NICCY

northern ireland commissioner
for children and young people

A children and young people's version of
this report has been produced. Please contact
NICCY to request this or contact the
Communications team at NICCY if you
require alternative formats of this material.

NICCY

northern ireland commissioner
for children and young people

Shared Education
The Views of Children and Young People
2013

FOREWORD

As the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), it is my primary aim, as set out in legislation, 'to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people'. NICCY places its work within the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other relevant children's rights instruments. The UNCRC is a comprehensive, international human rights treaty which enshrines specific children's rights and defines universal principles and standards for the treatment and status of children around the world. Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC contain key provisions outlining a rights-based approach to education. Article 28 is primarily concerned with the right of access to education, on the basis of equality of opportunity. Article 29 of the UNCRC addresses the aims of education and the benefits that every child should be able to enjoy as a consequence of their right of access to education.

A fundamental challenge for me, as Commissioner for Children and Young People, is to seek to ensure that all children and young people in NI enjoy an effective right to education. Central to my role is my statutory duty to advise Government on matters concerning children's rights and best interests. In advising Government, I am also required to take steps to ensure that the views of children and young people are sought.

The landscape of education provision in NI is in the process of a number of significant changes which will have a major impact on children and young people. As part of these changes, a commitment was made in the NI Programme for Government 2011-15 for the Department of Education to establish a Ministerial Advisory Group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance 'shared education' in Northern Ireland.

Crucially, Article 29 of the UNCRC states that the education of our children and young people should be directed towards preparing them for responsible life in a free society, in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of gender, and friendship. Article 29 also requires our Government to direct education towards the development of children's personalities, talents and mental and physical abilities. In parallel to this, it also states that children and young people's education should be directed towards respect for their parents, their cultural identity, and the cultural identity of others.

In cognisance of my statutory duties, I contacted the Minister for Education to offer to consult with children and young people to explore their views and experiences of

shared education, with the intention of ensuring that these could be meaningfully incorporated into the Ministerial Advisory Group's report. The Minister took up my offer, and NICCY therefore initiated a consultation with children and young people made up of two strands; surveys and a series of workshops. Evidently, the key aim of the consultation was to gather the views and experiences of children and young people across NI on shared education, in order that they inform the development and implementation of Department of Education policy.

In addition to consulting with children on their views of shared education, NICCY's consultation also offered children and young people the opportunity to share their views on area-based planning in education. The consultation was extended to include this issue in recognition of the intrinsic link between area-based planning processes, the task of the Ministerial Advisory Group, and the future development and implementation of Departmental policy on the advancement of shared education.

In February 2013, I provided an interim report on NICCY's consultation findings in respect of children and young people's views and experiences of shared education to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education.

This publication provides a detailed account of the main findings emerging from NICCY's consultation, primarily highlighting children and young people's perspectives in relation to shared education, but also including their views of area-based planning.

The consultation process has offered an important and challenging opportunity for children and young people across Northern Ireland to explore how and where schools can work together, and the potential for creating opportunities for children and young people in NI to come together. Throughout the consultation workshops, children and young people offered a wide range of reflective and interesting insights into their experiences, and offered thoughtful, constructive and practical suggestions. In reflecting upon children's perspectives, NICCY's report also outlines a number of emerging issues which must be carefully considered in order to ensure that children and young people's views are taken into account. It is particularly imperative that Government listens to the recommendations that children and young people have made, and ensures that the decisions it takes forward in order to progress shared education are fully informed by their proposals.

In taking forward this work, my Office will be seeking to ensure that children and young people's views and experiences, as outlined in this report, inform the decisions to be made by the Minister for Education, and the NI Executive as a whole, in respect of shared education.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the children and young people, school principals and members of staff, who kindly welcomed NICCY staff to their school, and gave so generously of their time to share with us their views and experiences.

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

April 2013

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NICCY wishes to record its appreciation to the children and young people who participated in the consultation workshops and to thank them for their willingness and enthusiasm to engage with the consultation.

We wish to acknowledge all of the schools, who kindly welcomed NICCY staff, and especially the principals and members of staff who generously gave of their time to be interviewed and to ensure all the necessary arrangements were in place to accommodate NICCY's visit.

We would also like to thank Dr Dirk Schubotz and Dr Paula Devine from ARK (The Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster) and Dr Katrina Lloyd of the School of Education at The Queen's University for sharing their expertise and providing support during the project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In the Programme for Government 2011-15, a commitment was made for the Department of Education to establish a Ministerial Advisory Group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. NICCY offered to assist the Minister by consulting with children and young people to explore their views and experiences of shared education, with the intention of ensuring that these were meaningfully incorporated into the Ministerial Advisory Group's report. An interim report was duly forwarded to the Advisory Group in February 2013. This final Report provides a detailed account of the main findings emerging from the consultation.

2. The consultation was undertaken through 38 workshops, with over 750 primary, post-primary and special school pupils in 21 schools across Northern Ireland. Interviews were also conducted with 20 principals and members of staff. A key objective was to ensure that pupils from as many school types as possible were able to participate, and care was taken to ensure that the sample of schools recruited, was as representative as possible. Eight of the ten post-primary schools selected, were involved in shared education initiatives through their membership of area learning communities or involvement in the Sharing Education Programme (The Queen's University, Belfast or Shared Education Programme (The Fermanagh Trust).

3. The workshops explored pupils' awareness, understanding and experiences of shared education and their views regarding how this should be taken forward. They were encouraged to identify opportunities and activities which they believed would be enjoyable and beneficial and, to highlight any barriers which they felt might dissuade pupils from taking part. Pupils' perceptions of the importance of children and young people from different schools and backgrounds learning together were explored and to conclude, pupils were invited to identify any issues which they believed the Government should consider in taking shared education forward. Recognising the relevance of area-based planning to shared education and potential impact of the proposals on schools and pupils, the sample cohort was also asked to share their views on this issue.

4. Most pupils did not recognise 'shared education'; less than 50% of post-primary pupils indicated that the term was familiar to them[1]. Their awareness was

---

[1] The definition of shared education provided by the Department of Education was employed throughout the Consultation. This is available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/shared_education.htm.

predominantly influenced by their knowledge or experience of shared classes. Very few primary pupils were aware of the concept, however following explanation, they identified a range of activities, including projects and trips, which they believed constituted shared education. Post-primary pupils' experiences were predominately through their participation in shared classes, although some other 'shared' activities were identified. The potential for pupils to participate in shared activities appeared to be influenced by a number of factors, including the subjects they studied, the class or year group they were in and their involvement in extra-curricular activities.

5. Pupils, who had taken part in shared classes or activities, expressed a diverse range of opinions, although students in every school highlighted positive and beneficial aspects of their experiences. Both primary and post-primary pupils welcomed the opportunity to meet and interact with pupils from other schools and to experience different learning approaches and environments. A clear benefit of shared classes for post-primary pupils was the expanded choice of subjects available to them at Key Stage 4 and 'A' Level. Opportunities to make new friends, gain insights into other schools and access different learning experiences were also highlighted. Less positive experiences occurred through limited or negative interactions with pupils from other schools and a sense of feeling 'out of place'. A number of logistical issues, including transport and timetabling also impinged on pupils' experiences.

6. Pupils shared a host of ideas about how shared education could be progressed, while also identifying a number of challenges which they believed should be addressed. Pupils called for more collaborative learning approaches to be employed, and for particular subjects and activities appropriate for sharing to be included. They also highlighted the importance of introducing shared education at an early stage and ensuring that effective practical arrangements are in place. In terms of potential barriers to shared education, students, mainly at post-primary level, acknowledged they held certain views of other schools and pupils, relating to standards of behaviour, increased potential for bullying, academic ability and cross-community issues. Logistical issues were also cited by many post-primary pupils (as well as principals and teachers), as a significant barrier.

7. Pupils in both primary and post-primary schools generally agreed the importance of pupils from different school types and backgrounds learning together. However, they identified a series of issues which they believed could make sharing between particular types of schools challenging. Collaboration between grammar and non-selective schools and schools with pupils from different community backgrounds was explored in some detail.

8. When proposing issues which Government should take into account in seeking to advance shared education, many pupils revisited issues they had mentioned in response to other questions. Additional ideas included trialling shared education initiatives, expanding shared education to all schools and ensuring that pupils were consulted about on-going developments and their views taken into account.

9. Very few pupils were familiar with the Department of Education's area-based planning proposals, however upon explanation, they reflected on many issues potentially affecting pupils and schools. Losing friends, an increased risk of bullying, overcrowding, and a negative impact on teaching and learning were some of the potential outcomes identified. Some pupils also expressed apprehension about possible mergers between schools *'of different religions'.* Other pupils supported the objectives of area-based planning but recognised that many challenges would be presented to schools, if they had to merge or close.

10. The Report identified a series of key issues emerging from the consultation. While many pupils recognised the value of shared education and its objectives, for some, their experiences of sharing had been less positive. Some pupils indicated that the collaborative activities and joint classes in which they had participated, had been a 'shared' but 'separate' experience, as pupils had remained within their own school or friendship groups and interaction between pupils from different schools had been limited. Therefore, it will be important to clarify what is intended through 'shared' learning and to ensure that pupils are encouraged and supported to be genuine and equal collaborators. An emphasis should be placed on ensuring that quality learning experiences are provided for all pupils. Where they have concerns, appropriate mechanisms should be put in place, to ensure these can be shared and addressed.

11. It was evident that post-primary pupils' attitudes to shared education, particularly those who had had limited experiences, were strongly influenced by their perceptions of other schools and pupils. Perceived differences in pupils' ability and religion were significant issues for some young people, affecting their views of and desire to engage in shared initiatives. A major concern for primary school pupils, evidenced in the findings from the Kids' Life and Times survey (KLT) and the consultation, was bullying and the potential for pupils from other schools to be nasty or unfriendly. If shared education is to be regarded as a positive learning opportunity, such preconceptions should be addressed and stereotypes should be challenged prior to and during shared learning activities. Evidently, one of the most effective ways to do this is to involve pupils in positive shared learning initiatives, where they can engage meaningfully with pupils from different schools and possibly different backgrounds. It may also be

helpful for teachers to facilitate discussions with pupils or for pupils to participate in interactive workshops with students from other schools, prior to their engagement in shared learning initiatives.

12. A key question arising out of the findings is whether shared education is seeking to go beyond enhanced curriculum provision, to promote and support mutual understanding and an appreciation of diversity (ability, religion, culture, ethnicity, social backgrounds) amongst pupils. There is evidence that some shared practice is aiming to do this, however, this objective within the Department of Education's definition of shared education should be clarified and, where appropriate, guidance and support provided to schools to ensure that it can be achieved in a positive and meaningful way which ultimately benefits pupils.

1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In November 2011, Northern Ireland's First Minister and deputy First Minister published the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015. This included a commitment for the Department of Education (DE) to *'establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education'*[2].

The Department defines 'shared education' as follows;

'The organisation and delivery of education so that it:
- *Meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of, learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status;*
- *Involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements;*
- *Delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion'.*[3]

Within this context, the Department further advises that "education" includes *'pre-school education; early years' services; primary schools (including nursery schools); post-primary schools; special education provision; and youth services'.*[4]

In January 2012, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), wrote to the Minister of Education, John O'Dowd MLA, to highlight the need for meaningful engagement with children and young people in order to ensure that their opinions and insights informed the report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on The Advancement of Shared Education (MAGASE). To support this, the Commissioner made a formal offer of assistance to the Minister to consult with children and young people, in line with her statutory remit to 'keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for children and young persons by relevant authorities'[5]. In February 2012, the Minister confirmed that he wished to accept the Commissioner's offer of assistance. NICCY therefore initiated a consultation to gather children and young people's views and experiences of shared education in Northern Ireland, with the objective of communicating the findings to the

---

[2] Northern Ireland Executive (November 2011*). 'Draft Programme for Government 2011-15'* (Belfast: NI Executive), page 49. This target was subsequently confirmed in the final Programme for Government.
[3] Department of Education (2012) *'Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education: Terms of Reference'* (Bangor: DE).
[4] Ibid.
[5] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2003/439/contents/made.

MAGASE for incorporation into its report to the Minister, and publishing a NICCY report. An interim report was forwarded to the MAGASE in February 2013.

In September 2011, in parallel with the development of the Programme for Government commitments on shared education, the Minister outlined his intention to progress the implementation of the Department's 'Sustainable Schools Policy'[6]. A programme of action was initiated to reshape the future pattern of education delivery across Northern Ireland on an area basis.[7] Following publication of a series of viability audits in March 2012 conducted by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), in conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)[8], work commenced to develop strategic area plans, with a primary focus on developing '*a planned network of viable and sustainable schools capable of delivering high quality education to meet the needs of children and young people in the area in line with the full suite of DE Policies*'[9].

Recognising the intrinsic link between area-based planning processes, the task of the MAGASE and future development and implementation of Departmental policy on the advancement of shared education, NICCY made a decision to extend the consultation with children and young people to encompass their views and experiences of shared education and area-based planning.

CONSULTATION APPROACH

NICCY was keen to ensure that as many children and young people as possible were afforded an opportunity to express their views and communicate their experiences of shared education, therefore the consultation had two strands:

- Consultation workshops with children aged 8 to 10 years and young people aged 14 to 17 years from a representative sample of schools in Northern Ireland;
- Surveys of children aged 10 to 11 years and young people aged 16 years.

Surveys

Two modules of questions relating to pupils' attitudes and experiences of shared education, were commissioned from ARK, a joint initiative between the Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster.[10] ARK conducts annual surveys of P7-age pupils through the Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey[11] and 16 year olds,

---

[6] http://www.deni.gov.uk/a_policy_for_sustainable_schools-2.pdf.
[7] Department of Education (September 2011) *'Putting Pupils First: Shaping Our Future. The Next Steps for Education'*. A Statement by John O'Dowd MLA, Minister for Education, to the Assembly. (Bangor: DE).
[8] Ibid.
[9] Department of Education (February 2012). '*Area Planning Guidance*' (Bangor: DE), page 4.
[10] http://www.ark.ac.uk/.
[11] http://www.ark.ac.uk/klt/.

through the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey[12]. Children and young people are invited to share their experiences of school and to feedback their views on a range of matters which may affect them. Surveys over the past number of years have addressed various themes including bullying, children's rights and the transfer tests, (KLT) and identity, politics and sexual health (YLT). The KLT survey is available on-line and children access and complete this in school. In 2012, 4,104 pupils completed the survey. The YLT survey may be completed using one of three methods: an online questionnaire, a paper questionnaire or telephone. In 2012, 1,208 completed surveys were returned.

The questions included in the KLT and YLT surveys on shared education and area-based planning were devised by NICCY in partnership with members of the ARK team. The module of questions was very similar in both surveys in order to facilitate comparisons between the different age groups of respondents. Questions in both surveys with piloted with children and young people beforehand. The questions are attached in Appendices 3 and 4. Findings from both surveys are referenced throughout the Report.

Consultation Workshops in Schools
The consultation workshops were conducted with 752 primary and post-primary-age pupils in schools spread across Northern Ireland between October 2012 and February 2013.

Selection and Recruitment of School Sample
NICCY was keen to ensure that a representative sample of schools in Northern Ireland was recruited to the consultation. The objective was not to recruit large numbers of schools, but rather to ensure that pupils from as many school types as possible, were able to participate. With this in mind, the sample included primary and post-primary schools which were: controlled, maintained, grant-maintained integrated, controlled integrated and Irish-medium. Grammar, non-selective and single sex post-primary schools were also included as were a special school and the preparatory department of a grammar school.

In addition, efforts were made to achieve an appropriately balanced mix of schools in urban and rural locations and across interface, border, socially deprived, affluent and mixed community areas. Consideration was also given to ensuring that a significant proportion of the schools selected were involved in shared education initiatives, whether this was through their membership of area learning communities, participation in the Sharing Education Programme (The Queen's University, Belfast) [13], Shared Education Programme (Fermanagh Trust)[14] or their engagement in other

---

[12] http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/.
[13] http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/about.html.
[14] http://www.fermanaghtrust.org/cms/publish/sharededucation/index.shtml.

funded or non-funded shared partnerships. NICCY was aware that the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), in collaboration with the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, the Rural Community Network and Youth Action[15], was consulting young people about shared education, through the youth sector. A decision was made not to duplicate this consultation with the youth sector.

Following identification of the school sample, contact was made with each school inviting them to take part in the consultation. Almost all of the schools contacted, expressed a willingness to take part. Where a school was unable or unwilling to participate, an alternative school with similar characteristics was substituted. Once a school agreed to participate, additional information about the workshops was forwarded to nominated staff members. This included details of what was required from the school, information leaflets for pupils and parents or guardians, and permission letters for parents and guardians or schools, as appropriate.

Approach to Workshops and Interviews

Twenty-one schools participated in the consultation through the involvement of 752 pupils in 38 workshops. Principals and members of staff were also consulted, however it is important to emphasise that pupils' views and experiences constituted the key focus. The workshops involved P5 and P6 pupils (aged 8-10 years) in primary schools,[16] Year 11 and Year 13 pupils (aged 14-17 years) in post-primary schools and three small groups of pupils aged 13-17 years in a special school. Two different year groups were selected in each participating school, in order to access a potentially broader range of views and experiences. Two non-selective post-primary schools in the sample did not offer post-16 provision, therefore workshops were conducted only with Year 11 students in these schools. In addition, two primary schools had composite P5 and P6 classes, so only one workshop was conducted in each school.

A facilitator and note-taker were present during each workshop. The facilitator introduced the session, explaining the purpose of the visit, describing NICCY's role and work and outlining the proposed format of the workshop. Confidentiality, anonymity and relevant safeguarding issues were explained to pupils and they were reassured that their participation was optional. If they were happy to take part, pupils were encouraged to share their views and experiences as fully as possible and to respect the participation and contributions of others. Each workshop lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. The difference in time was due to the variable length of school periods and the degree to which pupils engaged with the issues. Some workshops

---

[15] Youth Action, the Rural Community Network, Spirit of Enniskillen and the Integrated Education Fund (2013) 'Have your Say on Education: Young People's Engagement in Education Event'.
[16] NICCY is aware that shared education initiatives in primary schools frequently involve P7 pupils. However, given the timescales for fieldwork and reporting, the majority of workshops in primary schools were scheduled for the period just prior to both transfer tests, and it was therefore not possible to consult with P7 pupils.

were completed in a shorter period of time, particularly those involving smaller numbers of pupils. At the end of most workshops, pupils were given the option to record any concerns or comments which they did not wish to contribute during the workshop individually, in writing. Due to time constraints or following advice from school staff, pupils in a small number of workshops were not invited to submit written views.

The note-taker transcribed pupils' feedback during each workshop in detail and the transcription was then reviewed by the facilitator and note-taker immediately following the workshop. These, along with pupils' written feedback and transcriptions of the interviews with principals and members of staff in schools were then inputted to an analysis framework, devised to reflect each of the consultation questions.

Issues Explored During the Workshops

An initial draft of questions was prepared, taking account of the terms of reference for the MAGASE and the issues identified by the Ministerial Advisory Group in its call for written submissions in October 2012. Key themes which were developed into questions for inclusion in the KLT and YLT surveys were also reviewed and adapted for the workshops. In order to ensure that the questions were clear and accessible, a small working group of young people provided advice to NICCY in advance of the workshops. It met in September 2012 and offered suggestions and comments regarding the consultation approach, workshop questions and research sample. The schedule of questions for the workshops is attached in Appendix 1.

Interviews with Principals and School Staff

The consultation workshops with pupils were supplemented by interviews with 20 principals or other members of staff. These helped to contextualise pupils' responses and, where appropriate, to clarify factual information collected during the workshops. They also enhanced the research team's understanding of the school, community context and specific issues affecting individual schools. Interviews were conducted immediately before or after the workshops, depending on the principal or teacher's availability. Where a member of staff was not available before a workshop, the facilitator sought to speak briefly to the class teacher to clarify details of the class or group's involvement in shared activities. In a very small number of cases, it was not possible to interview a member of staff during the school visit. Where possible, additional information was sought following the visit. A schedule of the issues discussed during interviews is attached in Appendix 2.

Presentation of Findings

When securing schools' agreement to participate in the consultation, NICCY gave assurances that it would seek to protect their anonymity. Given the potential for the identification of individual schools, the Report has therefore not included a detailed profile of each participating school. However, Table 1 describes the school sample.

Table 1   *School Sample*

SCHOOL	TYPE AND LOCATION	NUMBER
Primary	Controlled, rural	2
	Controlled, urban	2
	Preparatory, urban	1
	Maintained, rural	2
	Maintained, urban	1
	Grant-maintained integrated, urban	1
	Irish-medium	1
Post-primary	Controlled, non-selective, rural	1
	Maintained, non-selective, rural	1
	Maintained, non-selective, urban	1
	Voluntary grammar, Catholic, urban	2
	Voluntary grammar, non-denominational, urban	1
	Controlled grammar, urban	1
	Controlled integrated, urban	1
	Grant-maintained integrated, rural	1
	Irish-medium	1
Special	Urban	1
TOTAL		**21**

Quotes from pupils, principals and members of staff are followed by codes, indicating the type and location of their school. A list of school codes used throughout the Report is provided overleaf.

It is important to emphasise that the consultation did not seek to quantify pupils' views in detail, but rather, to gain an insight into the breadth and depth of their views and understanding of shared education. Wherever possible, however, efforts are made to broadly define the weight of pupil opinion. It is worth noting that on some occasions, comments were attributable to comparatively small numbers of pupils, however, NICCY believed it was important to represent all views, including minority perspectives. Pupils' attitudes and experiences were clearly quite diverse and this was apparent both within workshops and between schools. Furthermore, there were a number of overlapping issues and recurrent themes, so pupils and members of staff revisited some issues on more than one occasion during workshops and interviews.

Primary and post-primary pupils' views and experiences are presented either separately or together in the Report, depending on the degree of similarity or variation in their responses and the distinctiveness of the issues they raised. The

views of pupils at a special school are included with the post-primary school findings as the pupils who took part were post-primary students.

Chapter 2 presents pupils' views and experiences of shared education and Chapter 3 examines pupils' understanding and opinions of area-based planning. Chapter 4 identifies a series of key issues emerging from the consultation.

KEY TO SCHOOL CODES

CODE	SCHOOL TYPE
Ca	Catholic
C	Controlled
CG	Controlled Grammar
CI	Controlled Integrated
GMI	Grant-Maintained Integrated
IM	Irish-medium
M	Maintained
ND	Non-Denominational
NS	Non-Selective
PP	Preparatory
P	Primary*
R	Rural
SS	Special School
U	Urban
VG	Voluntary Grammar

*In order to differentiate between comments made by primary and post-primary school pupils, each primary school code begins with 'P'. For example, "PM.r" indicates a maintained rural primary school, while "VGND.u" is a non-denominational voluntary grammar located in an urban area.

In order to protect the anonymity of all participating schools, single sex schools are not generally identified in the Report. However, where it is relevant to the findings, quotes from pupils attending these schools are appropriately attributed.

2. SHARED EDUCATION

This chapter details pupils' views and experiences of shared education. It begins by exploring pupils' awareness and understanding of the term 'shared education' and then examines their experiences of shared education and opinions of the activities in which they were involved. This is followed by a review of pupils' opinions of how shared education should be taken forward, including their proposals for activities which they believed were beneficial or appropriate and perceptions of possible barriers to pupils' participation. Pupils' reflections on the importance of students from different schools and backgrounds learning together are then considered. The final section on shared education details issues which pupils believed Government needs to consider in taking shared education forward. Findings from the KLT and YLT surveys are referenced, where appropriate, throughout the chapter.

FAMILIARITY WITH THE TERM 'SHARED EDUCATION'
The Department of Education's definition of shared education was employed throughout the consultation to inform the questions and to analyse the responses. At the beginning of each workshop, pupils were asked if they had heard of the term, 'shared education'. Where they had heard of it, pupils were encouraged to recall where and when they had first encountered the term. After providing their initial responses, the facilitator presented the definition of shared education provided by the Department of Education (explaining this, in terms appropriate to the age of the pupils participating in the workshop). Pupils were then asked if they had participated in any activities which they believed constituted shared education.

Post-Primary Pupils
Pupils' familiarity with shared education varied significantly between workshops. Across the post-primary school sample, just under 50% of participants indicated that they were aware of the term and a slightly higher proportion of non-grammar school pupils recognised it. Pupils, who stated they recognised the term, were aware of it through their involvement in 'shared activities' in school or through a youth club. Several pupils reported that they had read about shared education in the media. Those who recognised the term were then asked if they could define it. In most cases, pupils referred to their participation in shared activities when they provided definitions.

Students attending schools which facilitated shared classes with other schools at 'A' level or GCSE, explained that their school was a member of a local learning community which meant that, if they selected certain subjects, the classes were shared with pupils from one or more other schools. Pupils suggested that it involved sharing facilities and teachers as well. One pupil explained, *'It's education that's shared with another school'* (MNS.u), while a number of pupils in another workshop

referred to a shared school campus, suggesting that it involved, *'People from different backgrounds all going to the one school'* or having *'…different types of people in one school; different abilities and different religions'.* A few pupils at the same school, also proposed that shared education was based on the principle of equality, so it meant, *'Everyone getting the same education regardless of who you are'* (GMI.r). Pupils at two schools strongly associated shared education with the opportunity for pupils from different community backgrounds to learn together. One stated, *'It's different religions in one school'* and another suggested, *'It's cross-community isn't it?'* (MNS.r).

Primary Pupils
Most primary pupils were not familiar with 'shared education', although this was not unexpected, given the age range of the pupils, and the fact that the Entitlement Framework[17] is less relevant in primary schools. P6 pupils in two workshops were exceptions as P7 pupils in their schools had participated in funded sharing initiatives (PC.r1 and PM.u). Only very few primary pupils were able to articulate examples of 'shared education' and this knowledge appeared to have been gleaned from the NICCY information leaflet which had been sent to the school or from an explanation given by a teacher or parent prior to the workshop. Primary pupils, in some cases, defined 'sharing' in its broadest sense. A significant number of children in one school (PGMI.u), for example, talked at length about sharing within their school; sharing of stationery, games, opinions and sharing through activities provided by their school council.

After explaining the definition of 'shared education', pupils were asked whether they understood the concept. P5 and P6 pupils from three schools, involved in funded activities, demonstrated some degree of understanding, commenting that pupils in their school had discussed it; that P7 pupils from another school came to learn with the P7 pupils in their school, and they also talked about learning in a '*shared space'* (PC.r1; PC.r2 and PM.u).

Pupils from other primary schools, who were less familiar with the concept, asked; *'Is it like when you're able to do stuff in a different school...?'* (PM.r2) and some commented that it sounded *'fun'*, and *'exciting'* (PC.u2). Pupils from an integrated school recognised shared education, contrasting it with their own school experiences. They suggested it involved pupils from '*different backgrounds'*, defining these in terms of religion, nationality, race, gender and ability. On hearing more about shared education, one pupil at an Irish-medium school reacted quite positively, *'I'd like to get together with other schools'.* However, another pupil was rather more

---

[17] The Entitlement Framework is a Department of Education policy, designed to encourage schools to enable pupils at KS4 and post-16 to access a broader range of courses.

ambivalent, '[Sounds] *quite good and quite bad as there could be children from different estates and there could be a big row'* (PGMI.u).

PUPILS' EXPERIENCES OF 'SHARED EDUCATION'

After exploring their awareness and understanding of 'shared education', pupils were asked if they had taken part in any activities which they thought could be described as 'shared education'.

Post-Primary Pupils

At the time of the consultation, eight of the ten post-primary schools and a special school, provided shared learning opportunities for pupils through joint classes with other schools. In seven schools, opportunities to participate in shared classes were provided through the school's membership of an area learning community, consisting of a number of post-primary schools, and often, primary schools, special schools, and further education colleges. Four schools had experience of participating in partnerships with other schools through the Sharing Education Programme (The Queen's University, Belfast) or the Shared Education Programme (The Fermanagh Trust) and these also involved the provision of shared classes. The provision of shared classes can facilitate pupils' access to an enhanced curriculum, and support schools to provide the Entitlement Framework.

The breadth of provision varied quite considerably between schools. Some offered 'A' level, or GCSE subjects while others provided both. A few schools provided opportunities to study for other qualifications, such as BTEC. Across the schools providing shared classes, the number of subjects offered in each, ranged from two GCSE subjects (in a non-selective school) to 23 subjects at GCSE and 'A' level (in a grammar school). A significant proportion of subjects offered through shared classes were applied subjects, although general subjects were also available. Special school pupils studied a number of subjects through shared classes, including Art, Religious Education, Physical Education, Music and Money Management.

When asked to identify the subjects offered by their school through shared classes, pupils' knowledge differed quite considerably. As anticipated, those not participating in classes tended to be less familiar with the subjects available. Similarly, Year 11 pupils in schools where shared classes were offered only at 'A' level tended not to be aware of the details of this provision. Pupils commented, *'I think we can do Drama, not sure'* (CG.u). Students, who attended classes in another school or educational institution, generally demonstrated a greater sense of what 'shared education' was about. Those taking 'shared' classes in their own school with pupils attending from other schools, sometimes appeared to be less aware of the 'shared' nature of the class, *'I only got to know that one wee boy from* [school X] *was there…because he always turns up late for class'* (MNS.u).

Year 11 pupils in four post-primary schools indicated that they were involved in GCSE, BTEC or other exam classes and Year 13 pupils in six schools reported that they participated in GCSE or 'A' level classes[18]. In some workshops, the percentage of pupils who indicated their involvement in shared classes was extremely small and in seven of the 18 post-primary workshops, none of the pupils were involved in shared classes[19]. Overall, fewer Year 11 pupils were enrolled in shared classes. Pupils explained that subjects were taught through shared classes because 'in-school' enrolment had not been sufficient to enable the school to offer these or because the school did not specialise in a subject. One teacher from a school which provided shared classes to pupils in Year 11-14, commented, *'It tends to be the very big subjects or very small subjects that combine and that can be simply because of facilities or expertise. Every subject could be open to collaboration – it's that open, that fluid'* (MNS.u). Grammar school pupils reported that the majority of subjects offered to them through shared classes were provided in their school, while pupils in two workshops in non-grammar schools, indicated that classes were provided equally between their school and the other schools involved.

While shared classes tended to dominate post-primary pupils' experience of shared education, they also referred to a range of other activities which they proposed were 'shared education'. Recreational pursuits were mentioned by many pupils, including residential or day visits to outdoor activity centres, ski trips and joint musical or theatrical productions. Pupils in many post-primary schools and a special school, also referred to project work, educational visits, and sporting events. Additional activities included aerobics and dance, and attendance at conferences and courses. Pupils in four workshops indicated that they shared their sports facilities with other schools and the local community and pupils from another two schools indicated that students from a neighbouring school shared their buses.

It was evident that post-primary pupils' experiences of shared activities varied quite significantly between and within year groups. The opportunity for pupils to participate was influenced by the subjects they had selected, the year group they were part of, and by their involvement in sports, clubs and recreational activities. Under the definition of shared education provided by the Department of Education, it is questionable whether all of the activities identified by pupils, may be defined as such, as some were undertaken between schools within the same sector and the social benefits in some cases, appeared to have outweighed the educational benefits.

Young people who completed the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey were asked about their involvement in shared education and specifically, if they had undertaken 'projects with pupils from other schools', 'used or shared sports facilities or

---

[18] Two post-primary schools participating in the consultation did not offer post-16 provision.
[19] In some schools, other pupils in the year group, who did not take part in the Consultation, may have been involved in shared classes.

equipment, such as computers' or 'had classes with other schools'. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that they had undertaken projects, 45% stated that they had taken part in shared classes and 26% said they had shared sports facilities or equipment. Eighteen percent of respondents stated that they had 'not done anything like this' and 9% were 'Not sure'. The findings from the YLT survey indicated slightly higher levels of participation in shared learning activities and classes compared with post-primary pupils who took part in the consultation, although few pupils taking part in the consultation made reference to having completed projects. The broader age range of pupils in the consultation (14-17 years compared with 16 year olds completing the YLT survey), may partially explain this. As indicated above, Year 11 pupils reported having fewer opportunities to access shared classes, compared with their peers in Year 13.

Primary Pupils
Feedback from primary pupils about their involvement in shared education revealed that they had significantly less experience than their post-primary counterparts. Across the school sample, pupils in five primary schools indicated that they had only a little or no experience of participating in shared activities, although pupils in three schools, indicated that P7 pupils, were involved in activities with other schools, which they believed were 'shared'.

At the time of the consultation, five of the ten primary schools taking part, indicated that they had recently been involved in 'cross community' initiatives with another school or a number of schools. P5 and P6 pupils in one controlled primary school which had secured CRED[20] funding from DE and undertaken a range of initiatives with local maintained primary schools, described their experiences, *'We did a project with* [school X] *there'* and, *'We put two different religions together to see if we could work together'* (PC.r2). P5 and P6 pupils from three other schools participating in similar initiatives were not directly involved (PM.u; PC.r1 and PC.u2) although P6s in one school (PM.u) were aware that their P7 colleagues met up with pupils from a local controlled primary school, and were accustomed to their presence in the school. The P5 pupils were also able to explain that the school shared a teacher with another school in the area (PM.u).

P5 and P6 pupils at one controlled primary school (PC.u1), described having some contact with other local primary schools including a maintained primary school. This had occurred through various initiatives, including an event organised by the Education and Library Board, and a collaborative initiative with a neighbouring school, where the pupils had attended their school for a few days. Pupils explained that it was, *'To get to know other people'* (PC.u1). Pupils in another controlled primary school had taken part in short-term collaborative projects with other

---

[20] Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education.

controlled primary and post-primary schools and a university. They were also aware that P7 pupils in their school had been on *'trips'* with other schools (PC.u2). Pupils attending a third controlled primary school described a small number of short-term projects they had been involved in, with pupils from several local, mainly controlled schools.

Pupils from two small rural maintained primary schools reported having little contact with other schools and where this had occurred, it appeared to be with schools of a similar management type (PM.r1 and PM.r2). P5 and P6 pupils at an integrated school described having contact with other primary schools through sports activities and a university project, as well as with a local integrated post-primary school. Pupils also referred to an evening club for children from other schools, *'There's an X club here – in the evenings… it's for children', 'Other schools can come up to the school to see your school and to use it'* (PGMI.u).

Pupils from an Irish-medium primary school reported having limited contact with other primary schools. Existing links, for example, through sports *'blitzes'*, were organised with maintained schools or other Irish-medium schools. Pupils in a preparatory department also indicated that they did not engage frequently with other schools, however they did mention sharing facilities and resources with the grammar school to which the preparatory department was attached.

In the Kids' Life and Times survey (KLT), pupils were asked if they had got together with another school to use the school's facilities or to do classes or projects. Fifty-eight percent of pupils (total sample 4,104), indicated that they had taken part in these types of activities. Survey respondents were therefore more likely to have participated in shared activities compared with the pupils involved in the consultation workshops. However, the KLT survey was completed by P7 pupils who, by their final year at primary school were more likely to have participated in shared activities than P5 and P6 pupils. And, indeed P7 pupils' involvement in shared learning activities was highlighted by P5 and P6 pupils during some workshops.

A follow-on question in the KLT survey, asked pupils who said they had taken part in shared education activities, to identity what activities they had been involved in. This question was almost identical to the question in the YLT survey which asked pupils if they 'had done projects', 'used or shared sports facilities or equipment' or had classes with children from other schools'. In their responses, 88% of pupils indicated they had completed projects with children from other schools, 79% said that they had used or shared sports facilities or equipment and 78% indicated that they had had classes with children from other schools. Evidently these kinds of shared activities, particularly 'projects', were extremely popular. Asked about the arrangements for undertaking activities, 21% of P7 pupils reported they had completed these in another school and 12% said that pupils from the other school had come to their

school. Fifty-two percent of pupils indicated they had 'done both'. This indicated that in many cases, collaborative arrangements between schools involve exchange visits, possibly over a period of time although it is not possible to discern more about the nature of this exchange from the data. Furthermore, 61% of pupils who had taken part in shared classes or activities, stated that some of the children from other schools with whom they had undertaken shared activities or classes, were a different religion to them. This suggests that a significant proportion of collaborative activities were undertaken between schools of different management types and that many pupils were aware of the cross-community dimension of the collaboration. Twenty-nine percent of pupils indicated that they did not know if pupils were a different religion to them so it is possible that an even greater percentage of shared classes and activities may have involved a cross-community dimension.

PUPILS' VIEWS OF 'SHARED EDUCATION'

During the workshops, pupils were invited to reflect on their experiences of 'shared' activities and to identify what they had enjoyed or not enjoyed, what they thought was beneficial or not beneficial and what had worked well or could have been improved. It is important to emphasise, at the outset, that some pupils' involvement in shared education was relatively limited. Primary pupils' views are explored through their involvement in shared activities. These are presented in the section 'Shared Activities'.

Post-Primary Pupils

Respondents to the YLT survey provided generally positive feedback regarding their participation in projects and shared classes. Forty-seven percent of young people who indicated that they had done projects with pupils from other schools said they had 'mostly enjoyed' these while 36% said they enjoyed them 'sometimes'. Of those who had taken part in shared classes, 42% indicated they had mostly enjoyed these and 30% said they had enjoyed them 'sometimes'. Only 8% of respondents noted that they had 'not really', or 'not at all' enjoyed doing projects and 11% offered similar responses in relation to shared classes. Eighteen percent of young people did not have experience of shared classes, and 9% had no experience of projects. Young people responding to the survey, were therefore more likely to have taken part in shared projects than shared classes. Respondents indicated that they mainly enjoyed these opportunities, although the spread of responses suggests that there may be some aspects with which some pupils were less content.

Pupils participating in post-primary workshops during the consultation, offered mixed views of their experiences and their opinions differed both within and between workshops. The majority were fairly positive, although they did identify elements which they felt could be improved or changed. Pupils at three of the ten post-primary schools were particularly positive, reporting that they had '*enjoyed'* their experiences, that shared education was a '*good idea', 'great opportunity',* and '*made sense'*

(CG.u, MNS.r and GMI.r). Pupils at a special school also provided very positive feedback, describing their experiences as *'fun', 'brilliant'* and *'…exciting'* (SS.u). An overview of the positive responses from post-primary pupils is given below.

Shared Classes: Enjoyable and Effective Aspects
Pupils participating in shared classes described what was enjoyable and what had worked well.

Opportunity to Meet New People and Develop Friendships
The opportunity to meet people and make friends, was highlighted by pupils in around 60% of workshops conducted in schools providing shared classes. Pupils in each school said they welcomed the chance to study and interact with people from other schools and backgrounds. One pupil commented, *'I love meeting new people, going to schools'* (CG.u) and another remarked, *'It's good to have a new set of faces and everyone enforces* [sic] *it'* (MNS.r).

Other students alluded to the potential provided through shared classes, to create new friendships, *'I think it's a good way to mix with pupils from other schools, make new friends with people who have a different background or religion to us'* (VGCa.u). Pupils in a special school particularly valued this and talked at length about how they enjoyed meeting new people and making friends. Reflecting on this issue further, a number of pupils commented that relationships developed more easily in some classes than others, *'I like shared education because I made good friends who I keep in touch with…but in my X class nobody talks to each other and we sit at opposite sides of the classroom'* (MNS.u). Another pupil at the same school added, '*When I was in* [school X] *I did make friends with the girls, but it took quite a while to bond'* (MNS.u). Students in two schools revealed that they had met friends from primary school or friends they knew outside school through shared classes, *'I knew some people from primary school – was good to catch up with them'* (CI.u) and, '*My friend does the… Learning Community and I see her at* [school X]' (CG.u).

Provides an Insight into Other Schools
Pupils in approximately one third of the post-primary workshops referred to the opportunities provided through shared classes, to discover what it might be like to attend a different school and to mix with pupils from other backgrounds, *'It's interesting to see other schools'* (SS.u) and *'We found out about integrated schools…we didn't really know their backgrounds'* (CG.u). Several pupils also remarked that taking classes in another school helped to dispel myths or challenged their preconceptions about the school or pupils, '*You find out what it's like at other schools – you hear for real…'* (CI. u) and, *'It gives you a less biased view of what they are like'* (CI.u).

Enhances the Learning Experience

Pupils in three schools believed that attending classes in other schools or educational institutions improved their learning experiences. One pupil explained, *'I go to the Tech. It's good to have a change of scenery'* (VGCa.u). Others commented that access to superior equipment or facilities in other schools or further education colleges was also advantageous, *'It's a good idea because some schools have better equipment for certain subjects so it makes sense to share them'* (CG.u). A number of pupils also believed that sharing classes either in their own school or elsewhere, made their learning experience, more varied and interesting, '*School is too boring and shared learning makes school more lively'* (VGCa.u)*.* A few pupils also commented on the opportunity presented through shared classes to experience different teaching styles or approaches employed by teachers in other schools, *'You get to see different learning styles of teachers'* (CG.u) and, *'Other schools might have better coaches so it's good to use them* (VGCa.u2).

Provides an Expanded Choice of Subjects

Pupils participating in shared classes recognised that collaborative working arrangements between schools expanded the choice of subjects available to them, *'Gives people more subject options – unique opportunity'* (CI.u), *'You can do the subject and it saves you moving school'* (CG.u). One pupil acknowledged this provision, although they also qualified their response, *'Without* [school X], *I wouldn't be able to do my… course…but I would rather do it in a school of the same religion'* (MNS.u).

Shared Classes: Less Enjoyable or Effective Aspects

Pupils participating in shared classes also described elements which they felt were less enjoyable and which they believed had worked less effectively.

Limited Interaction with Pupils in Other Schools

Students in four workshops reported that they had only limited contact with pupils from other schools, during shared classes. Some admitted that they did not know the names of other pupils, or had not spoken to them, *'I couldn't name you one person from* [school X]' (MNS.u) and, *'When* [school X] *came, people didn't talk to them. It was really awkward'* (VGND.u). Others commented that pupils sat quite separately in their own groups during class, *'Joint classes are a bit awkward. We all sit at one table – don't really mix with the pupils from school X'* (MNS.u), and outside class, *'It was really awkward at lunchtimes as we just sat there and they all stared at us'* (VGND.u). Some pupils acknowledged that their only interaction with students from their partner school, was when this was required by the teacher, *'People only talk during activities because they have to'* (MNS.u). Reflecting on shared PE classes, pupils in one workshop were disappointed that the students from another school played different games, *'Like they don't do camogie so they can't join in. They're*

more into hockey…What's the point in going there if you're going to do different things? (MNS.u).

A very small minority of pupils reported that they had not enjoyed shared classes because negative comments had been made by other pupils. A significant proportion of pupils in one workshop remarked, *'According to the grammar school, we're all chavs…not as smart'* (CI.u)*.* Pupils in another school recounted specific incidents where sectarian comments had been made to them. One pupil admitted that '*Sharing classes made us uncomfortable due to the religious comments they made'* and another, who had been the recipient of a sectarian insult, commented, *'I felt really c*** and just sat there…I didn't talk to anyone in the class for two years'* (MNS.u).

Being in a Minority
While some pupils had no objections to shared classes, they did express a preference to attend classes in their own school, *'I didn't like the classes in the other school, gave up playing the fiddle because I had to go to other schools'* (VGCa.u). Others described feeling uncomfortable because they were in a minority in another school or because they believed their uniforms singled them out, *'You feel like outcasts if you're going to class and walking through and they look at you in a different uniform. People coming here would feel the same'* (CG.u). In a number of workshops, pupils commented on the unequal balance between the numbers of pupils from different schools attending shared classes, also highlighting the potential discomfort of the minority in this situation, *'There's only three of them. They'd probably be considered outsiders'. It's difficult coming to a school where the majority of pupils are Catholic'* (MNS.r). One pupil also questioned the effectiveness of shared learning where there was a considerable disparity in the proportion of pupils from different schools, *'Wonder if only six come from one school and 45 from another, does shared education really work?'* (CI.u).

Logistical Issues
A substantial number of pupils across the workshops drew attention to practical difficulties associated with shared classes. These related to timetabling, travel and the distance between schools, *'It's awkward because of the timetables. You have to get taxis to* [school X] *so we have to cut short classes here as they are a different length to classes there…'* (VGCa.u), and *'I think we should do a bit more with other schools. It's hard because we're so far out'* (GMI.r). Logistical challenges were a recurrent theme throughout the workshops and interviews with principals and staff and are revisited in other sections of this chapter.

No Discernible Benefits
Having reflected on their experiences of shared classes, a minority of pupils concluded that they had not been particularly beneficial or significantly different from

other classes. One student described the class as, *'…boring – it's just ICT. It's not anything in particular. There's only one person from the other school in the class. Nineteen of us and one of him. Didn't talk much…'* (MNS.u). Other students at the same school admitted, *'We wouldn't miss them if* [joint classes] *stopped… don't need shared education'* (MNS.u).

Shared Activities
Pupils briefly reviewed their involvement in shared activities, and again, their views are quite diverse.

Post-Primary Pupils
Many of the enjoyable and beneficial aspects of shared classes identified by pupils, were replicated in their assessment of shared activities, particularly the chance to meet and engage with new people and to access a variety of learning experiences in different environments. Pupils from a single sex school who met pupils from another school on a recreational trip commented, *'It was class, we got to meet girls',* while students at a special school particularly enjoyed opportunities to, *'…go new places'* and *'…learn together'* with pupils from other schools. A few pupils provided less favourable feedback, highlighting incidents of name-calling; *'We got called "Fenians" at a cross community event'* (VGCa.u2). A few other pupils did not feel that shared learning had any significant bearing on their educational experience, *'Shared education makes little or no impact on our lives'* (VGCa.u1).

Primary Pupils
Feedback from P5 and P6 pupils who had taken part in shared activities, was generally positive. P6 pupils at one school (PC.r2), who had completed projects with pupils from several controlled and maintained primary schools, were almost all positive, with only a very small minority reporting that the experience had not been enjoyable. Two thirds of P6 pupils in another controlled primary school, reported that their favourite piece of work during the year, had been completed through a joint initiative with a maintained primary school, although pupils appeared unaware that the pupils attending this school were from a different community background (PC.r1). Pupils at a third controlled primary school, commented that they enjoyed mixing with others and seeing different schools, *'I like it when others come to our school'* (PC.u2).

P6 pupils at a primary school who indicated having had no experiences of shared activities, reported that P7 pupils in their school had enjoyed the activities. They agreed that they would also probably find it enjoyable, if they had an opportunity to participate in a similar project. One P6 pupil commented that it sounded *'Mental'*, that is, "Good" (PM.u). Pupils in two rural maintained primary schools were involved in collaborative activities, mainly with other maintained schools, and their feedback was

generally positive (PM.r1 and PM.r2). One pupil commented, '*They're good because you got to meet new people and stuff*'.

Some pupils were concerned that there was a risk that pupils from other schools could be '*nasty*' or bully pupils. A few pupils in this school suggested they experienced this type of behaviour due to the small size and rural location of the school, '*Our school gets bullied because it's wee*' and another pupil asserted, '*People think we don't learn anything because it's in the country*' (PM.r1). In another school, a significant number of pupils in one class raised concerns about the behaviour of pupils from another school, '*The other school came over and broke something... and blamed* [it] *on the pupils here*' and '*Children from* [school X] *mustn't like us... they swear and put their fingers up*'. Other P6 pupils at the school were however, more upbeat, asserting that '…*not all the pupils are mean*', and, '*I like speaking to pupils from the other school. Sometimes they are nice*' (PC.r1).

Preparatory school pupils briefly discussed a joint project which they had been involved in, with a controlled primary school. Some P6s thought the initiative was '*more fun and you got to talk to different people*', while others indicated that they had interacted mainly with pupils in their class, '*We just pretty much talked to our class, and they talked to their own too. Like I would have said "Hi"* [and went back to my friends]' (PP.u). P5 and P6 pupils at an integrated school indicated that they enjoyed engaging with other pupils through sports. Asked if there was anything about these they did not like, some P5 pupils remarked that when taking part in sports activities with other schools, pupils might '*tease*' or '*boo*' them, because they were in competition. Other pupils argued however, that this could happen in their own school, '[It's] *not about* [the] *other school – can happen any time*' (PGMI.u).

In the KLT survey, P7 pupils were asked if they had enjoyed taking part in projects or classes with other schools. Fifty percent of pupils reported that they had 'mostly' enjoyed doing projects, and 47% indicated that they had 'mostly' enjoyed having classes with pupils from other schools. Some pupils were more ambivalent; 38% indicated that they enjoyed doing projects, 'sometimes', and 39% of pupils enjoyed doing classes 'sometimes'. Nine percent of respondents recorded that did not really enjoy doing projects, while 11% did not enjoy classes. The distribution of responses broadly reflects the spread of pupils' views from the consultation, although as has already been noted, pupils' experiences, in some cases, were quite limited.

PRINCIPALS' AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES OF SHARED EDUCATION
Principals and members of staff were asked to share their perspectives of shared education and to comment on their school's experiences of shared learning activities. In parallel with pupils' responses, their views were varied and they highlighted both benefits and challenges.

Opportunity to Meet New People and Build Relationships

Echoing primary and post-primary pupils, principals and teachers commented on the potential for pupils and schools to establish new relationships. They referred to, '*Barriers being broken down*' and '*New friendships springing up*' and described the experience for pupils and staff as '*Very beneficial*'. One post-primary teacher noted, '*It's about sharing good practice between schools*' (MNS.u), while a teacher in a special school remarked, '*It's good to learn about each other's differences and exchange ideas*'. Another member of staff commenting on how relationships had improved, said, '*Great work is being done… particularly as there was resistance from parents and the community in sending children to a Catholic school*' (MNS.r).

The principal of one controlled primary school (PC.r1) which had engaged in initiatives with a maintained school, also commented on the improved relationships between staff in the two schools. However, there was an acknowledgement that a continuing challenge was to negotiate parents' agreement for their children to engage with pupils in the other school. Another principal of a school located in an area of high economic deprivation commented on developing links between the neighbouring primary schools, '*We don't cluster yet, would like to and working on this*' (PC.u1). A maintained primary school principal whose school had participated in a series of initiatives with a local controlled school, commented that schools in the area benefitted from good relationships, and principals recognised the importance of working together. This respondent added optimistically, '*We have never had a school closed to us*' (PM.u).

Extended Curriculum Provision

In relation to the curriculum, principals and staff were generally very positive about the benefits of shared classes and particularly the opportunity provided to pupils to access a broader range of subjects. One member of staff commented, '*It opens up possibilities of new subjects for pupils. We can't afford all the subjects alone*' (CI.r) and another explained, '*The range of subjects is the best…really expanded the options*' (MNS.u). Reflecting on the views of parents, one teacher commented, '*I think the general view is it's fine. It will give them more options*' (CG.u). Another principal, concluded however that, '*Sharing proposals basically equate to meeting the Entitlement Framework*' (GMI.r).

A member of staff in a special school welcomed the educational opportunities available to pupils, through the school's membership of an area learning community. This had helped facilitate their participation in a diverse range of shared learning activities, including shared classes and had enhanced working relationships with other schools. This teacher explained, '*Under the umbrella of the area learning community, the links are much more meaningful*'. However, this respondent added, that whilst the area learning community co-ordinators were very proactive, with '*plenty of ideas*', challenges could arise when they returned to their schools to put

these ideas into practice. The teacher explained, they can *'…encounter a lot of resistance'* as well as a host of logistical challenges.

Logistical Issues

Logistical challenges around the organisation and delivery of shared education including the provision of appropriate travel and transport, were referenced by quite a number of principals and teachers. One principal commented, *'Distance is an issue so it's limited what we can do'* (VGCa.u). Other difficulties regarding transport arrangements were identified, '*Transport is a big issue. Bus takes pupils from both schools. Driver could forget or be new and not know'* (CI.u) and '[Pupils from school X] *have to leave five minutes earlier for the taxi…they don't have the opportunity to talk to me or pupils as they're rushing for the taxi'* (CG.u). Another principal noted that, *'The weakness in taking part is the rural setting'* (MNS.u).Transporting special school pupils also presented specific challenges in ensuring that appropriate transport was available which could accommodate the required number of pupils. A principal from a grammar school explained that the school had considered whether teachers, rather than pupils, could travel between schools, *'One solution has been to think about teacher mobility, but we have to take into account the rights and working conditions of teachers when doing this'* (VGCa.u). Only one primary school principal referred to transport issues, indicating that due to the school's rural location, it had proven costly to transport pupils to another school, despite the schools' relative proximity to each other (PC.r1).

Teachers in the majority of post-primary schools providing shared classes, drew attention to other practical challenges. One teacher explained, *'Main problems are timetabling, issues with bells, pupils arriving late for lessons,* [and] *different school rules – use of mobiles creates an issue for teachers'* (MNS.u). Other teachers agreed, *'There are key practicalities to think about…we have a service agreement with other schools…'* (MNS.r). Another teacher highlighted the challenge of managing different school timetables, *'Timetables are an issue – our school is a five-day one and theirs is two weeks so there are restrictions. Different holidays of schools…cost is a big issue'* (CI.u). Arranging shared learning activities with mainstream schools was perceived as a significant challenge for special schools. A member of staff referred to the different culture in mainstream schools, remarking that '*Timetables, exams and the rigidity of the curriculum'* could hinder efforts to arrange shared learning activities. Difficulties encountered by teachers in arranging suitable times to meet and prepare in advance were also highlighted. A primary school principal suggested that issues such as timetabling, use of halls and provision of meals had been *'…small technicalities'* (PM.u). In terms of delivering shared learning opportunities, there was a recognition that primary schools could be more flexible than post-primary schools.

Funding and Costs

Principals and staff in primary and post-primary schools indicated that cost was an important factor in the delivery and sustainability of shared learning initiatives. Principals asserted that funding was a considerable concern, and without this, projects were limited in terms of sustainability and impact. Reflecting on their experiences, a number of primary principals indicated that they had applied for or availed of funding to support the development of shared learning initiatives. As indicated earlier, three of the ten primary schools participating in the consultation had secured CRED funding[21]. One principal of a controlled primary school noted that this had enabled the school to engage in various activities with several maintained primary schools, and to secure substitute teacher cover (PC.r1). Another principal indicated that their school was constantly seeking funding from a range of sources. Despite the difficulties in securing funds, the principal confirmed, *'We will continue it because we value it'* (PM.U).

Responding to the issue of funding, one primary school principal highlighted the pressure they believed primary school principals faced, in seeking to meet the Department of Education's expectations to both drive up performance and results, and to promote greater inclusion. He remarked that this resembled a comparison of *'…apples and oranges'*; *'If they want schools to* [facilitate] *more inclusion and* [be] *wider in remit they would need to be funded* [for that]*' – 'I can drive up results – but at the cost of something else'* (PC.u2).

Principals or teachers in five post-primary schools and a special school referred to costs and the need for adequate funding to be made available to support the delivery of shared learning initiatives. One respondent mentioned funding amongst a list of other essential factors, *'Money, principals, vision and flexibility are key to success*' (MNS.r).

Sharing and Cross-Community Contexts

Whilst acknowledging the value of cross-community education initiatives, five out of nine primary principals[22] and teachers admitted that there were challenges in taking these forward. A member of staff at a maintained rural primary school acknowledged that the school was unable to participate in cross-community activities, due to the impact of the Northern Ireland conflict on the local community. They explained that parents would be very reluctant for their children to be involved in shared education projects, involving children from different community backgrounds (PM.r2). Two

---

[21] In addition to CRED and formal and informal links between schools, other sources of formal support cited by primary schools included universities, the Comenius Partnership (British Council), the Integrated Education Fund's PACT (Promoting A Culture of Trust) Programme and the Social Inclusion Fund.

[22] It was not possible to convene an interview with a member of staff in one primary school, therefore the total number of primary school principals or members of staff interviewed was nine.

controlled rural primary schools involved in cross-community initiatives also highlighted the challenge of developing links with local maintained primary schools, without losing parental support. Principals emphasised that parents had been generally supportive of these activities, however this was, '…*as long as* [parents] *feel* [their] *own identity* [is] *not under threat'* (PC.r2)*.* This principal also commented*, 'It's about protecting their own sense of feeling and worth'* (PC.r2), and another admitted, '[We] *do a lot of mutual understanding but don't address religion'* (PC.r1). In contrast, a principal of another controlled primary school, reported that parents had been *'…surprisingly ok'* about cross-community initiatives, although the school always had to seek parental consent in advance, given the sensitivity of the issues (PC.u1).

Parents of pupils attending an Irish-medium school were also reported, to have expressed concerns about the type of activities in which their children might be involved, through shared education and specifically if these had the potential to conflict with their political or cultural identity. Staff indicated however, that the school was taking steps to introduce activities not traditionally associated with the dominant culture of the local community. The principal also emphasised that Irish-medium education was non-denominational, *'Nothing would preclude interaction between the school and non-Catholics'* (PIM).

Principals or teachers in three out of ten post-primary schools referred to parental concerns about their children engaging with pupils from different community backgrounds. One principal acknowledged:

> *'There are difficulties recruiting children and young people to projects due to the parents' attitude… "He doesn't mix with them"…"Over my dead body is my child doing Irish"…I think the kids couldn't care less about religion…think they would love the experience'* (CNS.r).

Another teacher highlighted the potential influence of parent's views on pupils:

> *'I feel that sectarianism is still an issue in pupil's home lives and this is where they are coming from…We made it very clear that if a pupil chooses a particular subject they will be studying that at* [school X]*. Four sets of parents were reluctant…three came round and one withdrew the child after a month'* (MNS.u)*.*

And, again, reflecting the influence of parental opinion, a third principal commented, *'We have parents with very strong political views.* [They] *haven't complained about sharing initiatives but the school hasn't tested that...'* (VGCa.u2).

A few teachers and principals were also concerned about pupils participating in cross-community shared learning activities, particularly if they were in a minority, *'I'd have concerns about how pupils might be received in non-Catholic schools…hasn't*

been an issue so far, as pupils from Protestant schools have come here – it's a legitimate concern' (VGCa.u1)*.*

Parental Perspectives

Principals and members of staff from post-primary schools and a special school reported that the vast majority of parents, were supportive of shared learning initiatives and that only a minority had voiced dissent. Respondents also indicated that parents' anxieties generally related to cross-community issues, described above. Members of staff from five post-primary schools did, however, highlight two other concerns expressed by parents. These related to the perceived quality of teaching in other schools providing shared classes and transport arrangements for pupils travelling between schools. In a majority of cases, transport issues had been or were in the process of being resolved, although staff in some rural schools indicated that it required on-going monitoring. In relation to the issue of teaching quality, two principals explained:

> *'If pupils are going to a secondary school there is a concern from parents…their child is at the same school for five years. How will they get used to another school? Generally it's fine after a few weeks when they realise the quality is the same…but you can't guarantee it…I tell parents to get pupils to do four 'A' levels and the shared subject is generally the fourth one and they drop it anyway'* (VGCa.u1) and;

> *'Our parents wouldn't be very happy if we were to collaborate with [a non-selective school] simply because they come to this school because it is seen as academic…. The big issue… is the grammar/non-grammar divide…It wouldn't be an option for* [pupils] *to go there...we'd be aware of that'* (VGCa.u2).

This principal added that parents would be more supportive of the school's collaboration with a local non-denominational grammar, than with a local maintained non-selective school,

> '*There is a perception that sectarianism would come through the non-grammar rather than the grammar...there is a middle class family influence factor'.*

Staff Reservations

A number of post-primary principals and teachers indicated that colleagues had concerns about some aspects of shared education, particularly shared classes. Again, most emphasised that staff were generally very supportive of shared learning opportunities and that many of the problems identified in the early stages of establishing initiatives had been resolved. However a number of concerns remained. The standard of teaching provided in other schools, was an issue for some teachers. A principal commented, '*I can't guarantee the quality of teaching in other schools…our experience is that their results are always a grade lower or equal to the*

lowest grade here…don't know why that's happening…' (VGCa.u1). Management of shared classes could also be challenging as another teacher acknowledged:

> *'Some teachers get frustrated in terms of the communication problems – issues have to go through the year heads at each school'.* This respondent added, *'Not everyone is a million percent on board. But we know we need the collaboration…in order to* [remain viable]*'* (MNS.u).

Although all of the integrated schools who participated in the consultation had links or established partnership arrangements with other schools in their area, staff did suggest that the ethos of integrated education meant that they were already fulfilling the objectives of shared education. Several respondents explained that 'shared education' was essentially at the core of their work and reflected in the diversity of their intake (in terms of religion, culture and ability) to their schools. One principal illustrated this point:

> *'It's an integrated school – if someone calls you a "Fenian B", you explore it. If a teacher objects to a union jack being used, you address it in a staff meeting. Things work because you're around each other long enough… In saying that, you could say that shared is better than what we have now'* (PGMI.u).

Reflecting on the value of cross-community initiatives, this principal commented, *'Historically, integrated schools haven't really invested in CRED and EMU, because it's fairly meaningless to us'* (PGMI.u). A primary school principal also questioned the value of CRED, *'We've moved beyond that – It's out of date – too stark now'* (PC.r1).

A member of staff in a special school drew attention to concerns, occasionally expressed by principals of mainstream schools about how their pupils might react to children with disabilities. In response, this teacher remarked that, *'Perceptions of special schools may be different to what they actually are in practice',* indicating that staff encouraged other schools to visit and experience the school, for themselves. This teacher also explained that special schools had to be quite proactive in establishing links with mainstream schools as staff there were generally less likely to *'make the approach'.* The benefits of shared learning opportunities for all pupils at this special school were strongly emphasised, including the insight it gave pupils into mainstream schools. The teacher also described how collaborative learning opportunities could, '*raise expectations of what our pupils might achieve…We sometimes find pupils can match or outperform their counterparts* [in other schools]'.

TAKING SHARED EDUCATION FORWARD: WHAT WOULD WORK WELL
The workshops and surveys were designed, not only to ascertain pupils' views and opinions of shared education where they had experience of this, but also to identify the types of activities and approaches which they believed would work well. Children and young people who completed the KLT and YLT surveys were asked, through

several questions, to broadly consider whether specific activities would work well and to consider possible positive and negative outcomes of children or young people from different schools getting together.

Every respondent in the KLT and YLT surveys was asked briefly evaluate the merits of sharing classes, activities and facilities with other schools. Respondents were asked in each survey, if they thought these were a 'Good idea' or 'Bad idea'. Table 2 details their views.

Table 2 *Views of Shared Projects, Classes and Facilities/Equipment*

ACTIVITY	KLT %	YLT %
Projects		
Good idea	73	86
Bad idea	11	4
Don't know	16	10
Classes		
Good idea	59	72
Bad idea	21	14
Don't know	20	14
Facilities/Equipment		
Good idea	59	81
Bad idea	20	9
Don't know	21	10

These responses indicate that the majority of children and young people thought that sharing classes, projects and facilities or equipment was a good idea. Young people responding to the YLT were particularly positive about all three activities. It is possible that primary pupils had less experience of shared classes or that their schools did not share facilities or equipment so this may have contributed to the higher percentage of negative and 'Don't Know' responses. Examining the YLT responses, shared projects were identified as a good idea by more respondents than shared classes (86% compared with 72%). Again, young people may have had more experience of projects or where they had experience of both, young people may have concluded that projects were a more appropriate activity.

Another question presented respondents with a list of 'things that might be good if children or young people from different schools got together' and asked them to 'pick two favourite things that you think would be good'. Table 3 illustrates their responses.

Table 3 *Things that Might be Good if Children/Young People from different Schools Get Together*

Things that might be good…	YLT%	KLT%[23]
Using their sports facilities and computers or equipment	33	27
Getting the opportunity to be taught by different/fun[24] teachers	18	18
Doing classes we don't normally get to do at our school, like learning a new language	48	27
Making new friends	65	50
Doing interesting/fun[25] projects	32	40
I don't have any favourites	3	3
I don't know	2	3

For most respondents, 'making new friends' was regarded as the most attractive outcome of getting together with other schools with 65% of YLT survey respondents and 50% of KLT survey respondents selecting this. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, pupils who had experience of shared education, also welcomed the opportunity to meet people and to make new friends. Evidently, pupils regard the social opportunities presented through shared learning initiatives as very important. Almost half of the P7 pupils who completed the KLT survey also welcomed opportunities to experience classes not normally provided in their own schools while 40% of post-primary pupils indicated that interesting projects would be an activity they would enjoy. The opportunity to be taught by different or fun teachers was not identified as a particularly positive aspect with just less than 20% of pupils in each cohort selecting this option.

Every pupil taking part in the consultation could respond to this question, irrespective of the extent of their previous experience, although those who had been involved in shared initiatives were naturally able to reflect on their experiences when providing ideas and suggestions. Generally speaking, feedback from Year 11 and Year 13 pupils did not differ significantly, although, as indicated previously, a greater proportion of Year 13 pupils had experienced shared classes.

More Collaborative Approaches to Learning
Pupils in three of the eight post-primary schools and pupils at a special school who were actively involved in shared classes, advocated more opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, *'Some kind of joint activities that you do, work on things together so you're not just sitting there'* (GMI.r), and opportunities to *'Talk with the*

---

[23] In both surveys, respondents were asked to select two things therefore responses will total more than 100%.

[24] In the KLT survey, the phrase 'fun teachers' was used and in the YLT survey 'different teachers'.

[25] In the KLT survey the phrase 'fun projects' was used and in the YLT survey, 'interesting projects'.

pupils in other schools more…’ (MNS.u), and more ‘*Group work and more mixing activities – that would make it more enjoyable*’ (CG.u). Pupils in this school also suggested that seating arrangements in classes should be organised in such a way as to facilitate greater contact between pupils from different schools, ‘*Not just one school on one side and the other school on the other*’ and another pupil in this workshop added, ‘[Have a] *seating plan to get pupils to mix*’ (CG.u).

Pupils in four out of ten primary schools also believed it was important to ensure that activities or teaching approaches provided effective opportunities for pupils to engage with each other. Two pupils suggested that shared classes should, ‘*…do group work – because if there was people from different schools then you could get to know them properly if you are working together*’ (PM.r1)*, or ‘*Art, cooking, getting to know each other activities*’ (PM.u). Pupils in many primary schools were happy to participate in activities that enabled them to become better acquainted with other pupils and they were keen to, ‘*Find out about them*’, ‘*Find out about their thoughts*’ and to ‘*…get to know them*’ (PP.u).

Preparation for Sharing
Year 11 and Year 13 students in two post-primary schools who had participated in shared classes, underlined the importance of meeting and bonding with pupils from other schools before they met in shared classes. One pupil argued that, ‘*Team bonding should be essential beforehand*’ (MNS.u). Interestingly however, other pupils in this workshop commented that the preparative sessions in which they had participated, were not particularly enjoyable or effective, since pupils from each school had remained in their own friendship groups and had not mixed. A member of staff emphasised that the school, ‘*…puts in a lot of preparation for the pupils. Preparation is important as pupils are always a bit nervous*’. This individual explained that teachers taking shared classes introduced themselves to pupils in advance of classes beginning and that interactive workshops were arranged for all pupils involved. Evidently, the school was eager to ensure that pupils felt prepared, however pupils believed that the interactive workshops required review.

Primary school pupils in one school emphasised that once pupils met, ‘[They] *would need time to talk to people from other schools*’ (PM.r1). In terms of preparation, one pupil suggested that every teacher involved in a shared initiative should be aware of any children who had experienced bullying, to ensure that this did not happen again (PGMI.u). Several pupils in a special school also referred to the importance of preparation before engaging in shared activities, ‘*It's good to know in advance what the topic is…when it's announced you can just panic…so it's good to talk about it*’ (SS.u).

Subjects and Activities Appropriate for 'Sharing'

Pupils in a few primary schools, one post-primary school and a special school, proposed that subjects and activities which involved *'doing things'* and *'working together'* would be more effective in promoting shared learning. One pupil identified a number of subjects which they felt would be appropriate for sharing, *'Technology, Art, PE, Science, Music; You could do them with other people better'* (VGCa.u1) and, another pupil suggested, *'Art – because you can see people's opinions by their art'* (PM.r1). Primary and special school pupils suggested subjects they especially liked, *'Fun things…because it's what we like doing'* (PIM). Students in an Irish-medium post-primary school suggested that they could, '…*link up with pupils studying 'A' level Irish'* in English-medium schools or that if other subjects or activities could be delivered, *'…through… the medium of Irish and English,* [other pupils would] *have an insight into what we do'* (IM). Pupils at an Irish-medium primary school suggested they could do *'…half* [the class] *in English then half in Irish'* (PIM).

Primary school pupils eagerly proposed a range of extra-curricular activities which they thought were particularly appropriate for sharing and developing good relationships between pupils. Children in one school felt that it was important for all pupils to enjoy and be interested in an activity, *'It's good to do things you are interested in'* (PIM). Sports and games were extremely popular with primary and special school pupils, and pupils at nine primary schools suggested specific sports. Pupils from four primary schools suggested theatrical productions and drama could be shared while children from three schools proposed joint school trips including camping. Children from two schools advocated pupils' involvement in uniformed organisations and clubs (PM.r2 and PGMI.u). A plethora of other recreational and activities was also identified. Pupils at four post-primary schools suggested that sports, educational and recreational trips, and musical or theatrical productions were also appropriate 'shared' activities.

The majority of pupils in four workshops conducted in two grammar schools and in one workshop convened in an integrated school, stated a preference to engage in shared education through extra-curricular activities, rather than shared classes. One pupil explained, *'I think if it was lessons you could get distracted by the new people, so better to do extra-curricular activities'* (VGCa.u2) and another was concerned that pupils might feel excluded, *'Better to do extra-curricular stuff as some people may feel they don't fit in to joint classes'* (VGND.u). Others suggested that recreational activities would be more effective, *'Plays work really well… you get to meet different people'* and '[*It's a*] *good idea for non-school activities such as youth clubs, sports clubs'* (GMI.r).

Effective Practical Arrangements to Facilitate Sharing between Schools

In a number of post-primary workshops, pupils commented that it would be helpful if schools were located close to one another, so that shared activities might be organised more easily. Year 13 pupils in three schools suggested that shared activities should be provided in a 'neutral location', through joint sixth form facilities or via shared campuses:

> '*We should go to a community centre where no-one belongs… so no-one feels intimidated'* (CG.u);
>
> '*A sixth form connecting all the schools in the area with one uniform…Allow a range of subject choices and meet new people from different backgrounds'* (VGCa.u1); and,
>
> '*The shared campus is a really good idea…because people from different backgrounds and different religions can interact with each other'* (GMI.r).

Pupils also advocated that schools should share their facilities more widely. Pupils at a preparatory school, observing that other schools might not have access to the facilities they shared with a grammar school, said, *'I think we should share, like, the computer labs',* (PP.u). Pupils in one primary school said they would be, *'…over the moon'* if they were able to use another school's swimming pool (PC.u2).

Introduce Shared Education Early

Post-primary pupils across a range of schools believed that shared education would be most effective if it were introduced at an early stage in a child's school career and if it were made available to all pupils, *'Mixing at primary school would be better than at secondary as by that stage people have framed opinions and been influenced by parents'* (VGND.u) and, *'Good to start it early on and then you don't rely on other people's views. It's your own experiences and you're not intimidated by what you hear'* (CI.u).

Promote Shared Learning between Similar School Types

Reflecting on how shared education might operate most effectively, pupils in three post-primary school workshops advocated that similar types of schools should form shared partnerships. It is important to clarify that the vast majority of pupils in these workshops indicated that they had little or no experience of shared classes. Almost every Year 11 pupil in one workshop conducted in a grammar school concluded that it would be more appropriate for pupils in their school to share with another grammar school and, for pupils from grammar and non-selective schools to study separately, *'Only mix with similar background schools; grammar schools with grammar schools…maybe one-off extra-curricular with other schools but no long term things…'* (VGND.u). A minority of pupils from another grammar school agreed with a Year 13 pupil who said:

> '*It would result in the holding back of others, e.g. mixing a high achieving grammar school with a low secondary school would reduce the chances of*

success for those at the grammar as the…quality of education would decrease' (VGCa.u1).

The majority of pupils in one workshop who were involved in shared education, believed that it would be more enjoyable and effective, if the pupils with whom they shared, were from a similar community background to themselves, *'I would rather do it with another school that is the same religion…I don't like sharing education with* [school X] *because they don't do the same sports'* (MNS.u). Pupils from one controlled primary school held a similar perspective, expressing a preference to work with other controlled primary schools rather than a maintained primary school, with which their school had an established link. A P6 pupil noted, *'It's a good idea to see what other religions have done, but not too much, for* [fear of] *fighting. They might say bad things about religion and put you off'* (PC.r1). A pupil from an Irish-medium post-primary school agreed, *'Irish schools* [should mix] *with Irish schools and do wee activities which will make* [a] *stronger bond'* (IM).

Promote Shared Activities with all Types of Schools and Backgrounds
Students in two post-primary workshops highlighted the potential benefits of linking up with pupils from every type of school in Northern Ireland and one pupil suggested that as they attended an integrated school, pupils might be able to demonstrate how effective sharing worked, *'We're already integrated, but if we met with other schools we could set an example'* (GMI.r). Pupils at a special school were keen to link up with pupils from all kinds of schools, including those which siblings attended, *'We should do more stuff with other schools…I would like to do things with my sister's school'* (SS.u). Pupils in a number of maintained, controlled and integrated schools, indicated that they welcomed opportunities to engage in shared learning with pupils with learning disabilities, different nationalities and pupils from a less affluent background, *'We should have days out with special schools to learn about them'* (GMI.r) and, *'Should join with people not as fortunate as us, and people who have special needs'* (PM.u).

Provide a *'Buddy'* or Peer Mentoring System
Pupils in two primary schools agreed that a 'buddy' system would be a useful feature of shared education initiatives, *'You could have a buddy for the day'* (PGMI.u). During a workshop in a preparatory school, one pupil suggested that a *'buddy'* would be particularly useful if a pupil, *'got together with [a school] and someone wasn't being nice to them'*. The pupil could report any problems to their *'buddy',* if they were reluctant to approach a teacher directly (PP.u). Children in another primary school thought it was very important to minimise the potential for bullying to occur through shared activities, and one pupil suggested that children could learn from each other not to bully (PIM).

Consult with Pupils

Pupils in many workshops were keen to be consulted when schools were planning shared activities and they also wanted to be able to discuss any concerns they had before getting involved. Students who had experience of shared education commented, *'[You] should talk through pupils' fears before starting an initiative'* (MNS.u), and, '*You need to talk it through before you go'* (SS.u), and, '*Find out whether pupils want to do it or not'* (PM.r2).

TAKING SHARED EDUCATION FORWARD: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Children and young people who completed the KLT and YLT surveys and those who took part in the consultation were asked to consider or identify potential barriers or challenges to taking shared education forward.

In the KLT and YLT surveys, respondents were presented with a list of 'some of the things that might be bad if children/young people from different schools get together'. In both surveys, they were asked to select what they regarded as the two worst things. Table 4 details their responses.

Table 4   *Things that Might be Bad if Children/Young People from Different Schools Get Together*

Things that might be bad…	KLT %	YLT%
Having to be with children/young people I think are rough or nasty/rough, disruptive or annoying[26]	68	75
Having to mix with children/young people who are very different from me	22	18
Having to travel to get to the other school	14	49
Having to be with children/young people of a different religion	12	5
Having to share our sports facilities or computers	9	5
I don't mind any of these	12	20
I don't know	5	10

The possibility of having to be with children or young people who they believed were rough, nasty, disruptive or annoying was clearly the worst 'thing' for respondents to both surveys; 75% of YLT survey respondents selected this option as did 68% of respondents to the KLT survey. Interestingly, the previous question in both surveys, asked children and young people to select the two things which they thought would be good if children from different schools came together, and as discussed earlier, in

---

[26] In the KLT survey, the phrase 'Having to be with children who are rough or nasty' was used and in the YLT survey, the phrase 'Having to be with children who are rough, disruptive or annoying' was used.

both surveys, a significant proportion of respondents (50% in the KLT survey and 65% in the YLT survey), selected 'making new friends'. Their responses to both of these questions underline the importance to children and young people of being able to engage positively with others. This message was also communicated during the consultation. In each survey, approximately just one fifth of respondents indicated that they would mind mixing with children or young people, who were very different from them. From the YLT survey responses, almost 50% of young people regarded travel between schools as a negative outcome and again this point was reiterated, particularly by post-primary pupils in the consultation workshops.

During the workshops, pupils were asked if there was anything that might 'put young people off' taking part in shared activities. Pupils in every school went on to identify possible barriers or challenges that could impact young peoples' views of shared education and consequently their desire to take part. An analysis of the data revealed that there were a number of specific concerns which dominated some pupils' thinking. For some, their perceptions of barriers or challenges were based on previous or current experiences of shared activities or classes, while others who had little or no experience, highlighted what they perceived to be potential hurdles or difficulties.

Bullying

Bullying was a concern raised by pupils in response to a number of questions included in the consultation and a significant source of anxiety for many primary school pupils. In one primary school, pupils were also worried that they could 'lose' friends to pupils in other schools. Pupils in eight primary schools strongly agreed that the possibility of bullying would 'put them off' shared education, '*You might worry they would bully you'* (PC.r), and *'I don't like the fact that if another school joins with us I will not have a best friend and we will have bullies... the bullies will spread when we do shared education'* (PM.u). In another primary school, pupils discussed their general fear that children from the other school(s) might *'attack'* them or that *'someone bad'* could upset them (PC.u2). Only pupils at an integrated primary school, did not mention bullying as a barrier to shared education, although they did identify it as an issue for schools to consider when planning activities (PGMI.u).

Pupils in four of ten post-primary schools referred to the possibility of bullying or conflict occurring if different schools came into contact. Two pupils commented, *'Good idea, but there could be a lot of fighting or bullying'* (VGCa.u1), and *'Could be abuse from other schools'* (CI.u)*. A number of pupils in one post-primary school felt that any on-going conflict between young people outside school would dissuade them from engaging with these young people through shared classes or activities, *'If conflict is happening between young people outside school, might not want to get together in school'* (CNS.r).

Perceptions of Other Schools and Pupils

Post-primary pupils in seven workshops acknowledged that they had certain preconceptions about individual schools, declaring that many other pupils in their schools held similar views and that these would influence their desire to participate in shared learning, *'People's preconceived ideas and prejudices would put them off'* (GMI.r) and, *'Because of the stigmas around certain schools, some people may be reluctant'* (CG.u). A number of pupils in one school felt that students attending local non-selective schools had formed a particular impression of them, *'They think that the Grammar is stuck up…'* (CG.u). However, another pupil admitted that they, *'…wouldn't want to mix with* [local non-selective schools] *...because they're bullies… chavs...'* (CG.u). Pupils at another grammar school admitted they were also reluctant to collaborate with pupils attending a local controlled, non-selective school. They attributed this reticence to the pupils' behaviour, *'Nothing to do with religion – just the way they behave'* (VGCa.u). Primary pupils' preconceptions about particular schools tended to centre around bullying and misbehaviour and they anticipated that collaborative activities with pupils in these schools would be problematic. Several pupils talked about children in other schools *'…wrecking our equipment'* (PM.r1) and others claimed that *'Our school would have less bullying'* (PIM).

Students in three out of four grammar schools discussed possible drawbacks of shared classes, voicing their concerns about the teaching and academic standards provided in other schools where they could take classes. They highlighted the potentially detrimental impact this could have on the quality and progress of their own learning, particularly if pupils from other schools were *'less academic'* or not focused on learning, *'I don't want to sound stuck-up but they don't push you there. We get better grades'* (CG.u), and *'The behaviour of new classes you could be going to in different schools could be worrying and impede your learning'* (VGCa.u1). Pupils at all of the grammar schools included in the consultation also explained that while they were familiar with teachers and happy with the standard of teaching in their own school, they would be taking a risk if they chose a 'shared' subject which was taught in another school. They also referred to the quality of teaching provided in other schools at different stages in the workshops, *'You need to think about how other schools teach'* (VGCa.u1), *'It's easier to be in a school where you know the teachers and can talk to them…'* (VGND.u), and *'I want to be sure I pick subjects where the teaching is good…too risky to move'* [VGCa.u1].

Bringing Pupils from Different 'Community Backgrounds' Together

Pupils in six post-primary schools talked about the potential difficulties of bringing pupils from different community backgrounds together. Several pupils in one school identified *'sectarianism'* as a *'big issue'* and a major barrier to pupils' involvement in shared education activities (VGCa.u2). One pupil in an integrated school, commented, *'I think because of religions, it* [shared education] *wouldn't work'* (GMI.r) and another advised, *'Shared education would probably not work due to many*

people being sectarian and many social classes…not mix[ing]*'* (VGND.u). Reflecting on why this might be the case, pupils suggested it could be due to the influence of pupils' families, *'Could be family negativity about religion...about Protestants'* (MNS.r) or that pupils might hold strong views, *'...There is an issue when two segregated schools mix as their opinions would be very strong'* (VGND.u). A primary school pupil advised caution, *'It's a good idea to see what other religions have done but not too much, because of fighting. They might say bad things about your religion and put you off'* (PC.r1).

There was a perception that not every school would be able to facilitate pupils from different backgrounds coming together, *'Think about the complexities among Protestants and Catholics...it's ok at certain schools, but not all'* (GMI.r). Another pupil concurred, *'I think it's a good idea, but just be careful who you put the school with...Think about religion, like some aren't fussy,but others don't like certain religions'* (CI.u).

At least some of the students who communicated fairly partial views about other pupils and schools appeared to have had little or no contact with the schools or pupils to which they were referring. As such, their concerns were based on perception, rather than actual experiences. In response, perhaps the insights of several other pupils are quite appropriate *'Sometimes you hear bad rumours about other schools… then you meet them and they're not like that'* (CI.u).

Some of these issues are revisited below in pupils' responses to the question about the importance of pupils from different backgrounds learning together.

Pupils' Non-Participation in Activities

Pupils from six post-primary schools and three primary schools, suggested that they would be discouraged from taking part in shared learning initiatives, if students from other schools were reluctant or unwilling to participate in activities. One primary pupil suggested that, *'Some people mightn't like other schools and just want to be friends with ones in their school'* (PC.u1), while a post-primary pupil commented, '*Some people might not want to mix'* (CNS.r). For some, this concern was based on their previous or on-going experiences of shared classes. A post-primary student remarked, *'Everyone has their guard up'* (MNS.r) and another said, referring to pupils from another school who shared the class, *'You need to tell them they need to talk'* (MNS.u). One P6 pupil, reflecting on their experiences of learning together with pupils from another school, commented, *'It would make us happy if they went to other classes and not ours'* while a classmate noted, *'You think to yourself about the times they haven't been nice to us'* (PC.r1).

A number of post-primary pupils anticipated that some students might not wish to participate in the kind of activities promoted through some shared learning initiatives,

'They might not like what they're going to do' (VGCa.u2) and, *'People would be put off if they were forced to play Gaelic – might not want to'* (MNS.r). Following on from this, it was, therefore important, according to the pupil, to provide attractive learning opportunities, *'Has to be a good trip...for you to be interested'* (VGCa.u2). Primary pupils did not refer to this issue, however one pupil in a small rural primary school admitted they would be worried about pupils from other schools, *'…making fun of our equipment because they have better stuff'* (PM.r1)*.*

Being in a Minority at Another School

The prospect of being in a minority in shared classes at another school was a concern raised by pupils at four post-primary schools, and has already been referenced. Some pupils' responses were informed by their experience of shared classes whilst others' were based on supposition. Pupils attending a single sex school commented that if they were in a significant minority, they would not be happy to attend classes in another single sex school where pupils were of different gender, '*I wouldn't be happy going to another school if it were just me. If you were one boy and you went to a girls' school...you just wouldn't do it'.*

Another student suggested that other factors would influence their decision, *'If just one pupil* [was going]...*depends if you're really keen and it affected your career'* (CG.u). Others highlighted potential challenges confronting pupils in a minority at another school, including increased visibility, *'You don't want to be in the minority going round another school – you'd be targeted'* (VGCa.u), becoming invisible, *'If bigger classes...maybe pupils would get lost in class and not get the help they need'* (GMI.r) and having to contribute in class, *'You could be too intimidated to share your ideas'* (VGND.u). One pupil was concerned they '*Might just feel out of place'* (IM).

Logistical Issues

Pupils at seven out of ten post-primary schools and a special school identified a range of logistical challenges linked to the provision of shared education. Again, many of these issues were referenced in pupils' responses to other questions and they also echo comments made by principals and teachers in post-primary schools and a special school. Arranging travel between schools was perceived as a significant challenge in rural locations, *'Travel's not handy in the country, no buses'* (CNS.r) and pupils also referred to the inconvenience of having to travel, '*Bother of having to go to another school'* (MNS.u), or the time involved getting there, *'Could be weird wasting time getting a taxi out of school,* (VGCa.u) and, *'It would just take forever to get there'* (VGCa.u)*.* Pupils in two rural primary schools also described travel issues having a considerable impact on their collaborations with other schools (PC.r1 and PC.r2), and one pupil was concerned about travel sickness [PC.r1]. Pupils at a special school also discussed transport issues, commenting*, 'We'd have to sort out the buses – it's ok, but it's…hard to schedule them'* (SS.u). Several pupils in one post-primary school referred to the costs associated with transport for shared

classes and the possibility that this would eventually be passed on to pupils, *'Getting half a class to here costs. We'd have to pay more…'* (CG.u).

Post-primary pupils drew attention to a number of other practical challenges, including differences in school timetables, *'Have to get the timetable right…the ones from* [school X] *get here* [20 minutes after class begins]' (MNS.r) and, *'They have nine periods a day, we just have five'* (CG.u), insurance cover, *'Like, are the ones from* [school X] *insured if they come over here and get hurt?'* (MNS.u) and uniforms, *'The uniforms are different. Everyone stared at me. I never got used to it'* (MNS.u). Reflecting on the logistical challenges associated with shared classes, almost every pupil in one post-primary workshop agreed with one respondent who said, *'I don't mind sharing a subject here but not so good at another school'* (CG.u), while a pupil in another workshop concluded, *'I would prefer to avoid shared education because of the hassle'* (VGCa.u1).

Pupils in three post-primary schools also suggested a common set of rules and agreed standards of behaviour were required for all pupils participating in shared classes. Pupils in many primary schools also argued that appropriate rules and codes of conduct should be established in order to deal with bullying or conflict that occurred through shared initiatives, *'You would have to set consequences for anyone from a different school if they did anything bad'* (PM.r1). Other suggestions included the *'Need to make sure they respect the property'* (PP.u). Pupils in one primary school called for more stringent measures to be put in place in order to ensure their safety, *'Security cameras', 'Guards', 'Police', 'ID cards'* and *'Separate changing rooms for different schools in case someone takes your stuff'* (PM.r1).

Costs and Resources
A number of pupils in four post-primary schools, two primary schools and a special school highlighted the costs associated with shared education provision and the need to identify sources of funding. One pupil inquired about costs, *'What will the financial costs be to the school…to pupils?'* (VGCa.u2) while another suggested, *'It could be expensive'* (VGND.u). A primary pupil warned, *'If you were sharing, it would cost more money to get a bigger bus'* (PP.u) and other primary pupils advised that there would be a requirement for, *'A big room to fit everyone in'* (PIM).

Parental Views
A small number of pupils in two grammar schools believed that parental opinions could influence a school's decision to become involved in shared education initiatives. Pupils argued that schools had to respect parental choice and *'think about parents' views'* (VGCa.u2). They advised that some parents might not be supportive of a school's decision to partner another school, in order to provide opportunities for shared learning because, *'[..they] mightn't be happy as they've chosen a school for a reason, for example because it's single sex…'* or *'They might have strong views.*

Particularly if they have a strict religion as their generation was around in a really hard time' (VGND.u). A number of pupils at a special school also emphasised the importance of *'…checking that parents are happy'*.

IMPORTANCE OF HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN TOGETHER WITH PUPILS FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND SCHOOLS

In each workshop, participants were asked to consider whether they thought it was important for pupils from different types of schools (i.e. primary, post-primary, special, Irish-medium, and integrated etc.), and from diverse backgrounds to have the opportunity to learn together. Pupils were also encouraged to identify any specific groups of children or young people with whom they thought it would be important to share their learning. Responses throughout the workshops were mixed and appeared to be influenced by various factors, including the year group which pupils were in, the type and location of school they attended, and pupils' previous experiences of participating in shared education.

General Perspectives

In a number of workshops, pupils contended that the objectives of shared education should not be limited to bringing pupils from the two dominant religious traditions in Northern Ireland together, but rather, that it should focus on bringing pupils of all ages and from all social, cultural and religious backgrounds together, *'I think one of the most vital issues in Northern Ireland is multiculturalism…the education system needs to have multiple views expressed rather than a one way system'* (VGCa.u1).

In a majority of primary workshops, pupils thought it was important for all children to have opportunities to learn together and they were extremely positive about the potential to engage with pupils from other schools. In one school, pupils suggested it would give them the opportunity to '*see things you haven't seen before'*, *'teach each other things'* and *'get to know lots of different people'* (PM.r1). Pupils in another primary school identified similar benefits adding '[Pupils] *can make friends and when they grow up they will know more'* (PC.u1). The opportunity to learn about new things and complete activities together was also highlighted, '*You could share, learn about other religions, do arts and crafts and learn about different skin colours'* (PGMI.u). Some primary pupils were a little anxious that their peers in other schools might be *'Smarter'* or '*Better'* (PC.u1), and one pupil acknowledged there were some schools where he would not be happy to mix with the pupils, '*Definitely not* [school X]. *A boy there tries to beat* [my friend] *and me up'* (PC.u2).

In relation to this question, pupils at an integrated primary school explained, *'I think integrated schools are good because… you could come together with other children with disabilities'* and *'We have lots of different people here'* (PGMI.u). Although pupils in the workshops at this school thought it was important for them to collaborate with other schools, almost every pupil proposed that sharing would

ultimately be more effective, if children from different backgrounds were educated together in one school. Pupils explained further, *'It's not good to be separated', 'You can be friends with someone from a different religion'* and *'You can learn more about them'.* They had some concerns that they *'…might not get along with other schools'* or that '[Pupils] *might have fights if you just meet up* [from time to time]'.

A review of general comments from post-primary and special school pupils' indicated that the majority generally confirmed the importance of pupils from different schools and backgrounds learning together. One student believed, *'It would be good as…people from all different communities can come together to learn and it may break down barriers…'* (CG.u)*. Another pupil concurred, *'We need to meet more people from other schools so that we know how different it is to be here in our school with our views'* (MNS.r). Whilst responding positively to the question, pupils emphasised that for collaboration between schools and pupils to be successful, a number of extenuating factors should be taken into account. This view was expressed both by pupils participating in shared education initiatives and those who were not. Furthermore, although some pupils agreed with the premise, in principle, they remained sceptical about the benefits to pupils. One pupil warned, *'It could cause trouble and make it worse…'* (VGND.u). Year 11 and 13 pupils in three schools (two grammars and an integrated), were unconvinced, *'Don't really see the point. I wouldn't be bothered doing it'* (VGCa.u2) and, *'I don't think putting schools together works, because you're putting us out of our comfort zone'* (CI.u). Some pupils felt it would be more appropriate to mix with young people from other backgrounds outside school, *'I don't really see the need to do this in school time. Outside school is better'* (VGND.u).

In each workshop, the facilitator asked pupils to think about specific school types and to consider the importance of learning with pupils from these schools.

Post-Primary Schools
Pupils in approximately half of the post-primary workshops discussed the importance of primary and post-primary pupils learning together. Almost all of the responses from post-primary pupils suggested however, that this was either not essential or feasible. Indeed, when the facilitator asked if collaboration with primary pupils was important during a workshop in a grammar school, students laughed, and two thirds of the class claiming it was not possible.

Asked specifically about the potential for effective collaboration with Key Stage 2 pupils (8-11 year olds), post-primary pupils remained unconvinced, suggesting that primary pupils' behaviour and levels of maturity could be problematic, '*Don't think mixing with primary schools would work. They are vicious…too immature'* (CI.u), and *'Would be bad if young children were running about'* (GMI.r). A number of pupils concluded that the learning needs and curriculum requirements for primary schools

were too different for shared learning to be possible, '*Would they not learn different things?*' (IM). Some pupils were concerned about primary pupils' safety in a post-primary school, '*Primary and secondary schools are such different environments, it wouldn't be a good idea*' (GMI.r) and another pupil added, '*If a secondary school pupil is being pushy, primary school pupils might get hurt*' (MNS.r). Post-primary students at a special school thought it might be possible to work with P7 pupils however, they did not see any benefit from mixing with younger pupils, also noting that '*Teachers would need to spend too much time with them*' (SS.u).

Primary Schools

Only a minority of primary pupils considered the importance of shared learning opportunities with post-primary schools in some depth. Most primary pupils were interested in the prospect while others were quite ambivalent. Some children were quite positive*, 'It would be quite nice to see what older children can do', and 'Good for grammar school pupils to give advice*' (PM.u), while a few pupils admitted they would be a little apprehensive, '*I would be a bit shy as grammar schools are bigger and all*' and, '*I would be a bit nervous*' (PC.r2). In the KLT survey, P7 pupils were asked if they would mind undertaking a project with pupils from a 'secondary school for older pupils'. In response, 18% said they would mind 'a lot', 42% said they would mind 'a little' and 35% indicated they would 'not mind at all'. This range of responses broadly reflects pupils' responses from the consultation, albeit only a small proportion of the sample responded. Many primary pupils were therefore open to the possibility of engaging in shared activities with older pupils, although more than half of the respondents admitted they had some reservations.

Non-Selective Schools

Grammar school pupils' views regarding engagement with non-selective school pupils are explored in other sections of the Report. As with previous questions, their responses were quite diverse. A number of pupils in almost every workshop conducted in a grammar school, expressed reservations about collaborating with pupils in non-selective schools. The strength of these views and proportion of pupils communicating them, varied quite considerably between workshops. One pupil admitted, '[I'm] *happy to mix with secondary schools but* [it would be] *better with grammars*' (VGCa.u1). Another pupil suggested that it might be a '*good idea for some classes, but may not be suitable for some people as the divide of secondary and grammar is useful*' (CG.u). Other pupils referred to perceived differences in ability between pupils and one said, '*I don't want to sound cocky…, but like, they might not be as smart as us – they might be left behind*' (VGCa.u2). A student at the same school communicated quite a definitive view, '*I don't want any people from non-grammars in my school and I don't think it would be a good idea to mix religions*' (VGCa.u2). Several pupils in an integrated school considered this kind of partnership and one student concluded*, 'Socially it would be good, but not sure about it academically*' (GMI.r).

In the YLT survey, young people were asked if they would mind undertaking a project with pupils from different kinds of schools, including a 'non-grammar school'. In response, 90% indicated that they would 'not mind at all' and 9% said they would 'mind a little'. Further examination of the data, revealed that young people who had indicated they attended a grammar school, were more likely to 'mind' than those attending a non-grammar school. Fourteen percent of those attending a grammar school said they would 'mind a lot' or 'mind a little' about 'undertaking a project with a non-grammar school compared with 2.6% of those who attended an integrated school and 3.8% of young people attending a secondary school. Clearly, the vast majority of respondents to the YLT survey were quite happy to complete a project with pupils from non-selective schools, however, as a similar question was not asked in relation to shared classes, it is difficult to directly compare the survey and consultation responses.

Grammar Schools
In a similar vein, some pupils attending non-grammar schools acknowledged that they did not think it was particularly important for grammar and non-grammar pupils to learn together. Students suggested that pupils in grammar schools would be more academic and regard them as having less ability. Pupils in one workshop who were involved in a collaborative learning partnership which included pupils from a grammar school commented, '*It's how they view us. Because we're not grammar, we're not as smart',* and, *'They look down on us – have a negative view of us'* (PI.u). A pupil from an Irish-medium school commented, *'I think people from grammar schools think all others are stupid'* (IM). Pupils at the same school indicated a willingness to work with pupils from grammar schools, although they expressed a preference to collaborate with grammar schools where the majority of pupils came from a Catholic background, *'You'd* [be] *more comfortable in* [a voluntary grammar under Catholic management] *than* [a voluntary grammar under non-denominational management]*'* (IM)*.*

In the YLT survey, young people were asked if they 'would mind' undertaking a project with young people from a non-grammar school. Overall, 12% of respondents indicated that they would 'mind a little' or 'a lot', however, taking the type of school which respondents attended into account, 23% of young people who went to a secondary school and 19% of those who attended an integrated school indicated that they would 'mind a little' or 'a lot'. This suggests that over a fifth of pupils at non-grammar schools would not be entirely comfortable working on projects with peers at grammar schools. Again the question did not specifically address shared classes, so it is not possible to establish their views regarding this type of collaboration.

Integrated Schools
Pupils in non-integrated schools were generally positive about the possibility of learning with pupils from integrated schools and no particular concerns were

specified during the workshops. However, students in both workshops in an integrated school talked about how they felt they were perceived by other schools, *'I think when we get out of school and see other schools which cater for a certain religion, they don't fully understand',* and, '*People from one religion schools don't like the idea of integrated education because they don't like being with another religion as they find it awkward or odd'* (GMI.r). They also felt that their school dealt with religious issues in a very positive manner, '*Today I learnt how important shared education is and how great our school treats other religions. I think this workshop really helped me understand integration better'* (GMI.r).

Irish-Medium Schools

Pupils from English-medium schools who commented on the importance of learning together with pupils from Irish-medium schools offered mostly positive feedback. However, Irish-medium pupils considered the challenges they encountered when considering the possibility of collaborative learning with English-medium schools. A P6 class in a primary school thought about how they could learn together with pupils from English-medium schools. Half of the class said they would be comfortable just speaking English, *'We've been talking in English for a longer time'*, while the other half of the class said that they would mind not speaking Irish, *'We've learnt it all the way to P6'* and *'Maybe we're in a higher group in Irish than we would be in English'*. Some pupils in a P5 class also said they would mind if their classes were not conducted in Irish, *'It's better to speak in Irish so we can practise because we already speak English'* (PIM).

Pupils at an Irish-medium post-primary school explained that as they wished to be taught only in Irish, opportunities to engage and learn with pupils from English-medium schools were limited. One pupil explained, '*It's different because we do everything in Irish so we can't really go to another school because they teach in English'.* Another added, *'It'd be pointless to learn a subject in English if you are doing all the rest of your education in Irish'* (IM)*.*

Special Schools

When asked about the importance of learning together with pupils from special schools, some respondents initially questioned this was feasible while others admitted that they *'…hadn't thought about it'* (MNS.u).[27] Students across a range of post-primary schools, however, welcomed the opportunity, *'I'd be happy to share'* (IM), and *'I think it would be good learning'* (CG.u)*.* Several pupils suggested possible activities that could be undertaken with pupils from special schools*, 'We*

---

[27] When referring to special schools during the workshops, facilitators did not offer any additional information regarding these schools. From pupils' responses, it is apparent there were different perceptions of disability and the level of support and type of facilities which special school pupils might require.

could teach them the basics' (CG.u), and, 'We could do sports together' (VGND.u). Another emphasised the importance of engaging sensitively with pupils, 'Sharing between able bodied and special school pupils is completely achievable so long as it's practical learning and not something that may show a difference in abilities' (CG.u). One student felt it was particularly beneficial for pupils to have an opportunity to collaborate with pupils from special schools, '…as we're going to mix with special needs people later in life… we should know how to interact with them' (VGND.u). The vast majority of primary school pupils also welcomed the opportunity to engage with pupils in special schools, concluding, 'It's a good idea to work together' (PM.u), '…because they are just the same as us, they just have some problems' (PC.u2). Pupils talked about the opportunity of '…seeing how they do their own things', and '…learning what it might be like for them' (PC.u2). Other pupils referred to the opportunity to develop friendships, 'Just because someone has a disability doesn't mean they can't have friends' (PC.u1). Pupils from three schools were concerned that pupils might be bullied or teased if they came to their school, 'It would be hard. I know someone with a disability who went to a regular school and they got picked on' (CI.u). Pupils in two schools identified logistical challenges facing special school pupils if they visited their schools. One pupil remarked that there would be difficulties 'just getting them to school' (CG.u). Several others advised that mainstream schools might find it difficult to accommodate the needs of special school pupils, '[Pupils] need better facilities than a mainstream school can provide' (VGCa.u2). One primary pupil was concerned that, 'Pupils might hit them by accident and make them worse' (PC.r1).

Students from two grammar schools were concerned that shared learning with pupils from special schools could be challenging for teachers or detrimental to their own learning, 'It would be hard for a teacher to adhere to their needs other than learning' and, 'It would be good for them but we wouldn't gain anything' (VGCa.u2). One solution suggested was '…to stick to extra-curricular activities so they don't hold you back' (VGND.u) and another pupil concluded it was, 'Better to do it at a younger age – not something you do when you're older' (VGCa.u1).

All of the pupils from a special school who participated in the consultation were keen to engage with pupils from other types of school. One pupil commented, 'I'm happy to meet pupils from other schools – anywhere, any age…' (SS.u). While students were happy to visit other schools to participate in activities and share their facilities, some admitted they preferred to engage with other pupils in their own school, 'You do get a little nervous going somewhere new…but that's fine. I know that…sometimes prefer to stay here with [other] pupils visiting' (SS.u).

When asked if they would mind doing a project with pupils from 'a school for young people with special needs or disabilities', a majority of children and young people who completed the KLT and YLT surveys indicated that they would 'not mind at all'.

Sixty-one percent of P7 pupils and 79% of young people gave this response, while 21% of KLT respondents stated that they would 'mind a little' compared with 15% of YLT respondents.

Different Community Backgrounds
When considering the importance of pupils from different community backgrounds learning together, pupils tended to either strongly agree with the proposal, agree but identify issues which they believed required resolution or believe it was ill advised and potentially difficult. Pupils asserted, *'It's a good idea to mix the schools and religions because you get to meet people from different backgrounds'* (MNS.r), and '[It's] *good, as it means that people from all the different communities can come together to learn and may break some barriers'* (CG.u). Reflecting on their experiences of engaging with pupils from a controlled school, pupils in a maintained non-selective school admitted that they had once '…*held negative views of Protestants'* but after engaging in a collaborative learning initiative, this had changed, *'…we met them and realised it was grand'* (MNS.r).

Almost every pupil from an integrated school agreed that bringing pupils from different community backgrounds together was important, suggesting that pupils *'could mix and become friends'* and *'Because a Mum might be Protestant and Dad Catholic'* (PGMI.u). Another pupil in this school explained, '*My best friend is a different religion and it doesn't make any difference'.* Pupils in another primary workshop indicated that they, *'Would like to do shared education with different religions – could teach them stuff like Gaelic'* (PM.r1).

Pupils from three other primary schools were less convinced, with some suggesting that *'Schools of a different religion shouldn't join together'* (PM.u). Several pupils in one workshop surmised that *'…it might be difficult because pupils might be learning different things'* (PC.r1) while pupils in another workshop were concerned that '*Some might argue their religion is better than the other'* (PM.r1). A majority of pupils in one P6 class explained that combined assemblies were not appropriate, as their parents would be displeased, *'I think it's a bad idea to have an assembly of Catholics and Protestants as they believe different things….and if being told Catholic things, my parents would be cross'* (PC.r1).

A number of pupils in a controlled integrated school explained that their school had sought to create links with a maintained non-selective school, however, according to pupils this had been unsuccessful, *'We've tried to get together but they didn't want to'* (CI.u), and, '*There are no links with* [school X]*. They seem to hate us'.* Referring to possible obstacles associated with cross-community engagement, pupils at an integrated school observed, *'It won't work because of religion. Schools that are Catholic or Protestant might not want to share…could start fights'* (GMI.r). Students from another school concurred, *'Protestants and Catholics don't really mix'*… *It could*

end badly' (VGCa.u). Proposing an interim step, one pupil said, *'Don't send…a big Catholic school with a big Protestant school – you'd be better mixing first with an integrated school'* (GMI.r). Other pupils were mindful of the potential to cause offence, *'Mixing religions is good however I think…some would feel they would have to watch what they say so they don't offend anyone'* (MNS.r). Another pupil was concerned that bullying could be a problem, '*Would be a great idea to learn about different cultures, however, there would be issues such as acceptance, bullying…'* (MNS.r).

In the KLT survey, 26% of P7 pupils indicated that they would 'mind a little' and 11% said that they would 'mind a lot', if they were going to undertake a project with pupils from a school where most of the children were a different religion to them. Further analysis of the findings revealed that pupils attending controlled primary schools were marginally more concerned than those at maintained primary schools. In response to the same question, 14% of YLT survey respondents indicated that they 'minded a little' and 2.5% said they would 'mind a lot'. According to the survey data therefore, children were more concerned about this scenario than young people. When taking the schools young people attended into account, a slightly higher percentage of those attending schools defined as 'all or mainly Protestant' had concerns compared with those who attended schools which were identified as 'all or mainly Catholic'. Nineteen percent who came from schools described as 'all or mainly Protestant' said they would 'mind a little' and 3% said they would 'mind a lot', while 13% of those attending 'all or mainly Catholic schools' said they would 'mind a little' and 2% said they would 'mind a lot'. Overall, 82% of YLT survey respondents and 53% of KLT survey respondents indicated that they 'would not mind' doing projects with pupils who were from a school where most of the pupils were a different religion. Responses from P7 pupils in the KLT survey, broadly reflect the mixed views shared by primary pupils who participated in the consultation. YLT survey respondents were however, generally more positive than the post-primary pupils participating in the consultation, who communicated a greater diversity of views.

Other Schools and Backgrounds

Across the workshops, a few pupils identified other schools and groups with whom they felt it was important to engage. Pupils in single sex schools believed they should have more opportunities to engage with their peers in co-educational schools and primary pupils in a small number of workshops suggested they should learn together with nursery pupils, *''newcomer' children'*, '*Children who aren't as fortunate* [as us]' and '*Schools you've never even heard of'* (PC.u).

Reviewing Pupils' Responses

In many post-primary workshops this question generated some debate amongst pupils and as can be seen from their responses, demonstrated the breadth and strength of pupil opinion. Reflecting on the broad concept of learning with pupils who

were 'different', pupils generally acknowledged this was important, *'Good to say you've had this experience – it's good for you'* (MNS.u), and, *'It encourages tolerance and authority'* (IM). Some pupils felt it would equip them more effectively to deal with difference in the future, *'There are not going to be people of just one academic, social class, religious background in the real world so it's good to start doing this when you go to school'* (VGND.u).

Other pupils remained quite sceptical about the possible success of such ventures, '*Sharing with some schools will never happen*' [VGCa.u1], and '[It's] *not workable everywhere due to ingrained views'* (GMI.r). Finally, in response to this question, a few students provided some advice regarding shared education provision, *'If you're going to take people out of their comfort zone, it needs to be a valuable learning experience'* (CG.u).

SHARED EDUCATION: ISSUES FOR GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER

To conclude the discussions on shared education, pupils were asked to identify any issues which they believed Government should take into account when considering how shared education might be taken forward. The purpose of this question was to allow pupils to revisit the plethora of issues already discussed during the workshop and to prioritise those they believed were most important. The intention was also to provide an opportunity for students to identify any additional matters which had not been addressed previously. In the event, many of the issues raised, had already been referred to during the workshops. Primary pupils may have found this question more challenging or believed that they had already communicated their views as only a minority provided responses.

Advancing Shared Education

In response to the question, some pupils summarised their perspectives on shared education. One student concluded, *'Shared education is important…to broaden people's views and to understand how people think…more importantly it gives you the best opportunity for the best education'* (GMI.u). A few primary pupils agreed that, '[Shared learning] *was really fun and* [it is] *good to get involved'* and that *'new friends'* had been made (PC.r2). While intimating that there could be challenges in taking shared education forward, one post-primary pupil believed schools should, at the very least, attempt sharing, *'You can't tiptoe around as then no-one would mix and nothing would change, so you have to try'* (VGND.u). On a less positive note, another pupil in this workshop said, '*I feel…the education system we have at present works well for us and I don't see how* [shared education] *is in any way essential'* (VGND.u). Others remained cautious in their assessment, *'Shared education could have both positive and negative effects…'* (CG.u) and *'Socially it is vital, educationally, I'm not so sure'* (GMI.u).

Shared Education: Specific Issues

Some pupils revisited the logistical challenges associated with the provision of shared education, including, *'Travel, expenses and methods'* (MNS.r), calling on the Government to resolve these. Pupils at two grammar schools reiterated their concerns about the potentially detrimental impact which shared education could have on learning and attainment, particularly if they had to share classes with non-selective schools. Across a range of schools, pupils again highlighted what they perceived as the opportunities and challenges in bringing students from different religious and cultural backgrounds together. One pupil concluded that, *'Having people with alternative backgrounds* [together] *can only benefit the learning experience'* (MNS.r).

Students in various post-primary workshops recommended how shared education should be advanced. They suggested that the Government should, *'Trial it first'* or '*Start it smaller'* (CG.u) and that opportunities to bring pupils together *'should start…early,* [as] *starting mid-way through a child's education will just make them feel uncomfortable and alienated'* (VGND.u). Although advocating an expansion of shared education provision other pupils believed that pupils should always be consulted, *'You need to make sure that pupils are happy…ask them what they think about it'* (SS.u).

Teachers' Perspectives

Responding to the same question, some teachers provided advice concerning how shared education should be approached, developed and implemented. One primary school principal suggested there was a *'need to engage with primary pupils where they are at, their current frames of reference…*[as it's] *important not to impose adult experiences or interpretations of the past or the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict'* (PC.r2). Another advised, *'You have to build up trust. You allow them to integrate at primary school and work up. It takes time. We couldn't have had these joint classes five to six years ago'* (MNS.r). A third principal commented, *'There is still a lot of change required'* and, '[It is] *important to make people comfortable and get them in the position to embrace challenges'* (PGMI.u).

Other teachers highlighted specific concerns which they believed Government should take into account. An Irish-medium school principal drew attention to particular obstacles to Irish-medium schools' participation in shared education, acknowledging that the sector had yet to identify a longer term, systematic method of sharing with other schools. They also commented that the Department of Education had not considered how shared education might operate, to include Irish-medium schools, proposing that there was an opportunity within the structures of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to provide support.

Whilst applauding the principles underpinning shared education, one post-primary principal, was, nonetheless, concerned that the motivation behind some schools' involvement was the enhanced provision of subjects or activities, rather than to provide opportunities for genuine shared learning. They commented, *'It's about children and young people from different communities in the same room together. However some schools see it purely as an opportunity to benefit because they can't afford to do things themselves'* (CNS.r). Several teachers questioned the number of subjects specified for inclusion in the Entitlement Framework and one principal queried the benefits to pupils in their school:

> '*I'm not sure about the number of subjects identified in the Framework... A third of subjects are supposed to be applied…however, our pupils don't choose applied… they opt for traditional subjects. Non-traditional subjects are not accepted at university. So we're not doing them any favours'* (VGCa.u2).

Finally, the principal of an integrated school suggested that shared education could provide a sound basis for a greater transformation of the education system, *'Shared education is fine as a starting point, but it needs further work... This is a golden moment in Northern Ireland's educational history and we are missing it'* (GMI.r).

3. AREA-BASED PLANNING

The Department of Education describes the focus of area-based planning as;

> *'Developing a planned network of viable and sustainable schools capable of delivering effectively the revised curriculum and the Entitlement Framework and of providing adequate access to a range of educational provision appropriate to the needs of the children and young people in an area'*[28].

The process of area-based planning for education provision in Northern Ireland is progressing in parallel with the work on shared education. NICCY recognised the integral links between shared education and area-based planning and the potentially significant impact of area-based plans on schools and pupils. A decision was made therefore, to consult with pupils to gauge their awareness of area-based planning and to ascertain their views of the general concepts informing the policy. School principals and members of staff also responded to questions on this issue during interviews.

Awareness and Understanding of Area-Based Planning

The majority of pupils, at both primary and post-primary schools, were not familiar with the term. One primary pupil responded, *'It sounds like something in the army!'* (PM.r) and pupils in a primary workshop believed it had something to do with planning permission. Following an explanation of the term, pupils in two schools said that they knew something about it, explaining that they had '*read about it in the papers'* (PM.u), had siblings attending schools which were facing closure or amalgamation, or that they had heard rumours about the proposed closure of a local school, *'My Mum said a school was closing because there's not enough people and they're not learning well'* (PGMI.u). A few pupils explained that area- based planning was happening because, *'There aren't enough people going to some schools',* some '*have failed inspections'* and others have *'money problems'* (PM.u).

Pupils in just over half of the post-primary workshops were familiar with the term 'area-based planning' although in most cases, this was only a minority of pupils. Students indicated that they had heard about it, again, from the media or through reports that a local school or *'…country schools'* were going to close or merge with other schools. One pupil said they were aware that there were '*…committee meetings to keep schools open'* (VGND.u). Almost 50% of Year 13 pupils in one workshop in an integrated school were aware of area-based planning, because they had discussed the issue in their politics class and completed an online survey about the issue. One pupil explained, *'It's improving the school system, trying to remove surplus places and get the best education for people'* (GMI.r). Once the term was

---

[28] http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/area-planning/area-planning-terms-of-reference.htm.

explained, pupils in two other post-primary schools referred to several local schools which they believed were due to merge with other schools or close.

Quality of Current Provision

Facilitators asked pupils if they believed they had access to a good choice of schools in their area. The vast majority of primary school pupils, who responded to the question, confirmed that they did, although a few felt that they had a limited choice of post-primary schools, reporting that the school they wished to attend was closing down. Pupils in one workshop explained that they had only two post-primary schools to choose from and one of these was not considered an attractive option (PC.r2). Respondents proposed that pupils in other areas or circumstances might also have limited options, *'Some children don't get to the secondary school they want'* (PM.r1), *'Homeless children might not be able to choose a school'* (PC.u1) and, *'Some schools are more expensive and you can't get in'* (PC.u1). Pupils at an Irish- medium school also felt their choice of schools was restricted.

Pupils in six of the ten post-primary schools were generally content with the choice of schools available to them, although several reported that some students had to travel a considerable distance to access their preferred school. Others acknowledged that they had a greater choice of schools because they had passed the transfer tests. Other pupils felt their choice of post-primary school had been limited because they lived in a rural area and had limited accessibility to schools. Again, pupils attending integrated and Irish-medium schools felt that their choices were limited as there was generally only one school of this type located conveniently to where they lived and in some cases, pupils still had to travel some distance.

Perspectives of Area-Based Planning

Primary Pupils

In the KLT survey, two questions related to area-based planning. The first asked children to suppose that a school nearby was closing and that pupils would be coming to their school instead and, if they would mind if this happened. Their responses are presented below.

Table 5   *Pupils Coming from a Nearby School to Your School*

KLT	%
I would mind a lot	16
I would mind a little	31
I would not mind at all	32
It depends who the children are	21

Their responses indicate that almost 50% of pupils minded 'a little' or 'a lot' about the prospect of sharing their school with pupils from another, and 21% indicated that they would require additional information about the children before they could decide. It is important to note that this scenario involved pupils transferring from another school to the respondent's school so the question focused on how pupils would feel about an influx of pupils to their own school, rather than how they would feel about moving to another.

Pupils who responded that they would 'mind a little or 'a lot', or that it 'depends who the children are', were asked to explain what they would mind about it. Thirty-nine percent of the sample responded to this question. The most common things mentioned, were that children from another school would be 'cheeky', 'rough' or 'nasty', or that they would be unpleasant in some other way. Other issues mentioned most frequently were the potential for bullying, fears of how this would impact on friendships, and concerns that the school would be able to accommodate all pupils. Pupils participating in the consultation also referred to some of these issues in their responses.

In the consultation workshops, pupils at five primary schools provided substantive responses to this question and these related to several key issues. An overriding concern was the possible effect which school closures or mergers could have on friendships. A significant proportion of children were worried that they would lose friends, '*If your school closes and you have to be separated, you might be sad*' (PP.u) and also, '*I'd absolutely hate it – too many from each school – probably not see your friends*' (PC.r1). Others were worried they might not make new friends, '*I'd be sad in case you don't fit in*' (PC.r2) or that they '*…might be left out…*' (PC.r2). A minority of pupils felt there might be opportunities to make new friends or renew friendships, '*You'd get to know more people*' (PC.r2) and '*Might meet up with my old friend who's at* [school X]' (PC.r1).

Pupils in three schools reflected on what it would be like to attend a larger school if one were created through the amalgamation of several small schools. One pupil suggested that, '*If schools close, more popular schools will get bigger*' and therefore there was a '*need to think about how big schools could be*' (PGMI.u). Other pupils were happier attending small schools, '*We have small classes and it's easier to make friends* (PC.r1). A few pupils expressed contrasting views regarding the possible merger of controlled and maintained schools. Two pupils commented, '*Schools of a different religion shouldn't join together*' (PM.u) and, '*If it's a Catholic school and I don't know why, but I wouldn't like it*' (PC.r1) while another asserted that, '*I wouldn't have schools for different religions – just one type*' (PM.u).

A small number of pupils referred to funding issues, '*Might be quite hard for the Government to build a big new school as it's got lots of debt and stuff*' (PGMI.u),

teaching and learning challenges, '*Might get teached* [sic] *something we've already learnt…might think you're not clever*' (PC.r1), uniforms, '*Pupils might not be happy because they might have to change their uniform…you could combine the uniforms*' (PGMI.u) and objections from parents or teachers, '*Teachers might not agree with schools joining together*' (PGMI.u).

Post-Primary Pupils
Young people completing the YLT survey were also asked if they would mind if pupils from another school, which was closing, came to their school instead. Their responses are detailed below**.**

Table 6   *Pupils Coming from a Nearby School to Your School*

YLT	%
I would mind a lot	16
I would mind a little	35
I would not mind at all	35
It depends who the pupils are	14

The pattern of responses is similar to the KLT survey however there is a variation in the proportion of young people who indicated that 'it depends who the pupils are'; 14% compared with 21% of respondents in the KLT survey. This suggests that, compared with P7 pupils, young people's views were less likely to be influenced by the identity of other pupils. As in the KLT survey, young people were then asked, if they had indicated they minded or that it depended who the pupils were, what they would mind about it. Approximately 65% of the survey sample answered this question and the majority of respondents focused on four issues. The most frequently cited concern was that an influx of pupils from another school would make the school 'too big' or 'lead to overcrowding'. Other concerns mentioned were the disruption this would cause, the negative impact it would have on the quality of teaching and learning and the risk that young people might not like pupils from the other school on account of their attitudes or behaviour. A number of these responses are similar to those given in the KLT survey and, as indicated below, also correspond with the views of some post-primary pupils who participated in the consultation. It is worth reiterating that respondents to the surveys were asked to respond to a hypothetical scenario involving other pupils transferring to their school whereas, in the consultation, pupils were asked to share their views on the potential impact of school closures and mergers for all pupils involved.

While post-primary pupils' views of area-based planning varied across the workshops, most recognised that school closure or amalgamation would be a challenging experience for pupils, teachers and parents. Pupils in several workshops referred to specific proposed school closures or mergers of which they were aware

and their views were informed by their knowledge of these. Pupils across a number of schools suggested that area-based planning was '*a good idea…*' but acknowledged, that '*it will just take a while to get used to…*' (CG.u). Another pupil in this workshop expanded this point, '*I think after the first generation passes through the school it would be fine. However, it would be hard at the start. It would make numbers huge and the school intimidating*' (CG.u). Many pupils understood the rationale for area-based planning and issues it is seeking to address. They made the following comments, '*I understand there are too many schools, costs are too high and need to create jobs*' (VGCa.u2), '*No point in protecting a school especially if it's a secondary school and there's a limited number of people in it*' (MNS.r), and a third student proposed that, '*it* [could] *be positive – has to be done to move things forward*' (GMI.r). Potential benefits were highlighted by a small number of pupils; '*It might save money*' and '[You could] *meet new people, have more facilities, see people from primary school*' (CI.u).

Pupils in four workshops considered the issue in greater depth, and suggested its success was contingent upon various factors, '*It depends if pupils are getting a benefit out of it*' (MNS.r), '*Depends on how you set it up and…if teachers get laid off. Need to keep all classes and people you know*' (CI.u), and another pupil observed, '*If closing country schools, it puts pressure on town schools. Good because it will expand schools so more jobs but also will lose staff* [through] *closures*' (VGCa.u2). One respondent summarised other pupils' general concerns about area-based planning, '*Bad idea – change, schools closing down, no money, bullying* (VG.u1). A number of pupils were concerned that their school might close or merge with another, '*Really don't want schools to join up – like our school the way it is*'…a small, loving school' (CNS.r), and '[I'm] *scared our school will close and* [I'd have] *to move to another*' (MNS.r), and '*Amalgamating with* [certain schools] *would be dreadful*' (CI.u).

Students also identified a range of problems and concerns with regard to the potential merger of schools. These included bullying, '*Like having small classes at school…worry about bullying in a larger school*' (CNS.r), mixing with other pupils, '*Don't like the idea of different backgrounds mixing…like the way our school is at the moment*' (MNS.r) and, '*Couldn't get together with schools in… "No go" areas...*' (IM), and the negative impact this could have on learning, '*Not a good idea for primary schools to close because smaller schools could give better education and 1-2-1 support*' (GMI.r). A few pupils objected quite vociferously. One pupil warned that, '*Not everyone will tolerate each other*' (GMI.r), another suggested that merging schools was a '*Waste of money…two buildings destroyed,* [having to] *build a new place*' (CG.u) and a third student concluded that it was a '*Step back to start closing schools. …* [and that] *people's choice should be respected*' (IM).

Issues for Government

Finally, pupils were asked to identify what they believed were the key issues which Government should take into account in relation to area-based planning. Primary pupils in five schools listed a series of suggestions, including a requirement to consider the challenges facing pupils who might have to transfer from small schools to larger schools, the need to take account of some pupils' preference to attend a smaller school, and the additional distance pupils might be required to travel, if they moved to a different school. Pupils in integrated and Irish-medium schools underlined the importance of ensuring there was sufficient provision of their school type and pupils also emphasised the need to consult with them and their parents, '[The Government] *need*[s] *to think about how pupils feel'* (PM.u) and about how '*changes would affect people'* (PC.r2).

Post-primary pupils also identified various obstacles which they believed the Government needed to address. One pupil summarised these, *'It needs to look at the barriers between schools; uniform, religion and wealth'* (CG.u). Pupils at four other schools also referred to school uniforms and inquired as to how changes would be made to these, if two schools merged. Referring to religion, pupils at two schools provided several comments. One student advised that it would be important to, '*Ensure when devising plans that parishes and communities are not split in terms of educational choice*…' and that it would '*help to have compulsory activities that integrate different communities'* (MNS.r). A comment from a pupil in another school was more direct, '*Don't put Catholics and Protestants together…there would be too many fights'* (MNS.u).

The potential merger of grammar and non-grammar schools was addressed by pupils in two of four grammar schools. The general feeling was that this was not appropriate, '*Don't think grammar and secondary schools together is a good idea…not fair on teachers teaching different levels'* and another pupil at the same school added*, There's a social split with* [school X] *and our school...wouldn't get along. Without sounding snobby…we're a different level of education'* (CG.u). A pupil in another grammar school concurred*, 'Could end up with more mixed classes…mixing with pupils not ready for it'* (VG.u2).

Post-primary pupils' call for the Government to consult with them and to take their views and feelings into account, echoed those of primary pupils. Two students commented, *'Need to think about how new school will impact on new pupils'* (MNS.u) and, *'Think about pupils' views'* (CG.u). Pupils in an integrated school offered some additional suggestions, proposing that any changes to schools should be undertaken *'in a way that causes least harm',* and another pupil concluded, *'I don't think it matters about the building…just pupils' education* (GMI.r).

Perspectives of Principals and Staff

Principals or members of staff in just over 60% of schools offered substantive comments, relating to the anticipated impact of area-based planning on their own schools, the rationale and objectives underpinning the policy and the impact of the policy on shared education. Four respondents acknowledged they did not have any particular concerns about the proposals, with regard to how they might affect their own schools:

> *'Not an issue – we're a growing school and schools around us are growing too…not competing for the same pupils…don't make a big thing of it'* (PC.r1);
> *'Grammar schools feel safe because pupils choose to have this type of education'* (VGND.u);
> '*Easier for us because we know we're ok. It's the right thing to do…'* (CI.u); and,
> *'Our own school is ok…good academic achievements…no particular issues about area-based planning'* (VGCa.u1).

However, several respondents did disclose concerns regarding the long-term future of their schools. One respondent explained, '[The] *fear is that the collaborative arrangements …won't be enough…the schools have a strong desire to maintain their own identity, their own Boards of Governors…If they build one school, there will be redundancies'* (MNS.u). One principal admitted that they had initially welcomed the proposals, believing these were providing genuine opportunities to realise change in the education system, however, as the process advanced, they had become disheartened, *'At the beginning I was optimistic… however, too many principals worried about their own school...it's not built out of badness. It's a belief in their own schools'.* This principal added, *'I would like to see the research on which the area-based planning process was built…There's no transparency about how the plans were developed and where they came from'* (CNS.u).

Others questioned the extent to which the policy focused on pupils and the quality of educational provision, *'The rationale is not for the benefit of children – it's to save money…'* (VGCa.u2), *'Area-based planning is driven by a lack of money but it should be based on a vision for creating positive change for children in Northern Ireland'* (GMI.r), and *'Small schools are not the issue – need to think about quality of education provided'* (VGCa.u2)*.*

Grammar school principals also suggested that political and parental perspectives could significantly influence the planning process:

> '*When you move from shared education to area-based planning, and possibly closing a school, then individuals get defensive. It can become an issue of economics versus community representation and choice. As long as that particular prejudice is allowed to influence policy, you won't have that shift'* (VGCa.u1); and,

'[There are] *political reasons for keeping some smaller secondary schools open, even if they're not viable...It's based on a non-selective model, so would have to wonder about parental choice'* (VGCa.u2).

The impact of area-based planning on shared education was specifically addressed by several respondents. A member of staff in a special school advised that area-based planning was affecting the forward work plans of the local area learning community because of the uncertain future facing some schools. A principal suggested that,

'Shared education and area-based planning overlap in terms of providing subjects in an economically viable way. You have to think about what happens to a teacher… not required to teach a subject because shared education collaboration renders them unnecessary' (VGCa.u1).

Principals and teachers in several integrated and Irish-medium schools expressed particular concerns regarding area-based planning. One integrated school principal proposed that the Government is '*…blatantly breaking the Good Friday agreement by not proposing and pushing integrated education'*. They continued, *'We have to infect the whole system with what we are trying to do, not just protect our islands of integration'*. This principal was also frustrated that, due to surplus places being available in other schools in the area, the school was unable to expand. An Irish-medium principal identified specific issues, *'I have concerns about the number of pupils perceived to make a school viable… Irish-medium schools require a different funding formula to meet the needs of the child…'* And more broadly, they suggested there was a need for '*a clear DE policy to support the development of Irish-medium education'* (IM).

Several respondents were clearly dissatisfied with the Department of Education's consultation process concerning area-based planning, arguing that they had not been kept abreast of on-going developments or been afforded the opportunity to participate effectively. They commented as follows,

'Not a proper consultation…tick-box exercise….Schools in the area are angry because they're not aware of what's happening…' (PC.u1);
'Departmental process is woeful – have had no real voice in the process' (GMI.r); and,
'Rationale is correct. DE process is not correct. Maintained schools already far down a route before Minister's announcement' (PM.u).

The final chapter of the Report reflects on the findings and presents a series of emerging issues relevant to the further advancement of shared education and the implementation of area-based planning proposals.

4. EMERGING ISSUES

Throughout the consultation workshops, pupils provided valuable insights into their experiences of shared education and offered thoughtful and constructive suggestions about how shared education and area-based planning should be taken forward. Following an analysis of pupils' responses, a number of emerging issues have been identified.

i.   Pupils' Engagement with Shared Education and Area-Based Planning

The consultation provided many pupils with their first opportunity to reflect on shared education. Many demonstrated a genuine interest in the concept and its implementation, and as evidenced throughout the Report, pupils shared an eclectic range of views and experiences. While pupils were mainly positive about shared education, recognising its potential to provide enhanced educational and social benefits, they also highlighted a range of issues which they believed should be addressed by schools and Government. Few respondents were familiar with area-based planning, however after it was explained, they provided many reflective and helpful comments.

ii.   Awareness and Understanding of 'Shared Education'

Post-primary and special school pupils demonstrated a greater awareness and understanding of shared education than primary pupils. This was owing to their knowledge of or participation in shared classes, provided through collaborative partnerships between different schools. For many post-primary pupils therefore, shared education was synonymous with enhanced curriculum provision, although some also referred to various activities undertaken with pupils from other schools. Primary pupils generally associated shared education with projects or activities undertaken jointly with other schools. According to P5 and P6 pupils, P7 pupils had more experience of shared activities and indeed, findings from the Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey supported this assertion. Although the Department of Education's definition of shared education was explained to pupils, they tended to regard almost any contact with pupils from other schools as shared education. In taking shared education forward, it may be useful to revisit this definition to ensure that pupils and importantly, schools have an agreed understanding of the aims and objectives.

iii.   Pupils' Experiences of Sharing

Opportunities for pupils to experience 'shared education' were contingent on various factors, including the year group or class which pupils were in, the type of school they attended, and for post-primary pupils, the subjects they had selected for GCSE or 'A' level. Pupils evidently welcomed opportunities to cultivate relationships with pupils in other schools, to access additional subjects, gain insights into other learning environments and to engage in alternative learning experiences. The potential to

develop friendships and build relationships was regarded by pupils as an important feature of successful shared learning initiatives. Less positive aspects included unsatisfactory or negative contact with pupils from other schools, a sense of being in a minority in other schools and the logistical challenges associated with the delivery of shared provision.

While many pupils clearly recognised the value of shared education and expressed support for the objectives underpinning it, it was evident that for, at least some pupils, the practice of shared education was more challenging. Reports from some pupils indicated that their participation in collaborative activities and joint classes, had been a 'shared' but 'separate' experience, since pupils from different schools had remained within their own school or friendship groups and interaction between pupils had been limited. These situations did not contribute to an enjoyable or positive learning experience. It is therefore important to clarify what is intended through 'shared' learning and to ensure that pupils are encouraged and supported to be genuine and equal collaborators. As shared education is taken forward, it will be important to ensure that all pupils have access to quality learning experiences and that where pupils have concerns, appropriate mechanisms are put in place to enable them to raise concerns and to have these fully addressed. Steps should also be taken to consult regularly with pupils and to take their feedback into account when planning future provision.

Principals and teachers' responses echoed some of the views expressed by pupils, particularly in terms of opportunities to build relationships and logistical challenges associated with the provision of shared learning initiatives. Teachers highlighted the inherent difficulties in arranging shared learning activities between schools located in different sectors. Timetabling constraints and requirements regarding curriculum delivery often impacted on the potential for some schools to work flexibly, and the availability of funding continues to impact on schools' ability to generate new shared education links and to sustain existing ones. Additional challenges included the promotion of shared education through cross-community links, which for some schools remains a significant difficulty and, in a minority of cases, managing parents' or staff concerns.

iv.   Taking Shared Education Forward: Opportunities

Primary pupils proposed that shared education should involve enjoyable and practical activities which create opportunities for greater social interaction. Post-primary pupils also identified alternative environments, arrangements and activities, which they believed would be particularly effective. Older pupils emphasised the need for shared education to be introduced at an early stage in pupils' education, for appropriate preparation to be undertaken beforehand and for shared learning to be promoted across all school types.

The findings suggest however, that shared education, as defined by the Department of Education, was more prevalent in post-primary schools. Further consideration should be given to how it may be promoted and supported at primary level. In addition, a key question arising out of the findings is whether shared education is seeking to go beyond enhanced curriculum provision, to promote and support mutual understanding and an appreciation of diversity (ability, religion, culture, ethnicity, social backgrounds) amongst pupils. There is evidence that some shared practice is aiming to do this, however, this objective within the Department of Education's definition of shared education should be clarified and, where appropriate, guidance and support provided to schools to ensure that it can be achieved in a positive and meaningful way which ultimately benefits pupils.

v.   Taking Shared Education Forward: Challenges

Logistics were identified as a challenge for almost every participating school and while many were eventually resolved as initiatives were embedded, others remained, sometimes affecting pupils' views of provisions. It was evident that post-primary pupils' attitudes to shared education, particularly those who had had limited experiences, were strongly influenced by their perceptions of other schools and pupils. Perceived differences in pupils' ability and religion were significant issues for some young people, affecting their views of and desire to engage in shared initiatives. A major concern for primary school pupils, evidenced in the findings from the KLT survey and the consultation, was bullying and the potential for pupils from other schools to be nasty or unfriendly. If shared education is to be regarded as a positive learning opportunity, such preconceptions should be addressed and stereotypes should be challenged prior to and during shared learning activities. Evidently, one of the most effective ways to do this is to involve pupils in positive shared learning initiatives, where they can engage meaningfully with pupils from different schools and possibly different backgrounds. It may also be helpful for teachers to facilitate discussions with pupils or for pupils to participate in interactive workshops with students from other schools, prior to their engagement in shared learning initiatives.

vi.   Issues for Specific Schools

The consultation clarified issues pertaining to specific school types in Northern Ireland. Irish-medium school pupils were keen to engage in shared initiatives however the challenge of providing dual medium activities or classes has proved, thus far, a barrier to their inclusion. Principals of Irish-medium schools called on the Department of Education to consider how their schools could be included in shared education as this moves forward. The inclusion of special schools in shared learning initiatives was evidently regarded as more challenging by some pupils and teachers. Therefore, consideration should be given to how mainstream schools can collaborate most effectively with special schools and manage any logistical and practical issues arising.

The perspectives of pupils and staff in integrated schools were quite distinctive. While many welcomed opportunities to engage in collaborative learning with other schools, they also argued that pupils and staff in integrated schools were already part of an effective shared learning environment and some questioned whether shared education as it is currently defined, went '*far enough'*. Pupils felt that their experiences and *modus operandi* in integrated schools could helpfully support other schools engaging in shared education. As shared education is advanced, it will be important for the Department of Education to consider how integrated education 'fits' alongside it and how knowledge and expertise developed within this sector could be usefully disseminated to support the development of shared learning initiatives.

vii.   Area-Based Planning

Many pupils and teachers were concerned about the potential implications of area-based planning proposals. Contemplating the impact of a school closure or merger generated strong responses from pupils, demonstrating the sense of belonging which many shared in relation to their own schools. Findings from the consultation demonstrated clear connections between shared education and area-based planning. There was evidence that area-based planning proposals are likely to impact on shared education provision, as schools facing an uncertain future, may be unable to plan or commit to collaborative initiatives. In a financially challenging environment, where a priority is to deliver the curriculum as economically as possible, this may have implications for staff in some schools if more 'shared' subjects are taught by teachers in other schools. Furthermore, where schools are unable to provide pupils with access to the Entitlement Framework within their own resources, or through collaborative learning initiatives, their long-term viability may not be guaranteed, and particularly if they are dealing with additional pressures. A number of teachers regarded some post-primary schools' participation in shared education initiatives as an essential step towards ensuring their continued existence.

APPENDIX 1

WORKSHOPS WITH PUPILS:

SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS

Definition of Shared Education

1. Have you heard of 'shared education? Do you know what it means?

2. If YES, where and when did you hear about it?

Pupils' Experiences

3. Have you done anything like this at this school?

4. What kinds of things have you done?

5. What did you think about these?

6. Which activity was best? Why?

7. Which didn't work that well? Why?

Taking Shared Education Forward – Opportunities/Barriers

8. What type of activities do you think would work well?

9. What kinds of things do you think schools need to think about when they're planning to involve pupils with anything related to shared education?

10. Are there things that you think might put young people off taking part in these kinds of shared activities?

11. Do you think it is important that pupils from different schools and different backgrounds can have opportunities to learn together?

12. Are there any other issues concerning shared education that the Government should think about?

Area-Based Planning

13. Have you heard of the phrase "area-based planning"? If yes, what do you know about "area-based planning"?

14. Do you understand what this means?

15. Thinking about where you live, do you think children/young people have good access and choice for schools and other places for learning?

16. The Government has said that area-based planning might mean there will be changes to some schools. What do think about this?

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEWS WITH PRINCIPALS OR TEACHERS:

SCHEDULE OF ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Background Information about School**

2. **Shared Education**
   - School's Involvement in Shared Education
   - Positive Experiences of Shared Education
   - Barriers to Shared Education
   - Parents' Perspectives
   - Staff Perspectives

3. **Policy Context**
   - Opinion of the Department of Education's work on advancing Shared Education
   - Key Issues for Government to consider in relation to Shared Education

4. **Area-Based Planning**
   - Opinion of Rationale Informing Area-based Planning
   - Views of the Policy and Proposals
   - Specific issues for the school
   - Pupils' Awareness of the Issue

APPENDIX 3

KIDS' LIFE AND TIMES SURVEY

Questions on Shared Education and Area-Based Planning

Q21.   Sometimes primary schools get together with other schools. Children from one school might go to another school to do things together, or use their facilities. Children might go to another school just to use the computers or swimming pool, or sometimes they do classes or projects with the children from the other school.

Have you done anything like this?

Yes ☐   Don't know ☐

No ☐

If you have not done anything like this, go to Q26.

Q21a. If yes, please tick all the things you have done

We have done projects with children from other schools	
We have used or shared sports facilities or equipment, like computers	
We have had classes with children from other schools	

If you have not ticked any of the boxes, go to Q26

Q22.   Did you go to another school or did the other children come to your school?

We went to the other school	
The other children came to our school	
We have done both	
We were not in school but somewhere else	
Not sure	

Q23.   Did you enjoy doing projects with the other children?

Yes, mostly	
Yes, sometimes	
No, not really	
No, not at all	

Q24.   Did you enjoy having classes with the other children?

Yes, mostly	
Yes, sometimes	
No, not really	
No, not at all	

Q25. Were some of the children from other schools a different religion to you?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

Q26. Do you think that doing projects with children from other schools is a good idea or a bad idea?

Good idea	
Bad idea	
Don't know	

Q27. Do you think that schools allowing children from other schools to use their sports facilities or equipment like computers is a good idea or a bad idea?

Good idea	
Bad idea	
Don't know	

Q28. And do you think that you having classes with children from other schools is a good idea or a bad idea?

Good idea	
Bad idea	
Don't know	

Q29. Here are some of the things that might be good if children from different schools get together. Pick two favourite things that you think would be good.

Using their sports facilities and computers or equipment	
Getting fun teachers	
Doing classes we don't normally get to do at our school, like learning a new language	
Making new friends	
Doing fun projects	
I don't have any favourites	
I don't know	

Q30. Here are some of the things that might be <u>bad</u> if children from different schools get together. Pick the two worst things that you think would be bad.

Having to be with children I think are rough or nasty	
Having to share our sports facilities or computers	
Having to be with children of a different religion	
Having to travel to get to the other school	
Having to mix with children who are very different from me	
I don't mind any of these	
I don't know	

Q31. Suppose a group of children from another school were coming to do a project with your class. Would you mind if they were from these kinds of schools?

	I would mind a lot	I would mind a little	I would not mind at all	Don't know
An all-boys primary school.				
An all-girls primary school.				
A primary school near this school				
A school for children with special needs or disabilities				
A secondary school for older children				
A school where most of the children are a different religion to you.				

Q32. Suppose a school near your school was told that it had to close and all the children will now come to your school instead. Would you mind if this happened?

I would mind a lot	
I would mind a little	
I would not mind at all	
It depends who the children are	

If you would 'mind a lot' or 'mind a little' go to Q33 and Q34.

Q33. What would you mind about it?

Q34. What would you mind about some children?

APPENDIX 4

YOUNG LIFE AND TIMES SURVEY

Questions on Shared Education and Area-Based Planning

17. The Government is currently working on plans to change schooling in Northern Ireland. This means that some schools might be closed and some might join together to become one school. All schools will be expected to think about sharing classes, teachers or facilities with other schools. How favourable or unfavourable do you feel about these changes?

                               ✓

    Very favourable ☐
    Favourable ☐
    Neither favourable nor unfavourable ☐
    Very unfavourable ☐
    Don't know ☐

18. When the Government is working on its plans for schools, what do you think are the things it should think about?

    (Please tick ALL that apply)✓

    Saving money ☐

    Making sure pupils can study any subjects they want to, no matter what school they go to ☐

    Not having separate schools for Catholic and Protestant pupils ☐

    Keep separate schools, but giving more opportunities for Catholic and Protestant pupils to get to know each other and do things together in school ☐

    Making all post-primary schools 'all-ability' schools, so there are no grammar schools and no transfer tests ☐

    Keeping the transfer tests and grammar schools ☐

    Making sure pupils don't have to travel too far to get to school ☐

    Other *(Please write in)* ☐

Some schools already get together with other schools. Pupils from one school might go to another school to do things together, or use their facilities. Pupils might go to another school just to use the computers or swimming pool, or sometimes they do classes or projects with the children from the other school.

19.   Have you ever done any of the following?   Please tick ALL that apply ✓

We have done projects with pupils from other schools ☐
We have used or shared sports facilities or equipment, like computers ☐
We have had classes with pupils from other schools ☐
We have not done anything like this   *(Go to Question 23)* ☐
Not sure   *(Go to Question 23)* ☐

20.   Thinking back over the times you have got together with pupils from other schools, did you go to another school or did the other pupils come to your school?

We went to the other school ☐
The other pupils came to our school ☐
We have done both ☐
We were not in school but somewhere else ☐
Not sure ☐

21.   And did you enjoy the projects and classes with other young people?

	Yes, Mostly	Yes, Sometimes	No, Not really	No, Not at all	I did not do this
Projects with the other young people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having classes with other young people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

22.   Were some of the pupils from other schools a different religion to you?

Yes ☐
No ☐
I don't know ☐

23.   Do you think that doing projects with pupils from other schools is a good idea or a bad idea?

Good idea ☐
Bad idea ☐
Don't know ☐

24. Do you think that schools allowing pupils from other schools to use their sports facilities or equipment like computers is a good idea or a bad idea?

Good idea ☐
Bad idea ☐
Don't know ☐

25. And do you think that you having classes with pupils from other schools is a good idea or a bad idea?

Good idea ☐
Bad idea ☐
Don't know ☐

26. Here are some of the things that might be <u>good</u> if young people from different schools get together. Pick **TWO** favourite things that you think would be good.

Using their sports facilities and computers or equipment ☐
Getting the opportunity to be taught by different teachers ☐
Doing classes we don't normally get to do at our school, ☐
like learning a new language ☐
Making new friends ☐
Doing interesting projects ☐
I don't have any favourites ☐
Don't know ☐

27. Here are some of the things that might be <u>bad</u> if young people from different schools get together. Pick the **TWO** worst things that you think would be bad.

Having to be with pupils I think are rough, disruptive or annoying ☐
Having to share our sports facilities or computers ☐
Having to be with young people of a different religion ☐
Having to travel to get to the other school ☐
Having to mix with young people who are very different from me ☐
I don't mind any of these ☐
I don't know ☐

28. Suppose a group of young people from another school were coming to do a project with your class. Would you mind if they were from these kinds of schools?
Please tick ONE box in each row

	I would mind a lot	I would mind a little	I would not mind at all	Don't know
An all-boys primary school	☐	☐	☐	☐
An all-girls primary school	☐	☐	☐	☐
A school for young people With special needs or disabilities	☐	☐	☐	☐
A primary school	☐	☐	☐	☐
An integrated school	☐	☐	☐	☐
A grammar school	☐	☐	☐	☐
A non-grammar school	☐	☐	☐	☐

29. Suppose a school near your school was told that it had to close and all the pupils will now come to your school instead. Would you mind if this happened?

I would mind a lot *(Please go to the next question)* ☐
I would mind a little *(Please go to the next question)* ☐
I would not mind at all *(Please go to Q.31)* ☐
It depends who the pupils are *(Please go to the next question)* ☐

30. What would you mind about it?

31. And everything considered, do you think that your school does a lot of sharing with other schools?

Yes ☐
No ☐
I don't know ☐

32. Please write in why you think this