and it is happening more fluidly across all staff groups.

5.9 Similar to the previous year, in Year 2 there is a positive and optimistic outlook on community relations amongst many of the year groups surveyed as part of this evaluation as compared to those who took part in the Northern Ireland-wide YLT Survey (used as a benchmark). Year 14s were most likely to feel that community relations were getting better. The proportion of Year 14 students who stated they believed community relations were getting better, ranged from 61% to 67%, rising from the corresponding figures of 47% and 52% the previous year. It is also more positive than the findings from the 2025 YLT survey, where less than one-third of 16-year-olds felt that community relations were getting better.

5.10 The survey data also shows that across both schools and all year groups, students have friends in the other school. The likelihood of not having any friends in the other school diminishes as students progress through the school. Year 14 students who took part in focus groups explained that spending time in class with peers from the other school encouraged friendships to develop between young people within and outside of class. The shared campus was key for some students to making this happen.

Evaluative data for Mainstreamed Shared Education partnerships (2023/24 and 2024/25)

5.11 Key findings from relevant MSE OBA Report Cards include:

- A high proportion of respondents agreed that pupils engaged in shared activities with 92% reporting in 2024/25 have been involved in a minimum of 20 hours of contact with pupils from partner setting(s), at least 15 hours of which have been face to face. This demonstrates sustained levels of contact.

- 98% of respondent partnerships in 2024/25 agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has had a positive impact on educational outcomes for those pupils participating, up from 91% in 2023/24.
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed in 2024/25 that their partnership worked together to share resources available to pupils, staff, parents/carers and the wider community, up from 82% in 2023/24.
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed in 2024/25 that Shared Education has a positive impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity; up from 90% in 2023/24.
- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that Shared Education has had a positive impact on relations between partner settings and the wider community, up from 90% in 2023/24.
- High levels of agreement were also reported in terms of the positive impact of Shared Education on pupils' respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion - 91% in 2023/24 rising to 98% in 2024/25.

Evaluative Data for PEACEPLUS ASPIRE (2024/25)

5.12 OBA Report Card data for Year 1 of the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE programme (2024/25) based on information supplied by participating schools/settings revealed:

- All respondents to the specific pre-school element of self-evaluation reported that participating in PEACEPLUS ASPIRE had a positive (15%) or very positive (85%) impact on overall educational outcomes.
- 94% of pre-school respondents reported that taking part in PEACEPLUS ASPIRE provided 'significantly more' learning opportunities for young people.
- Furthermore, 97% of pre-school respondents advised that young people explored 'significantly more' new places; with 100% advising that children were more confident going to new places and meeting new people with around 2/3 answering that children were 'much more confident'.

- Similar positive indications were received through the school element of the self-evaluation data with all respondents agreeing (19%) or strongly agreeing (81%) that Shared Education through PEACEPLUS ASPIRE has had a positive impact on the educational outcomes for those pupils taking part. Again, all respondents reported positively on the promotion of equality of opportunity for all pupils to be involved in shared learning experiences with 12% agreeing and 88% strongly agreeing.

5.13 Further achievements from the first year of PEACEPLUS ASPIRE delivery included 416 educators across 160 partnerships participating in 13 professional learning events including a focus on peace and reconciliation, digital skills, and leadership in shared education partnerships with further development in this area in Year 2 of the programme.

Data from Education and Training Inspectorate Questionnaire returns

5.14 During the reporting period April 2024 – March 2026, there were a total of 18,793 questionnaire responses from pupils (2,390 primary; 16,403 post-primary) and 10,880 responses from parents and carers of primary and post primary pupils.

- Overall, 58.4% of pupil respondents (76.6% of primary respondents and 55.7% post primary respondents) indicated that they have benefitted from opportunities to meet and learn with pupils from other schools, for example, through Shared Education. Overall, 61.7% of parent and carer respondents agreed this was the case for their children (68.6% of primary related responses; and 56.3% of post primary related responses).
- Post-primary school pupils responded also to the statement “*Shared Education is having a positive impact on relationships with other communities.*” Of the 16,403 respondents, 56.1% indicated that it was; 15.5% indicated the opposite while 28.4% indicated that they did not know. Overall, 61.2% of parent and carer respondents indicated positively with regards the same statement with 4% indicating otherwise while 34.8% did not know.

Education and Training Inspectorate published inspection reports

5.15 Evidence drawn from ETI inspection reports published during the reporting period shows clearly that participation by pupils in shared education opportunities has a positive impact.

5.16 Amongst others, the following was reported:

- Participation in enriching learning experiences
- Knowledge and skills development for pupils
- Improved engagement, collaboration and relationships
- Improved understanding and valuing of different beliefs, traditions and cultures
- Partnerships help schools to further build equity, diversity and inclusion
- Enhanced professional learning and collaborative curricular working
- Links with the wider community.

Summary

5.17 In summary, the findings presented in this section, taken together, demonstrate how Shared Education is continuing to make a contribution towards educational improvement and in fulfilling the statutory purposes of the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Selection of excerpts from ETI inspection reports:-

“Governors are very passionate about embedding strong and effective community links through shared education. They see a moral purpose in education as transformative in helping to heal division and to change society for the better.”

Macosquin Primary School June 2025

“The school’s participation in the Shared Education for Positive Innovation Programme (SEPI) funded under PEACEPLUS, further strengthens cross-community collaboration and partnership. Through this initiative, the school works within a cluster of ten post-primary schools, including schools from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, engaging in a north-south civic exchange that brings young people from diverse backgrounds together to learn on a regular and sustained basis. This shared learning promotes mutual understanding, respect and inclusion, supports peacebuilding, and extends pupils’ and staff’s skills for life and work.”*

Foyle College November 2025

“The school is in a highly regarded shared education partnership, which is a significant strength and worthy of dissemination. The pupils value deeply their long-standing, sector leading shared education partnership. They value how they have developed open mindsets and shared differing perspectives about interpretations of past historical events and are excited about the opportunities of a shared campus. Pupils and staff benefit from multiple opportunities for personal and professional shared learning. The schools are research partners with Queen’s University Belfast and the shared education partnership work between the two schools has inspired educationalists from conflict regions internationally. The pupils inspired us with their understanding of the importance of being educated together for a better future and the importance of knowing that we have ‘more in common’.”

Cross and Passion College November 2025

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

6.1 Since the introduction of the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, successive statutory reports laid before the Assembly have outlined the significant progress achieved in advancing Shared Education across Northern Ireland.

6.2 Despite the challenges to date including the pandemic and ongoing budgetary pressures, momentum has been maintained through delivery of key Shared Education funding streams, including continuing financial support for experienced mainstreamed partnerships and the range of new opportunities presented through the PEACEPLUS programme, notably the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project, as well as continuing progress on capital projects.

6.3 Continued investment from DE and other funding partners, together with a culture of enhanced collaboration, is helping to embed Shared Education more firmly within the education system. Input received from various stakeholder bodies as part of this report evidences the fulfilment of relevant statutory powers and duties under the Act and ongoing commitment to Shared Education.

6.4 Programme level evaluation data, research studies and stakeholder surveys all continue to highlight the positive impact of Shared Education in facilitating collaboration, strengthening relationships, enhancing learning outcomes and promoting wider community cohesion. These findings reinforce the value of sustained partnership working and the benefits that shared education brings to children and young people. However we are aware, as noted by ETI in their key findings from a review of shared education in the schools inspected from September 2024 – June 2025, whilst the evidence shows clearly that participation by pupils in shared education opportunities has a positive impact; not enough pupils get the chance to take part in, and benefit from, shared education experiences and opportunities, particularly in post-primary.

6.5 Looking ahead to the next reporting period, DE, working alongside key stakeholders, will continue to implement the MSE Strategy in line with the Phase Three Delivery Plan and available resources, aiming to strengthen collaboration

and further normalise and embed partnership working. The primary underpinning priority remains, as previously, to increase participation levels in sharing across phases and sectors, addressing any gaps or barriers which may exist, and maximising pupil engagement as far as possible.

6.6 PEACEPLUS will continue to be a significant driver in this work over the coming years, particularly through the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project. DE will continue to collaborate with EA, SEUPB and Irish government colleagues to ensure effective delivery, monitoring and refinement including exploring additional funding award opportunities within the current programme. Beyond that, DE will continue to seek additional resources to secure the long-term sustainability of Shared Education, recognising that ongoing investment is essential to enable delivery, maintain and enhance quality, build capacity and ensure consistency across the system.

6.7 With this in mind, it is understood that commitments are in place which will see a successor PEACE programme implemented as a replacement for PEACEPLUS once the current funding cycle comes to an end. This is a welcome development and presents a valuable opportunity for DE to explore what options may be open to education through this avenue, including the potential to further advance Shared Education provision.

6.8 Further planned work and engagement with relevant colleagues will focus on enabling, equipping and empowering the education workforce to deliver or support Shared Education effectively, as well as promoting broader awareness, knowledge and understanding of Shared Education. PEACEPLUS ASPIRE will be critical to this development.

6.9 Progress on the Strule and SEC projects will also continue across the next reporting period in line with approved business cases and available funding, with the main school building in Ballycastle anticipated to be finished and available to the schools for the start of the new academic year in August 2026 and full works due to complete the following year. Construction at Strule is also planned for completion in 2027 with full campus opening in September 2028. These are significant steps forward.

- 6.10 As further SECs become operational, robust evaluation will be essential; insights and learning from the ongoing evaluation of Limavady SEC will prove helpful in this regard.
- 6.11 In conclusion, notable developments have been achieved during this reporting period, crucially the commencement of PEACEPLUS and ongoing delivery of associated projects. The level of engagement demonstrated through PEACEPLUS ASPIRE for example reflects the strong demand for sharing across pre-school, primary, post-primary and special school sectors. This programme will continue to make strides in enhancing the delivery of Shared Education during its lifetime, expanding the scope of new, creative and stimulating opportunities and experiences for all learners.
- 6.12 Building on that sustained progress, further collective effort is required to fully realise the vision and aims set out in the MSE Strategy and enable more children and young people to benefit. Working in partnership, DE remains committed to further embedding Shared Education and supporting the building of strong, meaningful and inclusive relationships, understanding and connections at all levels -across our schools and settings, educators and children and young people alike, and within communities - keeping on that journey towards system wide and societal change.

Selection of quotes from PEACEPLUS ASPIRE practitioners

“One of the most rewarding aspects has been watching the children get to know each other -forming friendships, learning about each other’s backgrounds and celebrating their differences in a spirit of respect and curiosity. This has helped foster a stronger sense of community and mutual understanding between our schools.

At the same time, the programme has allowed pupils to develop important digital skills in a fun and engaging way. Whether they were collaborating on creative projects or exploring new technologies, the children were learning without even realising it, because they were having so much fun!”

“It has been a real privilege to participate in the ASPIRE project. The experience has brought immense value to both of our school communities, fostering a strong sense of wellbeing, collaboration and pride. Through hands on learning, peer-led initiatives and community engagement, our pupils have not only deepened their connection to the world around them but also developed key life skills such as teamwork, leadership and emotional awareness.”

“ASPIRE has provided a meaningful platform for connection across classes and between schools encouraging shared experiences and a supportive environment where every child feels valued. It has truly enriched our school culture and helped to embed wellbeing into everyday learning and relationships. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity and look forward to building on this momentum in the future.”

‘meet new people and learn new things’

Voice of young person involved in a PEACEPLUS ASPIRE partnership

Table 1a Number of Educational Establishments in Northern Ireland by Management Type 2024/25

	Management Type	Schools
Nursery Schools	Controlled	60
	Catholic Maintained	31
	Controlled Integrated	2
	TOTAL	93
Primary Schools	Controlled	346
	Catholic Maintained	346
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	25
	Other Maintained - Other	2
	Controlled Integrated	27
	Grant Maintained Integrated	23
	TOTAL	769
	<i>Grammar school prep depts.¹⁸</i>	<i>12</i>
	Total Including Prep Departments	781
Post-Primary Schools - Secondary	Controlled	47
	Catholic Maintained	54
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	2
	Controlled Integrated	6
	Grant Maintained Integrated	15
	TOTAL	124
Post-Primary Schools - Grammar	Controlled	16
	Voluntary Schools under Catholic management	29
	Voluntary Schools under other management	21
	TOTAL	66
	Total Post-Primary Schools	190
	Special Schools	40
	Hospital Schools	0
	Independent Schools	13
	All schools GRAND TOTAL (excl Prep Depts)	1,105
Voluntary and Private Pre-Schools		322
	Total schools and pre-school education centres	1,427

Source: Northern Ireland school census

¹⁸ Part of Grammar Schools

Table 1b Number of Educational Establishments in Northern Ireland by Management Type 2025/26

	Management Type	Schools
Nursery Schools	Controlled	57
	Catholic Maintained	31
	Controlled Integrated	5
	TOTAL	93
Primary Schools	Controlled	343
	Catholic Maintained	345
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	25
	Other Maintained - Other	1
	Controlled Integrated	27
	Grant Maintained Integrated	23
	TOTAL	764
	<i>Grammar school prep depts.¹⁹</i>	<i>11</i>
Total Including Prep Departments	775	
Post-Primary Schools - Secondary	Controlled	47
	Catholic Maintained	54
	Other Maintained - Irish Medium	2
	Controlled Integrated	6
	Grant Maintained Integrated	15
	TOTAL	124
Post-Primary Schools - Grammar	Controlled	16
	Voluntary Schools under Catholic management	29
	Voluntary Schools under other management	21
	TOTAL	66
	Total Post-Primary Schools	190
	Special Schools	40
	Hospital Schools	0
	Independent Schools	15
	All schools GRAND TOTAL (excl Prep Depts)	1,102
Voluntary and Private Pre-Schools		316
	Total schools and pre-school education centres	1,418

Source: Northern Ireland school census

¹⁹ Part of Grammar Schools

Table 2a Religion of Pupils by School Type and Management Type 2024/25

		Protestant	Catholic	Other/Not Recorded	Total
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Centres (funded children only)	Voluntary	1,132	2,716	1,610	5,458
	Private	254	304	372	930
	TOTAL	1,386	3,020	1,982	6,388
Nursery Schools	Controlled	1,489	1,017	1,378	3,884
	Catholic Maintained	34	1,387	310	1,731
	Controlled Integrated	30	30	45	105
	TOTAL	1,553	2,434	1,733	5,720
Nursery Classes & Reception	Controlled	1,852	565	2,049	4,466
	Catholic Maintained	63	3,419	338	3,820
	Other Maintained	39	421	113	573
	Controlled Integrated	72	91	93	256
	Grant Maintained Integrated	149	250	236	635
	TOTAL	2,175	4,746	2,829	9,750
Primary Schools (Years 1 - 7)	Controlled	40,017	5,923	29,078	75,018
	Catholic Maintained	714	69,211	5,612	75,537
	Other Maintained	219	2,988	460	3,667
	Controlled Integrated	1,658	1,491	2,290	5,439
	Grant Maintained Integrated	1,692	2,521	2,337	6,550
	TOTAL	44,300	82,134	39,777	166,211
Prep. Departments (Years 1 - 7)	TOTAL	367	170	775	1,312
Secondary Schools (Non Grammar)	Controlled	22,229	1,648	8,610	32,487
	Catholic Maintained	#	37,573	#	41,070
	Other Maintained	*	1,300	#	1,366
	Controlled Integrated	2,261	781	1,408	4,450
	Grant Maintained Integrated	3,485	4,337	3,126	10,948
	TOTAL	28,760	45,639	15,922	90,321
Grammar Schools (Year 8 - Year 14)	Controlled	8,630	1,934	4,169	14,733
	Voluntary - (Catholic Man)	432	28,563	1,754	30,749
	Voluntary - (Other Man)	11,039	3,442	6,605	21,086
	TOTAL	20,101	33,939	12,528	66,568
Special Schools	Controlled	2,073	2,850	2,034	6,957
	Catholic Maintained	11	357	47	415
	Other Maintained	22	30	38	90
	TOTAL	2,106	3,237	2,119	7,462
EOTAS Centres		10	10	5	25
ALL FUNDED PRE-SCHOOL, NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS and EOTAS Centres		100,804	175,500	77,744	354,048

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

Table 2b Religion of Pupils by School Type and Management Type 2025/26

		Protestant	Catholic	Other/Not Recorded	Total
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Centres (funded children only)	Voluntary	1,327	2,800	1,325	5,452
	Private	263	288	377	928
	TOTAL	1,590	3,088	1,702	6,380
Nursery Schools	Controlled	1,387	906	1,120	3,413
	Catholic Maintained	39	1,387	291	1,717
	Controlled Integrated	128	83	189	400
	TOTAL	1,554	2,376	1,600	5,530
Nursery Classes & Reception	Controlled	1,843	557	2,023	4,423
	Catholic Maintained	61	3,356	395	3,812
	Other Maintained	26	487	89	602
	Controlled Integrated	62	113	106	281
	Grant Maintained Integrated	186	272	252	710
	TOTAL	2,178	4,785	2,865	9,828
Primary Schools (Years 1 - 7)	Controlled	38,396	5,874	29,324	73,594
	Catholic Maintained	671	68,092	5,781	74,544
	Other Maintained	260	3,012	418	3,690
	Controlled Integrated	1,589	1,424	2,243	5,256
	Grant Maintained Integrated	1,600	2,470	2,422	6,492
	TOTAL	42,516	80,872	40,188	163,576
Prep. Departments (Years 1 - 7)	TOTAL	307	149	681	1,137
Secondary Schools (Non Grammar)	Controlled	21,605	1,731	8,739	32,075
	Catholic Maintained	#	#	2,919	41,175
	Other Maintained	*	#	66	1,373
	Controlled Integrated	2,220	772	1,448	4,440
	Grant Maintained Integrated	3,472	4,292	3,248	11,012
	TOTAL	28,121	45,534	16,420	90,075
Grammar Schools (Year 8 - Year 14)	Controlled	8,392	2,023	4,389	14,804
	Voluntary - (Catholic Man)	439	28,318	1,948	30,705
	Voluntary - (Other Man)	10,795	3,475	6,912	21,182
	TOTAL	19,626	33,816	13,249	66,691
Special Schools	Controlled	2,086	2,950	2,176	7,212
	Catholic Maintained	12	361	53	426
	Other Maintained	22	31	38	91
	TOTAL	2,120	3,342	2,267	7,729
EOTAS Centres		7	12	6	25
ALL FUNDED PRE-SCHOOL, NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS and EOTAS Centres		98,071	174,115	79,052	351,238

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

Table 3a Free School Meal Entitlement by School Type and Management Type 2024/25

School and management type	Number	Enrolment	Percentage
Funded Voluntary and Private Pre-schools - Voluntary	1,184	5,458	21.7
Funded Voluntary and Private Pre-schools - Private	133	930	14.3
TOTAL	1,317	6,388	20.6
Nursery Schools - FULL TIME			
Controlled	1,221	2,345	52.1
Catholic Maintained	817	1,577	51.8
Controlled Integrated	22	53	41.5
TOTAL	2,060	3,975	51.8
Nursery Schools - PART TIME			
Controlled	282	1,539	18.3
Catholic Maintained	23	154	14.9
Nursery schools - Part-time - Controlled Integrated	10	52	19.2
TOTAL	315	1,745	18.1
Nursery Classes - FULL TIME			
Controlled	984	2,319	42.4
Catholic Maintained	1,069	2,470	43.3
Other Maintained	128	274	46.7
Controlled Integrated	52	99	52.5
Grant Maintained Integrated	59	132	44.7
TOTAL	2,292	5,294	43.3
Nursery Classes - PART TIME			
Controlled	338	2,147	15.7
Catholic Maintained	187	1,350	13.9
Other Maintained	42	299	14
Controlled Integrated	33	157	21
Grant Maintained Integrated	102	503	20.3
TOTAL	702	4,456	15.8
Pre-school Specialist Provision in a nursery school	13	30	43.3
Pre-school Specialist Provision in a primary school	23	77	29.9
Reception pupils	23	184	12.5
TOTAL PRE-SCHOOL	6,747	22,149	12.5
Primary Schools (Year 1 - Year 7)			
Controlled	18,924	75,018	25.2
Catholic Maintained	21,545	75,537	28.5
Other Maintained - Other	1,235	3,667	33.7
Controlled Integrated	1,543	5,439	28.4
Grant Maintained Integrated	1,542	6,550	23.5
TOTAL	44,789	166,211	26.9
Prep. Departments	15	1,312	1.1
ALL PRIMARY AND PREP. YEAR 1-7 PUPILS	44,804	167,523	26.7
Secondary (Non Grammar) Schools			
Controlled	9,946	32,487	30.6
Catholic Maintained	13,815	41,070	33.6
Other Maintained	552	1,366	40.4
Controlled Integrated	1,596	4,450	35.9
Grant Maintained Integrated	3,273	10,948	29.9
TOTAL	29,182	90,321	32.3
Grammar Schools			
Controlled	1,353	14,733	9.2
Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management	4,503	30,749	14.6
Voluntary - Schools under Other Management	1,620	21,086	7.7
TOTAL	7,476	66,568	11.2
ALL POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS	36,658	156,889	23.4
ALL SPECIAL SCHOOLS	4,043	7,462	54.2
EOTAS Centres	8	25	32
ALL NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY, and SPECIAL	90,935	347,635	26.2

SCHOOLS²⁰			
ALL NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY, SPECIAL, and EOTAS Centres³	90,943	347,660	26.2

Figures for pupils in nursery schools/units and pre-schools include parents who are entitled to receive Income Support, or Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance, or Employment Support Allowance where an award of income-based job-seekers allowance has been converted; and Universal Credit are some of the benefits which determine eligibility for free school meals

Preschool aged pupils enrolled in Specialist Provision in Mainstream (SPiM) have been presented separately from other preschool aged pupils, they are not part of PSEP. See 'notes for readers' points 4 and 10 [Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2024/25 - Notes for readers](#)

²⁰ Excludes Voluntary and Private Pre-schools

Table 3b Free School Meal Entitlement by School Type and Management Type 2025/26

School and management type	Number	Enrolment	Percentage
Funded Voluntary and Private Pre-schools - Voluntary	982	5,452	18
Funded Voluntary and Private Pre-schools - Private	101	928	10.9
TOTAL	1,083	6,380	17
Nursery Schools - FULL TIME			
Controlled	1,153	2,443	47.2
Catholic Maintained	872	1,665	52.4
Controlled Integrated	69	192	35.9
TOTAL	2,094	4,300	48.7
Nursery Schools - PART TIME			
Controlled	148	970	15.3
Catholic Maintained	14	52	26.9
Nursery schools - Part-time - Controlled Integrated	33	208	15.9
TOTAL	195	1,230	15.9
Nursery Classes - FULL TIME			
Controlled	1,153	2,835	40.7
Catholic Maintained	1,182	2,644	44.7
Other Maintained	164	344	47.7
Controlled Integrated	71	146	48.6
Grant Maintained Integrated	131	369	35.5
TOTAL	2,701	6,338	42.6
Nursery Classes - PART TIME			
Controlled	280	1,588	17.6
Catholic Maintained	232	1,168	19.9
Other Maintained	43	258	16.7
Controlled Integrated	20	135	14.8
Grant Maintained Integrated	65	341	19.1
TOTAL	640	3,490	18.3
Pre-school Specialist Provision in a nursery school	13	30	43.3
Pre-school Specialist Provision in a primary school	23	77	29.9
Reception pupils	16	160	10
TOTAL PRE-SCHOOL	6,765	22,005	30.7
Primary Schools (Year 1 - Year 7)			
Controlled	18,278	73,594	24.8
Catholic Maintained	21,212	74,544	28.5
Other Maintained - Other	1,244	3,690	33.7
Controlled Integrated	1,414	5,256	26.9
Grant Maintained Integrated	1,517	6,492	23.4
TOTAL	43,665	163,576	26.7
Prep. Departments	10	1,137	0.9
ALL PRIMARY AND PREP. YEAR 1-7 PUPILS	43,675	164,713	26.5
Secondary (Non Grammar) Schools			
Controlled	9,863	32,075	30.7
Catholic Maintained	13,781	41,175	33.5
Other Maintained	562	1,373	40.9
Controlled Integrated	1,563	4,440	35.2
Grant Maintained Integrated	3,200	11,012	29.1
TOTAL	28,969	90,075	32.2
Grammar Schools			
Controlled	1,286	14,804	8.7
Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management	4,322	30,705	14.1
Voluntary - Schools under Other Management	1,557	21,182	7.4
TOTAL	7,165	66,691	10.7
ALL POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS	36,134	156,766	23
ALL SPECIAL SCHOOLS	4,284	7,729	55.4
EOTAS Centres	9	25	36
ALL NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY, and SPECIAL SCHOOLS3	90,858	351,213	25.9

ALL NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY, SPECIAL, and EOTAS Centres	90,867	351,238	25.9
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Figures for pupils in nursery schools/units and pre-schools include parents who are entitled to receive Income Support, or Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance, or Employment Support Allowance where an award of income-based job-seekers allowance has been converted; and Universal Credit are some of the benefits which determine eligibility for free school meals

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