Attitudes towards, and experiences of, the Network for Shared School Improvement: a survey of teachers and school leaders


Document Version:
Other version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Download date:13. May. 2021
Attitudes towards, and experiences of, the Network for Shared School Improvement: a survey of teachers and school leaders

Queen’s University SSESW Working Paper – Summary
January, 2020

Gavin Duffy, Tony Gallagher, Mark Hadfield and Gareth Robinson

In January 2018, the Education Authority (EA) began implementation of a Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI) within the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Shared Education Signature Project (SESP). The NSSI seeks to establish a self-supporting network of partnerships to further develop collaboration and sharing of best practice within and between SESP schools under the Department of Education’s (DE) ‘Every School a Good School strategy’. As a contribution to the evidence base on the impact of NSSI it was agreed that a survey for teachers and school leaders would be developed to provide a baseline of attitudes and perceptions of teachers in schools involved in NSSI, and monitor change in these over the course of NSSI.

The target sample for the survey comprised teachers working in schools in the first two cohorts of schools involved in the Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) The achieved sample comprised 637 questionnaires from respondents in 17 hub partnerships. Of these, 73 per cent worked in post-primary schools and 25 per cent in primary schools, with the remainder being in nursery or special schools. A total of 85 per cent of the respondents said they were in permanent posts and the remaining 15 per cent were in temporary posts.

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section was relevant to all teachers in the participating schools and 630 responses were received; the second part was relevant only to teachers who had been involved in Joint Practice Development (JPD) activity or any other NSSI activity and 237 responses were received.

Over half the teachers responding to the survey had been involved at some level with an SESP project, a little over two-in-five were involved in a JPD cycle of work and one-in-six were involved in any other NSSI related work. Respondents from primary schools were much more likely to be regularly involved in SESP projects, as compared with respondents in post primary schools.

In the section of the survey which was answered by all respondents a very positive picture emerged in regard to our respondents’ perception of school culture: we had asked them whether they felt a variety of characteristics relevant for school improvement were reflected in the culture of their schools, and a clear majority agreed that they were. Furthermore, those who had been more involved in collaborative activity with teachers in other schools showed particularly high levels of agreement that these characteristics were to be found in their schools. When asked whether areas of school improvement were addressed effectively in their schools, once again a majority agreed that they were in all but two areas: the response...
suggested they felt that the process of disseminating the learning from collaboration could be improved and that teachers need more time to work together on improving teaching.

The main part of the survey was answered only by respondents who had been directly involved in NSSI or related activity and they answered three banks of items. The first of these related to activities or experiences they had been engaged in over the past twelve months and most of our respondents had the opportunity to engage in most of these on a regular basis. The activities in which a half or less of our respondents were never involved related to planning for shared classes with a teacher from another school, delivering lessons with a teacher from a partner school, or peer observations with colleagues from other schools. Most of our respondents either had never or rarely experienced being involved in action research, or using an inquiry approach, or planning for a shared class with a teacher from another school. When we asked about their experience of specific activities the pattern of results was more mixed and it was noteworthy that the two items directly dealing with diversity and difference were only covered by a quarter or less of our respondents, while the item on addressing factors that impact upon the achievement of learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds was covered by less than one-in-five of our respondents.

The second set of items related to activities they had experienced in the schools over the past twelve months as a consequence of NSSI. As before a majority of our respondents said they had done most of these activities in their schools on at least a termly basis. There were two items where this was not the case: carrying out collaborative research into a topic of interest, and mentoring or coaching one or more teachers.

The third set of items related to their views of the impact of NSSI. The pattern of responses was very positive, although there was a bit more variability in the responses from post primary schools. The overall pattern suggests that teachers who had been involved in NSSI and school collaboration generally perceived it to have had positive impacts on their schools, with a minority being, for the moment, undecided on whether this is the case. It is noteworthy that only a small minority of our respondents perceive school collaboration and NSSI as definitely not having a positive impact across a range of issues on their schools. An issue which emerged was that our respondents seemed to be saying that collaboration with teachers from other schools had enhanced their opportunities to learn how to address issues related to diversity and difference, but as yet many have had limited opportunities to put this into practice in their classrooms. This served as a reminder that while collaboration may provide opportunities to acquire new skills, time is needed to implement and test this learning. A majority of our respondents agreed that their personal development had been enhanced on the basis of their experience of NSSI. More generally these data suggest that most teachers who have been involved with NSSI and school collaboration are positive about its outcomes and benefits, while a minority remain as yet undecided on whether those benefits have been realized. Only a very small minority do not believe the benefits have been realized.

Overall four main conclusions emerged from the analysis of the survey evidence:
The survey instrument appears to offer a useful picture of the experiences and perceptions of teachers in schools involved in NSSI.

The emergent picture is a very positive in relation to collaboration and school improvement as a consequence of NSSI, both in terms of the perceived culture of the schools and the experience of being involved in NSSI and related activities. Teachers were particularly positive about the JPD process because the programmes were organized to focus on their specific needs, highlighting the importance of a tailored approach, based on prior engagement with teachers to identify needs.

Throughout the wider study we found numerous examples where teachers were trying to engage with learners as part of the wider NSSI process. Despite this there was a pattern in the survey results which suggested that our respondents felt the opportunities to engage with pupils as learners had been limited. Most of the approaches they had used on getting pupils’ views on what had happened, rather than engaging with them beforehand to play a fuller role in the planning process. We noted that methodologies to enhance the role of pupil voice are now widely available.¹

There are some types of opportunities or activities which seem to be undertaken less often by teachers in NSSI, including direct engagement or planning with teachers in other schools, or leading professional development activities in their own schools. In addition, there were some indication that activities related to dealing with diversity and difference may have been engaged in less frequently than other areas. This seemed to be related to the time available to work on these areas.

The findings of the survey suggest that teachers found the opportunity to work with teachers from other schools to be a rewarding and positive experience. Teachers said they gained better insight into why they should be using some approaches in their classroom practice, rather than just learning that they should use them. This led to critical reflection and rethinking on some long-standing practices, and greater confidence in new practices that emerged from the process. The evidence also suggests that planning activities with teachers in other schools, carrying our peer observation, teaching shared classes, tackling difficult or controversial issues, or finding appropriate methods for engaging with diversity and difference, require time. When teachers from schools in different sectors engage they need time to build relationships and develop trust. And when teachers learn new skills and approaches they need time to implement, test and enhance these skills before they are embedded as new practice. Evidence from the survey may suggests that the availability of time has acted as a constraint on all these activities. It may be that there has been a slight over-prioritisation of activity within NSSI at the cost of embedding new skills that are in the process of being acquired. It may be an indication of the need to ‘make haste slowly’ and allow teachers to consolidate the learning they are

deriving from NSSI. It may also serve as a reminder that learning in collaborative contexts requires additional time for consolidation, sustainable change and long-term improvement\(^2\).

\(^2\) This research upon which this paper is based was supported by funding from the Social Change Initiative. We also benefitted from comments on earlier drafts by key stakeholders in education in Northern Ireland. All comments and conclusions in this paper are the responsibility of the authors.
Attitudes towards, and experiences of, the Network for Shared School Improvement: a survey of teachers and school leaders

Queen’s University SSESW Working Paper
January, 2020

Gavin Duffy, Tony Gallagher, Mark Hadfield and Gareth Robinson

Introduction

In January 2018, the Education Authority (EA) began implementation of a Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI) within the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Shared Education Signature Project (SESP). The NSSI seeks to establish a self-supporting network of partnerships to further develop collaboration and sharing of best practice within and between SESP schools. An initial cohort of central ‘Hub’ partnerships were identified and formed geographic clusters of partnerships to work together to identify and address shared education school improvement priorities and needs across the clusters. The NSSI, which operates under the Department of Education’s (DE) ‘Every School a Good School strategy’, will be rolled out over the remaining years of the DSC SESP, with the aim of creating an NI-wide network to deliver practitioner-led school to school improvement. As a contribution to the evidence base on the impact of NSSI it was agreed that a survey for teachers and school leaders would be developed to provide a baseline of attitudes and perceptions of teachers in schools involved in NSSI, and monitor change in these over the course of NSSI.

It was agreed that the survey would be circulated to all teachers in all schools involved in NSSI, whether as hub or cluster schools. It was also agreed that the survey would be divided into two sections, the first containing a series of general items to be answered by all teachers, and the second containing items more specific to NSSI and to be answered only by those teachers who had been directly involved in NSSI activities. This report provides details of the sample of respondents for the survey and outlines the pattern of responses across all items.

Sample

The target sample for the survey comprised teachers working in schools in the first two cohorts of the Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI): the data we were provided with indicated there were a little under 100 schools in 20 partnerships in both cohorts, including post-primary, primary, special and nursery schools and special units. We were also advised that the total number of teachers working in those schools was 1,235.1 full-time-equivalent (FTE). The questionnaires were distributed via cluster leaders in each of the participating partnerships, then distributed and collected within the cluster schools, before being returned
by cluster leads in batches for processing. There was a concern that the return rate may be affected by on-going industrial action.

The achieved sample comprised 637 questionnaires from respondents in 17 partnerships, though not all items were completed on all questionnaires. Of the total respondents 73 per cent worked in post-primary schools and 25 per cent in primary schools, with the remainder being in nursery or special schools. A total of 85 per cent of the respondents said they were in permanent posts and the remaining 15 per cent were in temporary posts, with these proportions being almost identical among primary and post-primary respondents.

Half of the respondents said they were classroom teachers; 33 per cent said they were in middle management roles (department head, year head); 14 per cent said they were principals or members of senior management teams; and one per cent (7 respondents) said they were JPD cluster leaders or SESP coordinators: JPD cluster leaders were responsible for the professional development work within NSSI, whereas SESP coordinators were responsible the shared education activities of partner schools. The pattern differed between primary and post-primary respondents: for primary school respondents 62 per cent were classroom teachers, 13 per cent were in middle management roles and 24 per cent were principals or in SMT; among post-primary respondents 46 per cent were classroom teachers, 41 per cent were in middle management roles and 12 per cent were principals or in SMT.

Questionnaires (see Annex Table 1) were returned from schools in 17 NSSI partnerships, though the numbers returned across the partnerships varied widely: one partnership returned 133 questionnaires from four schools, whereas, by contrast, five partnerships returned ten or less questionnaires. In most cases there were some schools within partnerships where no questionnaires were returned. If a fuller response profile had been achieved it might have been possible to produce specific partnership reports, but absent a reasonable response rate from all schools in each partnership these reports would present only a partial picture.

Results

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section was relevant to all teachers in the participating schools and 630 responses were received; the second part was relevant only to teachers who had been involved in Joint Practice Development (JPD) activity or any other NSSI activity and 237 responses were received. Three items were included in the survey to differentiate these categories of teachers and asked: ‘In the last 12 months, how often have you worked on the following initiatives, with teachers from other schools on (a) a Shared Education (SESP) Project? (b) a cycle of Joint Practice Development (JPD) through the Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI)? and (c) any other NSSI related work?’

The pattern of results in Table 1 show that over half the teachers responding to the survey had been involved at some level with an SESP project, a little over two-in-five were involved in a JPD cycle of work and one-in-six were involved in any other NSSI related work. There was a statistically significant difference between primary and post-primary respondents in relation to
participation in SESP projects: whereas three quarters of primary respondents said they were regularly involved and only 7 per cent said they were never involved, the figures for post-primary respondents were 25 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. These patterns are unsurprising: as primary schools are smaller it is more likely that the majority of staff will be involved in an initiative of this kind, whereas in post-primary schools there will also be a proportion of staff not involved, no matter how extensive the project. We asked all our respondents a series of 13 items on aspects of practice within their schools and disaggregated the data on the basis of their involvement in SESP, JPD or NSSI work.

Table 1: In the last 12 months, how often have you worked on the following initiatives with teachers from other schools on ... (%) (note: on all tables columns may not total to 100 due to rounding errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>... a Shared Education (SESP) Project</th>
<th>... a cycle of Joint Practice Development (JPD) through the Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI)</th>
<th>... any other NSSI related work?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Number of respondents)</td>
<td>(617)</td>
<td>(611)</td>
<td>(572)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results: Part 1 of the survey

Two items on the survey were asked of all respondents. Firstly, they were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about the culture of their school; and secondly, they were asked for their views on how effective their school was in relation to a series of improvement characteristics.

The pattern of responses in relation to our respondents’ levels of agreement on the statements relating to school culture can be seen on Table 2 which shows the proportion who agreed, disagreed or were undecided on whether the stated characteristics applied to their schools. Overall the picture is very positive, with clear majorities in each case saying that these characteristics were evident in their schools. In all cases less than one-in-ten respondents felt that their schools did not have these characteristics, but there were some items where up to one-in-five respondents were undecided.
Table 2: How much do you agree with the following statements about your current school? (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree/strongly agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree/strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This school has a culture which is open to working with other schools, through shared education, to share ideas and practices</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school actively encourages staff to work with colleagues from other schools</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school encourages learners to voice their opinions and feedback to staff about how they are being taught</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school encourages staff involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of professional learning programmes</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school is a place where people feel comfortable challenging each other’s ideas about learning and teaching</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through shared education this school has improved its knowledge and understanding of self-evaluation</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the responses were disaggregated by the degree of engagement respondents had with SESP, JPD or NSSI the overall pattern of results remained very much the same, that is, most respondents felt these statements were characteristic of their schools, whatever their level of involvement in SESP, JPD or NSSI. However, those who had been regularly involved in these the activities showed higher levels of strong agreement, as compared with those who had never been involved in those activities. Those who said they had never been involved in these activities were a little more likely to say they were undecided on whether these statements were characteristic of their schools, as compared with those who had been involved in the SESP, JPD or NSSI activities.

On three of items from Table 2 the differences reached statistical significance:

- On the item ‘this school actively encourages staff to work with colleagues from other schools’ a significantly higher proportion of those who had been involved in SESP, JPD or other NSSI agreed with the statement, in comparison with those who had not been involved in any one of those areas of activity:
  - 75 per cent of those regularly involved in SESP were strongly in agreement, as compared with 48 per cent of those never involved in SESP (p=0.000);
74 per cent of those regularly involved with JPD were strongly in agreement, as compared with 52 per cent of those never involved (p=0.000);

77 per cent of those regularly involved in other NSSI activities were strongly in agreement, as compared with 53 per cent of those never involved (p=0.000).

In each case there were proportionally between two and five times as many of those never involved with an activity undecided, as compared with those regularly involved in any of the activities.

- A similar pattern emerged on the item ‘this school encourages staff involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of professional learning programmes’
  - 48 per cent of those regularly involved in SESP strongly agreed with this statement, as compared with 31 per cent not involved in SESP (P=0.002)
  - 49 per cent of those regularly involved in JPD strongly agreed with the statement, as compared with 32 per cent of those not involved (p=0.003)
  - 54 per cent of those regularly involved in other NSSI activities were strongly in agreement, as compared with 34 per cent of those never involved in the activities (p=0.006).

- On this item about a fifth of those never involved in the activities were undecided, as compared with less than a tenth of those regularly involved.

- A pattern of statistically significant differences was also found for the item ‘through shared education this school has improved its knowledge and understanding of self-evaluation’:
  - 44 per cent of those regularly involved in SESP were strongly in agreement with the statement, as compared with 21 per cent of those not involved in SESP;
  - 43 per cent of those regularly involved in JPD were strongly in agreement with the statement, as compared with 24 per cent of those not involved in JPD;
  - 48 per cent of those regularly involved in other NSSI activities were strongly in agreement, as compared with 27 percent r of those never involved in NSSI activities.

In each case the proportion who said they were undecided was twice as much, or more, among those never involved in the activities, as compared with those regularly involved.

Overall, then the responses to these items suggests that a majority of the respondents agree that these qualities are characteristic of practice in their schools. Furthermore, those who had been more involved in collaborative activity with teachers in other schools showed particularly high levels of agreement that these characteristics were to be found in their schools.

The next set of items asked of all respondents concerned various areas of school improvement and asked the extent to which they felt their school was effective in ensuring these activities occurred. The overall pattern of results can be seen on Table 3 which shows that on all but two items there was a clear majority of respondents saying that their schools were effective in ensuring that these activities took place. This overall pattern of results suggests that:
our respondents felt their schools have an effective environment within their school for addressing professional development and improvement processes, including having opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues from other schools; that the process of disseminating the learning from collaboration could be improved; and, in particular, teachers need more time to work together on improving teaching.

Table 3: How effective is your school in ensuring that... (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely or very effective</th>
<th>Moderately effective</th>
<th>Slightly or not at all effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers can use data effectively to improve their teaching?</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The climate supports people to discuss teaching challenges with colleagues?</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are well-structured opportunities for professional learning in school?</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues from other schools?</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff have opportunities to inform the school development plans and/or improvement processes?</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What staff learn from working with other schools is shared effectively?</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have time to work together on improving teaching?</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As before, we disaggregated these responses based on the level of engagement our respondents had with SESP, JPD or NSSI activities, though the pattern of significant outcomes was a little more varied than previously.

- For the item ‘teachers can use data effectively to improve their teaching’, 36 per cent of those who were regularly involved in SESP activities said their school was extremely effective, while only 19 per cent of those who had only been involve once in the year said this (p=0.010).
- For the item ‘there are well-structured opportunities for professional learning in school’ the only significant difference in responses also concerned involvement with SESP. Three quarters of those regularly involved in SESP said their school was extremely or very effective, as compared with three-in-five of those involved once in the year, or not at all. These last two categories were more likely than those involved regularly with SESP
to say their school was moderately effective (three-in-ten, in comparison with one-in-six) (p=0.001).

- For the item ‘teachers have opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues from other schools’ there were significant differences related to involvement in SESP, JPD or other NSSI activities. In all cases significantly more of those regularly involved with the activity said their school was extremely effective, in comparison with those who had never been involved with the activity. By contrast, in all cases the latter group were significantly more likely to say that their school was moderately effective (p=0.000).

- For the item ‘the climate supports people to discuss teaching challenges with colleagues’ those regularly involved with SESP or JPD were more likely to say their school was extremely effective, in comparison to those who never had been involved in SESP or JPD, while the latter were significantly more likely to say their school was slightly effective (p=0.001 for SESP, p=0.004 for JP).

- For the item ‘what staff learn from working with other schools is shared effectively’ those who were regularly involved with SESP, JPD or other NSSI activities were significantly more likely to say that their school was extremely effective, in comparison with those who never had involvement with the activities, while the latter were significantly more likely to say their school was moderately or slightly effective (p=0.000 in all cases).

- Finally for this section, for the item ‘staff have opportunities to inform the school development plans and/or improvement processes’ those who were regularly involved with JPD cycles were significantly more likely to say their school was extremely effective, in comparison with those who never had been involved in JPD, and this latter group were significantly more likely to say their school was moderately or slightly effective (p=0.006). There was no statistical difference between the groups among the small proportion (three per cent) who said that their school was ‘not at all effective’ on this issue.

The overall pattern for those group of items indicated very positive perceptions that their schools provided an environment that supported effective practices in school improvement, with the only caveat coming from mixed views on whether teachers are given enough time to work together on improving teaching. Once the data are disaggregated we see differing layers of perceived effectiveness, with those most regularly involved in SESP, then JPD, saying that their schools are extremely effective on most of the dimensions, whereas in comparison those never involved in these activities were more likely to say their schools were moderately or slightly effective.

This overall pattern is similar to the pattern of responses on the first set of items in that they are generally very positive, and even more positive for those teachers who have direct and regular involvement in collaborative work with teachers from other schools.
Results: Part 2 of the survey

Only teachers who responded affirmatively to the items on involvement in a JPD cycle or any other NSSI activity were asked to complete the rest of the questionnaire: this comprised a total of 237 respondents, or 38 per cent of the overall survey respondents. Table 4 shows the pattern of responses when we asked the teachers who continued to complete the questionnaire how many cycles of JPD activity they had been involved in and disaggregated this by their responses when asked whether they had been involved in JPD activity in the last twelve months.

Table 4: How many cycles of JPD did you participated in (number and %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in JPD in the last twelve months:</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No cycles of JPD</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cycle</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cycles</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more cycles</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents directly involved in NSSI and/or JPD

For these respondents we asked a series of items which aimed to provide a picture of their experiences of a range of activities and their evaluation on the impact of NSSI and collaboration more generally. Inter alia this will help identify strengths of the implementation of NSSI to date and weak spots where renewed priority may be important. More important, the overall data will provide a measure of the current impact of NSSI and provide a baseline for repeat annual surveys during the course of NSSI.

The items in this section of the questions can be divided into three main categories:

- Items which asked about activities or experiences our respondents had been involved in over the past twelve months as a consequence of NSSI
- Items which asked about activities in their school over the past twelve months as a consequence of NSSI
- Items which asked for our respondents’ views on the impact of NSSI and collaboration, and the extent to which their school has been effective in supporting specific activities

Experience of NSSI activities over the past twelve months

This section contained three sets of items, each of which are illustrated on Figures 1 to 3. Figures 1 and 2 show a variable range of responses across each of the specific items. In general, most of our respondents had the opportunity to engage in most of these activities (seven out of the ten listed) on a regular basis, understood here as termly or more frequently, though there
was a significantly higher minority of respondents in post-primary schools who said they were never involved in these activities. Overall only a minority of our respondents had opportunities to engage in these activities on a more regular basis (understood here as monthly or weekly). On Figure 1 the three activities in which a half or less of our respondents were never involved related to planning for shared classes with a teacher from another school, delivering lessons with a teacher from a partner school or peer observations with colleagues from other schools. From Figure 2 we can see a majority of our respondents either had never experienced, or only experienced once a year, being involved in action research, or using an inquiry approach, or planning for a shared class with a teacher from another school. The proportion of respondents saying they had never delivered a lesson with a teacher from a partner school or planned for shared classes was significantly higher in post-primary schools, as compared with primary schools.

Figure 1: In the last 12 months, through NSSI, how often were you involved in the following activities (%)?
Figure 2: In the last 12 months, through NSSI, how often have you experienced the following (\%)?

We provided a list of specific activities and asked our respondents to identify which of these they had covered in the past 12 months as part of their experience in NSSI. The results are illustrated on Figure 3. An open-ended item was left for respondents to include other activities not listed, but only a small minority provided examples: 15 items were mentioned, each by a single respondent.

The pattern of responses can be broken down into three sets of items: a set of five items for which more than two-in-five our respondents said they had covered them; five items for which about a third of our respondents said they had covered them; four items for which about a quarter of our respondents said they had covered them; and two items for which less than one-in-five said they had covered them: this pattern can be seen clearly on Figure 3.

It is noteworthy that the two items directly dealing with diversity and difference were only covered by a quarter or less of our respondents, while the item on addressing factors that impact upon the achievement of learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds was covered by less than one-in-five of our respondents.
Figure 3: In relation to your experiences of NSSI during the last 12 months, which of the following have you covered from the list below (%)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific aspects of subject or content knowledge in your main area of teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective pedagogical practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving practice through research and inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner evaluation and assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching learners with additional needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) modules for Shared Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting how the school engages with the local community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to develop classroom practice and improve understanding of learners’ needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the professional learning of colleagues, e.g. mentoring and coaching PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital/ICT competency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered issues of diversity/difference and explored ways these can be dealt with in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of numeracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with controversial issues in school/classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered the factors that impact upon the achievement of learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please indicate the broad area covered)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activities in their school over the past twelve months as a consequence of NSSI**

This section covers two sets of items illustrated on Figures 4 and 5. As before, a majority of our respondents say they done most of these activities in their schools on at least a termly basis. On Figure 4 the two items where this was not the case were carrying out collaborative research into a topic of interest, and mentoring or coaching one or more teachers. On Figure 5 the item
which was engaged in least frequently was leading professional learning or training for colleagues in their school.

Figure 4: As a result of your involvement in NSSI, on average over the last 12 months, how often have you done the following in your school (%)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once a year</th>
<th>Termly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in discussions about the learning development of specific learners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed my professional learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed relevant research findings with colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimed to improve learning and teaching by working with other teachers across several classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked with others to moderate standards in evaluating learners’ progress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carried out collaborative research into a topic of interest to you professionally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored or coached one or more teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The impact of NSSI and collaboration, and the extent to which their school has been effective in supporting specific activities

This section included four sets of items, illustrated on Figures 6 to 9. Perhaps the most notable feature across all these Figures lies in the high level of agreement on the positive impact of NSSI and collaboration. The specific items which differ from this overall pattern relate to a number of different themes:

- There is a mixed pattern of outcomes when our respondents were asked whether there was a negative impact on learners’ progress when staff and learners are out of class (figure 7): 42 per cent disagreed, 29 per cent agreed and 30 per cent were unsure. There were significant differences between primary and post-primary respondents, with 56 per cent of the primary respondents and 30 per cent of the post primary respondents disagreeing with the proposition.
- Overall 64 per cent of our respondents disagreed that competition between schools gets in the way of collaboration (Figure 7), but gain there was a statistically significant difference between primary and post primary respondents: 70 per cent of primary respondents disagreed with this proposition, as compared with 50 per cent of post primary respondents.
- Our respondents vary in the extent to which they think pupil voice is encouraged within the schools. On Figure 6 we can that just over half of our respondents agreed that sharing between schools provided opportunities for learners to offer views on shared education and how it might be implemented. On Figure 7 less than half our respondents agreed that learners had opportunities to be involved in the planning and evaluation of shared education projects. On both items quite a high proportion of respondents said they were undecided on the issues.

- A relatively high proportion of respondents disagree that they have sufficient time and resources to work effectively with other schools, which may be relevant to the findings above that the proportion of respondents who say they are directly involved in activities with teachers in other schools is relatively low.

Overall, however, the pattern of responses to items in this section of the questionnaire confirm a generally positive evaluation of the impact of school collaboration and NSSI on our respondents’ schools. From Figure 6 over half our respondents agreed that eleven of the twelve items listed had been positively impacted by NSSI. This was so also for responses on four of the nine items illustrated on Figure 7. Of the total 21 items shown on both figures our respondents disagreed on the impact of only one, and this was the suggestion that competition between schools affected their willingness to work together. We can also see from the Figures that there were a few items for which some respondents said they were undecided on the impact of specific items. Overall, therefore, this suggests that teachers who are involved in NSSI and school collaboration generally perceive it to have positive impacts on their schools, with a minority being, for the moment, undecided on whether this is the case. It is noteworthy that only a small minority of our respondents perceive school collaboration and NSSI as definitely not having a positive impact across a range of issues on their schools.

On Figure 6 we can see that three of the five items achieving the highest level of agreement relate to the promotion of good relations: developing teacher skills to promote respect for others, developing teacher skills to promote community cohesion, and developing teacher skills to promote equality of good relations. This stands somewhat in contrast with the data reported on Figure 3 which showed that the two items directly dealing with diversity and difference were only covered by a quarter or less of our respondents. In other words, our respondents seem to be saying that collaboration with teachers from other schools had enhanced their opportunities to learn how to address issues related to diversity and difference, but as yet many have had limited opportunities to put this into practice in their classrooms. If this interpretation is correct then it may serve as a reminder that collaboration between teachers in different schools provides opportunities to acquire new skills, but the application of those skills in their classroom practice requires both a prioritization of those themes in their schools, and the time to implement and test their new skills.
Figure 6: Do you agree that sharing with another school(s), through NSSI, has had a positive impact upon you, in terms of... (%)
Figure 7: To what extent do you agree with these statements about working collaboratively with other schools through NSSI (%)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with colleagues in other schools is an effective approach to professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More sharing of knowledge about learning and teaching between schools through NSSI will improve our school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in shared education helps improve the relationship between our schools and the local communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our school is able to access better sources of external support than in previous years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners have opportunities to be involved in planning and evaluating shared education projects.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have sufficient time and resources to work effectively with other schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through JPD, our partnership has developed joint practice (pedagogy) around reconciliation outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When staff and learners are out of class to work with other schools it can negatively affect learners’ progress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition between schools affects our willingness to work together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 8 and 9 report the responses when we asked about personal development gains our respondents had gained from their experience of NSSI (Figure 8) and how effective they felt their school had been in supporting a series of identified activities (Figure 9). From Figure 8 we can see that in all cases a majority of our respondents agreed that their personal development had been enhanced on the basis of their experience of NSSI. The proportion of respondents...
who disagreed was very small for each item, but for three of the items there was a reasonable proportion of respondents who said they were undecided: the three items where this response was more evident all concerned their sense of their capacity to take on leadership roles in professional development. This is consistent with the results shown on Figure 5 where the two items with the lowest levels of engagement concerned leading activities in school. On Figure 9 we can see that a majority of respondents said their schools had been effective in supporting all but one of the activities, and in this last case just under half said this. As before, the proportion of respondents who disagreed was very small while a reasonable minority said they were undecided. These results add to the general emergent pattern from the survey that most teachers who have been involved with NSSI and school collaboration are positive about its outcomes and benefits, while a minority remain as yet undecided on whether those benefits have been realized. Only a very small minority do not believe the benefits have been realized.

Figure 8: Based on your experience of NSSI over the last 12 months, to what extent do you agree with the following statements (%)?
Conclusions

This report has examined the pattern of evidence from the first administration of a staff survey for teachers in schools in the Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI). The primary purpose of the survey is to provide a baseline picture of teacher’s attitudes to, and perceptions of, NSSI at work in their schools, with subsequent surveys allowing for an assessment of the developing impact of NSSI. The target sample comprised all the teachers in the school partnerships in cohorts one and two of NSSI, with an achieved sample of 637 respondents.

The survey was divided into two parts: the first was relevant for all teachers in the schools and the second part was relevant to the subset of teachers who had been involved in Joint Practice Development (JPD) or any other NSSI activity. Over half the teachers responding to the survey had been involved at some level with a Shared Education Signature project, a little over two-in-five were involved in a JPD cycle of work and one-in-six were involved in some other NSSI related work, and the achieved sample for the second part of the survey was 237 respondents.
In the first part of the survey we asked all our respondents about the extent to which they felt their schools displayed a variety of characteristics of collaboration and reflection, and a set of items asking how effective they felt their school was in supporting teachers’ professional development opportunities. On the vast majority of the items our respondents agreed that the qualities we asked about were characteristic of practice in their schools and that their schools were providing an environment that supported effective practices in school improvement. In general, respondents who were more involved in JPD or NSSI work were more likely to be very positive in their evaluations. Only on two issues were our respondents a little more critical with many saying that they did not have enough time to work together to improve teaching, and some saying that what teachers learned from working with teachers in other schools could be shared more effectively in their own schools.

The second part of the survey contained three broad sections: one asking about activities they had been involved in through NSSI over the past twelve months; one asking about NSSI activities in their own school; and one which asked for their views on the impact of NSSI and collaboration, and the extent to which their school had been effective in implementing specific activities.

In the first of these sections most of our respondents said they engaged in most of these activities on a regular basis, that is, at least termly, although only a minority engaged in these activities more regularly: there were significantly more respondents from post primary schools, as compared with primary schools, who said they were never involved in these activities. The lowest levels of involvement related to activities such as developing resources, being involved in specific projects or mentoring other teachers. The lowest levels of experience were found for engagement with teachers from other schools, whether through planning for shared classes, delivering lessons, or carrying our peer observations. The proportion saying they had never delivered a class or planned a shared class with a colleague from another school was higher among post primary respondents than primary respondents. When we asked our respondents to indicate how often they had experienced a list of activities less than a quarter had experienced activities addressing diversity and difference, dealing with controversial issues or factors impacting upon the achievement of learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The next section dealt with our respondents’ experience of activities related to NSSI in their own schools. As before a majority said they had experienced most of these activities at least termly. The lowest levels of experience related to such activities as working with others to moderate standards, mentoring or coaching other teachers, or leading on areas of activity in their school.

The third and final section asked for our respondents’ evaluation of the impact of NSSI and collaboration and the results were, in general, positive. There were some differences between respondents from primary and post primary schools, most notably in relation to whether time spent working with other schools negatively affected learners’ progress. Overall about a third of both groups were unsure if this was true. Among primary respondents a majority disagreed...
with the proposition, but by contrast about a third each of post primary respondents agreed and a third disagreed with the proposition. Only two areas of apparent limitations emerged in this part of the survey: first, views on the extent to which pupil voice is encouraged within the schools varied quite a lot, and a relatively high proportion of respondents felt they did not have sufficient time and resources to work effectively with other schools.

Four main conclusions emerged from this iteration of the survey as follows, with some more consideration of each of them below:

- The survey instrument appears to offer a useful picture of the experiences and perceptions of teachers in schools involved in NSSI.
- The emergent picture is a very positive in relation to collaboration and school improvement as a consequence of NSSI, both in terms of the perceived culture of the schools and the experience of being involved in NSSI and related activities.
- The extent to which pupil voice is encouraged or practiced in schools appears to be limited.
- There are some types of opportunities or activities which seem to be undertaken less often by teachers in NSSI

The survey instrument

The survey used in this study was based on one previously used in Wales, with adjustments made to reflect the circumstances of schools in Northern Ireland and the particular importance of school collaboration. One of the goals of the baseline study was to test the survey instrument itself. Our main conclusion is that the survey appears to offer a robust basis for monitoring the culture and context of schools, the experiences of teachers within the schools, and their perceptions of the impact of NSSI and collaboration, and their assessment of the consequences of being involved in these activities. Only minor adjustments may be required for future iterations of the survey.

The positive impact of NSSI and collaboration

The emergent picture of the context, experience and impact of NSSI and collaboration is very positive. There may be a degree of selective bias in the sample if schools with a more supportive culture are more likely to participate in NSSI. That said, it may be significant that the experiences and views of those most closely involved with NSSI were more positive than those in the schools who are not directly involved, as this suggests a positive momentum arising from participation in the activities themselves. This conclusion would be consistent with other evidence we gathered during the course of the wider study. Thus, for example, we found that teachers who had worked together collaboratively for a longer period of time had developed higher levels of trust and so were in a stronger position to discuss critically aspects of current practice and explore ways in which it might be improved. This, in turn, reflects an important theme to emerge more generally from research into shared education, that is, that regular and
sustained engagement encourages a collegial atmosphere which helped support critical conversations and was more likely to promote positive change (Gallagher, 2016).

We also found that teachers were particularly positive about the JPD process because the programmes were organized to focus on their specific needs, highlighting the importance of a tailored approach, based on prior engagement with teachers to identify needs, rather than the application of a singular template across a number of partnerships. NSSI was also particularly helpful for teachers in small departments in schools as they said they gained considerably from engagement with a wider pool of teachers in their subject across a number of schools. We had also found evidence that teachers involved in NSSI were developing a more nuanced and rounded understanding of the characteristics and practice of learning leaders.

Pupil voice

Throughout the study we found numerous examples where teachers were trying to engage with learners as part of the wider NSSI process. Examples of which we were aware included the collection of baseline data from pupils as part of a wider evaluation plan; informal discussions with pupils to get their reactions to some of the activities they had engaged in, again as part of an approach to evaluation. In some cases this approach was slightly more formalized through the use of teacher-led focus groups of pupils. In addition, in a few cases there were examples of where pupils were involved in some planning activities, including having an opportunity to offer preferences for fieldwork sites outside the schools and for the type of ice-breakers to be used in active learning activities.

Despite this there was a pattern in the survey results which suggested that our respondents felt the opportunities to engage with pupils as learners had been limited, a theme which had emerged in some of the qualitative work undertaken as part of this study. In some of the partnerships teachers we talked with had felt they might have made better use of pupil feedback through questionnaires or other methods to inform discussions. Most of the methods they had used, as illustrated above, were used to get pupils’ views on what had happened, rather than engage with them beforehand to play a fuller role in the planning process more fully. A methodology for a more participative role for pupil voice has been developed by Laura Lundy and is now widely used internationally and is promoted specifically by UN agencies. The role of pupil voice in NSSI would be strengthened if teachers were given some training in this methodology, including the use of the Young Person’s Advisory Group (YPAG) model (Lundy, 2007; Lundy et al., 2011)

Activities which appear to be limited

Our respondents said they were less likely to be engaged in some types of activities, including direct engagement or planning with teachers in other schools, or leading professional development activities in their own schools. In addition, there were some indication that activities related to dealing with diversity and difference may have been engaged in less frequently than other areas. The underlying reason for this may be reflected in the fact that
some of our respondents said they had insufficient time to work on some aspects of NSSI related activities.

There is no doubt from our survey data, and related qualitative data from the wider study, that teachers found the opportunity to work with teachers from other schools to be a rewarding and positive experience. In particular they liked the time they had for engagement and reflection, allowing them to think critically of current practice and consider new practice. Teachers said they gained better insight into why they should be using some approaches in their classroom practice, rather than just learning that they should use them. This led to critical reflection and rethinking on some long-standing practices, and greater confidence in new practices that emerged from the process. They also found research and evidence as useful benchmarks when considering and critiquing practice, though some had problems in locating relevant research.

Spending time planning with teachers in other schools, or carrying our peer observation, or teaching shared classes all requires significant investment of time. Tackling difficult or controversial issues, or finding appropriate methods for engaging with diversity and difference, require time. As noted above, when teachers from schools in different sectors engage they also need time to build relationships and develop trust. Furthermore, when teachers learn new skills and approaches they need time to implement, test and enhance these skills before they are embedded as new practice. This strand of evidence from the survey may suggest there has been a slight over-prioritisation of activity within NSSI at the cost of embedding new skills that are in the process of being acquired. It may be an indication of the need to ‘make haste slowly’ and allow teachers to consolidate the learning they are clearly deriving from NSSI. It may also serve as a reminder that learning in collaborative contexts requires additional time for consolidation, sustainable change and long-term improvement.

References


This research upon which this paper is based was supported by funding from the Social Change Initiative. We also benefitted from comments on earlier drafts by key stakeholders in education in Northern Ireland. All comments and conclusions in this paper are the responsibility of the authors.
Annex 1: responses by job title by cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>JPD Cluster leader</th>
<th>Middle leader</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>SMT member</th>
<th>SESP Coordinat or</th>
<th>Teaching principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2: NSSI Key Terms/Roles

Cluster
A Cluster is a group of Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) partnerships working together to improve educational outcomes for pupils, build good relations across the school and wider community, provide opportunity for professional learning and embed the ethos and culture of Shared Education across a local geographic area. The Cluster identifies a common development need and supports the co-construction of Joint Practice Development (JPD) Programmes facilitated by the Hub Partnership. The Cluster, in some cases, will be cross-phase, for example, it may include primary and post-primary partnerships. The Cluster provides a platform for the delivery of policy and practice through the EA School Development Service (SDS) in delivering shared education. SESP Partnerships have the opportunity to engage in their local cluster, however, this is not compulsory as each partnership is at a different stage on its Shared Education journey and may feel their current needs are being met within the partnership.

Cluster leader
Populating the system with expertise and knowledge in the development of a self-sustaining network is crucial. Cluster Leaders have been identified to represent Hub Partnerships and be the direct link between the EA SDS and the Cluster. The Cluster Leaders liaise with all other Cluster members. Each Hub Partnership has been responsible for recruiting a Cluster Leader based on specified criteria. The Cluster Leaders help to embed Shared Education and collaborative support into the fabric of the system. Within the delivery of the network it is important that Cluster Leaders are identified and engaged in partnership with EA SDS Officers to co-construct the network, create clusters, develop programmes through JPD and evaluate outcomes. Cluster leaders plan, monitor and evaluate JPD while also providing connections between the EA and partnerships, between partnerships and between clusters. Effectively they become conduits for learning across the network to help embed Shared Education

Education Authority Role
The Education Authority has a statutory duty to promote, encourage and facilitate Shared Education. NSSI provides an approach which enables the authority to embed the working practices of shared education into school improvement strategies. The EA initiated the NSSI programme to pilot the concept of a system-wide network of schools to share best practice within and among SESP schools. A key feature of the network is to identify and address shared education school improvement priorities.

An NSSI Team from within the EA was developed to create a training programme for Cluster Leaders which provided them with the skills necessary to implement JPD. A JPD Toolkit to support the planning, monitoring and evaluating of programmes was co-designed by EA and the Cluster Leaders. This toolkit and the learning from the NSSI initiative will be used to inform future shared education and teacher professional learning provision offered by the EA.

Hub partnership
The Hub partnership is an existing SESP partnership which can demonstrate, through the ETI Framework, that it is highly effective in the delivery of shared education and has the collaborative capacity to support other schools beyond the partnership. The role of the Hub partnership is to support local SESP partnerships to create a cluster, to identify common and complimentary needs and to facilitate Joint Practice Development (JPD) Programmes leading to school improvement and to help

---

4 We are grateful to colleagues from the Education Authority for overseeing the drafting of this glossary
embed shared education. Whilst it is expected that a Hub partnership will be highly effective in terms of its collaborative capacity and ability to deliver shared education outcomes, it is not necessarily the case that all schools within the partnership will be at this level. The role of the Hub partnership is to facilitate collaborative improvement activities, not to be the model of all areas of practice. The Hub partnership will be the main point of contact for the School Development Service when working with the cluster.

**Joint Practice Development (JPD)**
The term Joint Practice Development (JPD) was coined by Fielding et al (2005) in their research into successful schools that had shown high levels of innovation and were heavily involved in transferring practices between schools, either as “Beacon Schools,” as part of an excellence cluster or a collaborative network. The term JPD was used to distinguish this distinctive strand of collaborative Continued Professional Development (CPD) and to indicate a more learner-centred approach and provide a better description both of teachers’ aspirations and their achievements together.

The partnership structure, established as part of the shared education signature project, provides a platform for this approach to professional learning to take place. The relationships developed and enhanced through JPD allow for shared education to be embedded which result in improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people. The transfer of practice is best understood not as the passing on of ‘blocks’ of new practice, or as the abandonment of old practice, but rather as a process in which teachers adapt and incorporate innovations into their existing approaches. JPD as a collaborative process recognizes that each partner has something to offer and is based on the assumption of mutually beneficial learning that involves practice being improved by all partners and not simply moved from one person or place to another.

This facilitation of Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) delivered through JPD programmes has provided a new and innovative model to support professional development and the embedding of shared education across all phases in Northern Ireland.

**NSSI Relationships Diagram**

The Network is constructed by building on existing relationships in schools and between schools involved in SESP. The network is the final element of building school to school relationships at a system-wide scale.

The base unit in the network is an individual school. Next the school enters into a partnership with at least one other school. This partnership may then link with other partnerships to form a cluster. Clusters may then link through hub partnerships who provide co-ordination of activity to the clusters.
At the final level the hubs interact to create a network of schools interacting on a range of different issues and achieving more together than they could achieve on their own as a single school.

**Shared Education Self-Evaluation Framework**

“Developing Shared Education – A Framework for School Partnerships” was developed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in 2014 to guide schools as they designed their Shared Education journey. The document enables partnerships of schools to document and evidence their progress in working together over time. The document can be accessed here: [https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/ETI%20Self-Evaluation%20Framework%20for%20Shared%20Education.PDF](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/ETI%20Self-Evaluation%20Framework%20for%20Shared%20Education.PDF)

**Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) Coordinator**

The SESP Coordinator is the member of staff within a school, which is part of a shared education partnership, who has been given responsibility to lead shared education. Their role involves planning, monitoring, evaluating and promoting shared education. The member of staff collaborates regularly with colleagues from within their partnership schools and is continually in communication with the school leaders. The SESP Coordinator collates evidence of shared activity and can provide the EA with up to date progress.

**Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) Partnership**

The SESP involves 159 partnerships consisting of 371 schools across Northern Ireland. These partnerships consist of 2 or more schools from different sectors which have demonstrated that they are at the developing stage of the ETI Developing Shared Education- A Framework for School Partnerships.
Annex 3: Examples of JPD Programmes undertaken to date through NSSI5

- Middle Leadership - Aspiring Leadership Programme
- Using metacognitive approaches to facilitate independent learning and strategies for promoting explicit teaching of metacognitive approaches
- Effective utilisation of success criteria and exemplar material
- Numeracy Focus: A research-informed enquiry into the most effective use of Bar Modelling as a strategy to support problem-solving.
- Effective strategies for feedback/feedforward
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities within a shared education partnership
- Effective feedback through ‘Using Communication’ (within Creative Writing at KS2)
- SEN- Sensory Needs (nursery/FS),
- Focus on Dyslexia within a Post Primary Setting
- Streamlining schemes to allow time for DIRT (Directed Improvement & Reflection Time)
- Developing a Metacognitive Perspective on Classroom Practice
- Growth Mind-set
- Transition of play/ Activity based learning (FS and KS1)
- Teacher Health and Well-Being
- Thematic Planning KS2
- Trauma in children (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- Effective Interventions for dealing with Low Level Classroom Behaviours (Creating a Nurturing Environment)
- Community Relations and Equality & Diversity (CRED)
- SEN- creating dyslexia / dyscalculia friendly schools
- Activity Based Learning FS/KS1
- Curriculum Development: Geography focus with specific reference to Field Work in a Post Primary context

---

5 We are grateful to colleagues from the Education Authority for supplying this information