Shared Education Beyond the Signature Project

SELF Conference Paper (Workshop B)

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Introduction

This paper reflects the discussion which took place in two workshops at the SELF Conference on 25th November 2016.

The Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) programme is into its second year for most of the partnerships involved and this workshop enabled participants from nursery, primary and post primary schools to contribute to the discussion of key questions related to the 'mainstreaming' of shared education beyond the signature project.

The workshop discussions took account of the Shared Education Act and the Department of Education (DE) shared education policy. Andrew Bell from DE and Lauri McCusker from Fermanagh Trust had made presentations to participants relating to the responsibilities of DE, the Education Authority (EA) and schools in the implementation of shared education policy in Northern Ireland.

The purpose of the workshop was to:

- Contribute to the vision for 'mainstreaming' of shared education;
- Identify 'enablers' or factors which encouraged shared education to develop;
- Identify 'barriers' to its development; and
- Identify possible further actions for DE, EA and other employing authorities, and schools.

Core Questions

- What motivates school leaders and governors to undertake more shared education?
- What discourages school leaders and governors from undertaking more shared education?
- Is Shared Education being limited by DE/EA supporting it as a 'project'? How?
- How would post 2019 'mainstreamed' shared education differ from SESP? What would optimize growth (both quality and quantity)?

This paper summarises the main discussion points and follows up with suggested action by DE, EA and in some cases schools themselves.

Towards a Vision for Shared Education post SESP

Participants agreed that it was important to develop a vision statement for shared education in NI which reflected the views of all key stakeholders in shared education. It was felt that this would provide schools, EA and DE with a unity of purpose and a common goal. In addition, it was agreed that this vision statement should be shared with the wider community to promote better understanding of what shared education is and what it could contribute to young peoples' educational experiences and their life beyond school.

It was agreed that the vision statement for shared education would be developed from much wider discussion than this workshop, although elements of the discussion and recommendations could help contribute to the overall vision statement.

1. What motivates and inspires principals to get involved?

This question prompted discussion which identified 'enablers', - aspects of SESP which would encourage Principals and Boards of Governors to develop sustainable, thriving partnerships.

The key points emerging from the discussion were as follows:

- **A sense of moral purpose and belief that schools, through SESP, could make a difference to the lives of individual pupils which would have impact in their families and communities**

  - There was strong agreement among participants that most boards of governors and principals were motivated by the belief that it was the 'right' thing to do and that it would benefit the children as well as the local and wider community.
  - Principals felt that SESP had allowed them to identify a programme which for the most part suited the needs of their local communities and the children in their schools. The scope of the project enabled schools to involve parents and the community at a pace suited to their individual contexts.
  - Principals and boards of governors could see tangible outcomes - relationships and trust developing between children, staff, and in some cases community leaders
  - Some schools reported the enthusiasm and support of parents for shared education as a strong enabler and source of encouragement.

- **SESP as a vehicle to undertake school improvement, school development planning and professional development with partner schools**

  - Principals also noted that the SESP had enabled them to identify common goals related to school improvement as well as benefit from being part of a larger professional

community where teachers and leaders could share ideas and practice in a supportive way.

- SESP had provided opportunities for younger members of staff to take on co-ordination and leadership roles.
- Principals were encouraged to take part in the knowledge that this was something which would be 'mainstreamed' and was not another 'project' or 'initiative'.
- SESP enabled schools to make more effective use of resources and share expertise – a number of smaller schools, both primary and post primary saw this as an important source of motivation to engage.

- **Principals and governors are motivated to engage in ehared education because the 'system' expects it.**
  - The fact that this is now enshrined in legislation and funded by DE along with Atlantic Philanthropies, has indicated to schools that this is viewed as important for young people and for society.
  - Some principals felt there seemed to be an expectation in the system (DE and EA), that schools should get involved. They felt that this was general a positive influence on their decision.

- **Other**
  - All agreed that it was easier to form a partnership when the partner schools were not in competition with each other.
  - The fact that children have had experience of shared experiences and partnership projects in primary school meant that pupils will, and to some extent do, have an expectation that this will continue post primary schools.

Considerations for Action by DE and EA to encourage sustained, high quality, mainstreamed Shared Education

Based on the views and opinions shared by principals about what motivated and inspired them to become involved, there emerged a few important guiding principles which should inform future action by DE and EA.

- **Principals and governors are motivated by the fact that their experience in sharing so far is having a positive impact on pupils, staff and communities.**

  Action: DE and EA should strongly encourage those involved by:

- Providing high quality TPL to ensure that there is capacity and commitment in the workforce which will maximize the educational and social impact of shared education activities.
- Seeking to develop a range of tools to monitor the impact using a wide range of indicators both qualitative and quantitative.
- Facilitating and encouraging regular communication of the impact of shared education with the main stakeholders as well as with the wider community
- Requiring ETI to include meaningful statements about a school's commitment to, and provision for, Shared Education experiences.
- Exploring the possibility of developing a Charter Mark type of recognition award -this would have the dual effect of setting standards and goals for schools to achieve as well as providing public recognition at for example an award event.
- Encouraging schools to share their experiences and successes within their own communities.

- **Principals are motivated by the fact that involvement in Shared Education can be used to enhance the normal curriculum experience for young people as well as achieve their school improvement objectives.**
  Action: DE and EA should continue to fund schools beyond SESP in order to:

  - Enable partnerships to co-plan, monitor and evaluate the shared learning experiences including the educational and reconciliation/social outcomes.
  - Enable schools to provide transport where required.
  - Continue the work involved in connecting to the community.
  - Facilitate and encourage partnerships to identify and work on common school improvement initiatives.

- **Principals and governors are motivated to engage in Shared Education Ebecause the 'system' expects it.**

  Action: DE should review statutory requirements for schools and amend to include references to Shared Education provision in the following:

  - School prospectuses and other published school information.
  - School development plans.
  - Annual reports to parents.
  - ETI Inspection activities including published reports.

  Given that working in Shared Education partnerships is likely to be a part of every newly qualified teachers experience, it will be important that initial teacher training institutions

include opportunities for young teachers to develop the capacity to contribute positively to shared education experiences in the schools in which they are employed.

2. Barriers to Participation in Shared Education

The views of the workshop participants can be grouped under three main headings:

- **Perceptions of what shared sducation 'is' and 'is not'**

  Workshop participants all reported that they had encountered staff, parents and governors who were suspicious about shared education and who felt that it was 'the back door' to integrated education. Some saw it as a threat to the identity and ethos of their school with a minority sharing that that it could lead to the closure of their school.

- **Possible conflict with the overall school's objectives and priorities – especially as they relate to attainment**

  Principals reported that there were high levels of accountability for school leaders and teachers in relation to pupils' attainment at all key stages. This was viewed as a potential barrier to embracing the potential of shared education fully. In post-primary schools, where it made economic sense to share exam classes, some principals reported that quality assurance of the pupils' experience could be problematic.

  Both primary and post primary principals reported that the current funding model which was based on the provision of substitute cover to support SESP work, was a challenge to the day to day quality of pupils' experience. Disruption to learning and teaching was viewed as a huge barrier and one which participants emphasised needed to be given strong consideration by DE and EA. A significant number of principals reported that teachers were very reluctant to get involved in shared education experiences, not because they didn't see the value of them, but because of the disruption to their teaching and the impact it could have on their pupils if they were missing class. Principals also expressed the view that the substitute cover model added to the class teacher's workload as they were still responsible for planning and follow up to lessons taken by substitutes.

  Concern was also expressed about linking attainment outcomes to shared education activities. Participants felt that this would deter schools from getting involved, again citing concerns about the impact of disruption and additional stress to teaching staff and school leaders.

  All principals felt that DE and EA should allow shared education experiences to be viewed as having value in themselves and that the benefits were not always measurable in the short

term. Participants agreed with the need to evaluate impact when it came to public money, but believed that evidence of impact through questionnaires and focus groups, would give DE and EA the information they required to account for spending. There was strong agreement that to add educational outcomes to the data used to measure the success of shared education was problematic since school performance indicators were already accounted for to ETI in inspection and to DE and the employing authorities in the annual returns made.

Participants discussed the possible limitations to SESP being presented as a 'project'. Many of the issues raised were covered in previous questions, however, it was agreed that the term 'project' often suggested to teachers and governors that the initiative would end and that the benefits accrued through the partnerships would not be sustained.

- **The Pressure of reduced budgets / pressure on resources**

All participants expressed real concern about the impact which significant cuts to school budgets would have on shared education. They expressed concern that shared education could be viewed as a 'luxury' and not a high priority when it comes to budget allocation.

There was agreement that planning and implementation of a worthwhile shared education programme often necessitated additional management allowances being added to the management structure of the school. Depending on the size of the school, this could have a significant impact on budgets. In light of the ongoing industrial action related to teachers' pay, terms and conditions, it will be important for DE and schools to give consideration to how teachers are given time, and/or remuneration, for additional work undertaken in the leadership or co-ordination of work related to shared education.

Principals also expressed the view that excessive administrative bureaucracy would be a barrier to participation. Some reported that it had been difficult to attract teachers to apply for the co-ordinators positions advertised.

Participants discussed the possible limitations to SESP being presented as a 'project'. Many of the issues raised were covered in previous questions, however, it was agreed that 'project' often suggested to teachers and governors that the initiative would end and that the benefits accrued through the partnerships would not be sustained. In addition, the fact that although close monitoring of spending and of the impact of the project was recognised by participants as necessary, they felt that it would be important to take on board the concerns raised regarding the bureaucracy and administration involved.

Considerations for Action by DE and EA to overcome barriers to sustained, high quality, mainstreamed Shared Education

- **Managing the perception of parents and indeed the general public of shared education is important if it is to be seen as something which is not a threat to the identity and ethos of schools.**

  Action: DE and EA could:

  - Include shared education in governor training programmes.
  - Include collaborative approaches to leadership in TPL modules and peer leadership development in future TPL programmes.
  - Prioritise support for schools in the development of community connections.
  - Facilitate the development and circulation of a government sponsored leaflet for parents explaining what shared education is and how it can benefit children.
  - Take the individual identity and ethos of schools into account in the planning and design of shared campus projects. For example; signage, building layout, colour schemes.
  - Encourage MLAs who are Education Committee members to visit shared education partnerships in their constituencies.
  - Ensure that all employing authorities are clear about the nature and purpose of shared education.

  Action: Schools could:

  - Provide opportunities for staff, governors and parents to explore the identity, ethos and core values of their own school and agree ways of promoting their distinctive identity in a shared education context.
  - Keep parents well informed about shared education activities on their websites, prospectuses and any newsletters.
  - Research ways in which local community groups could support and be a part of appropriate shared education activities, for example, drama or writing groups, sports organisations, volunteering groups related to charities, local health professionals and so on….
  - Encourage attendance of parents and the general public at appropriate shared events.
  - Celebrate shared education successes at annual prize giving or award ceremonies.
  - Keep their respective employing authorities well informed about the nature, purpose and successes of their shared education arrangements.

- **Shared Education Partnerships will need additional funding to support their work beyond the SESP.**

  <u>Action:</u> **DE and EA should:**

  - Develop systems to allocate funding based on the scale of activity which can be delegated to the school's budget in full. This will minimize the bureaucracy and administration involved.
  - Develop accountability for spending which is effective, giving DE the information they need, yet proportionate to the amount of spend involved.
  - Continue to monitor SESP spending to identify models of sharing which are effective in terms of impact relative to their cost.
  - Consult with schools on approaches to funding shared education.
  - Notwithstanding their responsibilities related to the Shared Education Act, DE and EA should use the data providing evidence of impact to support the case for allocation of adequate funding.

  <u>Action:</u> **Schools should:**

  - Contribute fully to any consultation activities related to funding beyond SESP.
  - Use SESP experience to reflect carefully on models of sharing which are cost effective yet have impact.

- **Shared Education activities need to be planned and implemented in a way that minimises disruption or indeed in ways which have the potential to enhance the school improvement process.**

  <u>Action:</u> **DE and EA could:**

  - Facilitate opportunities for partnerships to share models of sharing which work – this includes approaches to curriculum models and timetabling, transport, and staff deployment using SESP funding.
  - Include opportunities for school leaders to develop the capacity to work more collaboratively on school improvement initiatives.
  - Work with school leaders involved in shared education to develop descriptors of what highly effective shared education provision looks like and include this in ETI guidance to schools.

3. How would post 2019 'mainstreamed' shared education differ from SESP? What would optimize growth (both quality and quantity)?

Based on the contributions of workshop participants and the reflection and analysis above, shared education in Northern Ireland's schools would display some or all of the following characteristics post 2019.

- **Shared Education would be an integral part of the education system in Northern Ireland and reflected in all related policies and practice in DE. This would include the following:**

  - Communication with the general public as well as relevant public bodies.
  - Funding.
  - ETI activities – in particular, they should be in position to provide guidance on highly effective practice in shared education partnerships.
  - Curriculum pre-school to 19.
  - Area planning and all related policy areas, ensuring that the relevant employing authorities are included in all planning processes.
  - Transport.
  - Capital Programmes.

- **The implementation of the Shared Education Act and Policy would be reflected in relevant areas of business of the Education Authority. This will include:**

  - Management structure and responsibilities.
  - Human resources.
  - LMS.
  - Area planning and related areas.
  - Capital programmes.
  - Estate management.
  - Teacher professional learning provision.
  - School transport.

- **Beyond SESP, from 2019, Shared Education provision in schools will be integrated into the way in which schools deliver normal provision. The depth and breadth of sharing will be related to the context of each of the schools involved and the communities they serve. Shared education activities will be:**

  - An integral part of how school partnerships deliver areas of curriculum provision year on year, which are appropriate the age and stage of pupils, the school context, as well as the identified curricular strengths and needs of schools within a partnership – this general principle would apply from pre-school through to Post 16.

- Delivered through curriculum models for delivery which are sustainable, cost effective, optimise contact between pupils whilst at the same time minimize disruption to learning and achievement.
- Planned, monitored and evaluated collaboratively by schools using an appropriate proportion shared directed time and school development days.
- Supported by additional funding, accessed through LMS budgets, which can be used to enable planning and delivery of activities- the decision about how the funding is used to meet the needs of the partnership in the delivery of the shared provision, should be up to schools to decide and be accounted for to DE.
- Evaluated internally as part of ongoing school development activities as well as externally by ETI.
- Involve ongoing community participation as deemed appropriate by each partnership.

- **Teachers working in shared education partnerships will, through planned, systematic contact, have ongoing opportunities to:**

  - Develop collaborative leadership capacity at middle and senior leadership levels.
  - Work across the partnership to develop and share innovative approaches which improve teaching and learning including the use of technology to promote and enhance sharing.
  - Develop capacity to promote highly effective safeguarding arrangements as well as strategies to promote well-being of young people.
  - Identify shared successes to build on, challenges to work on and have opportunities to work collaboratively on shared school/partnership improvement activities.

- **Boards of governors of schools involved in shared education partnerships will be fully informed and engage in the normal processes related to effective governance of schools. Governors will have the capacity to make a highly effective contribution to this by:**

  - Taking part in relevant governor training.
  - Seeking information from principals related to shared education activities in a regular, systemaic way.

- **Pupils involved in shared education will:**

  - Have regular and systematic opportunities to meet pupils in their partner schools to engage in well planned, motivating and challenging learning activities.
  - Enable them to achieve their full potential.
  - Engage in shared learning activities which take place in a safe, secure learning environment.
  - Engage in learning activities which take account of their individual needs and aptitudes

- Contribute planning and evaluation through pupil voice activities.

In Summary

There was a strong appetite for shared education becoming part of the education system in Northern Ireland and for it continuing to thrive and grow beyond the SESP.

Shared education should be fully integrated into the way in which schools deliver aspects of the normal curricuum, taking into account each schools own needs and context.

Shared education will thrive if it is understood by, and gains the commitment of, all stakeholders - this includes pupils, their parents, staff, governors and employing authorities.

Shared education needs to be supported beyond the SESP by funding which is adequate, readily accessible to schools and which can accounted for in ways which are not excessively bureaucratic and which are proportionate to the additional funding received.

Shared education will have most impact when it is delivered by a workforce which is highly effective in the leadership, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of shared education experiences.

The full potential of shared education partnerships will be relalised if well established community connections are developed and sustained.

Shared education will have most impact communities and wider society when all school sectors engage – Controlled, Maintained, Integrated, Irish Medium and Special Schools.