

## Shared Education in Practice : Portadown

### MUSIC

Both schools, myself and Hart Memorial take part in an awful lot of initiatives, we have been doing this for like 10 years now and we have a shared school choir and we have a shared school council which have designed a lovely logo and t-shirt that the children would wear during their Shared Education lessons.

The reason we became involved with this is for the children. It's so important that the children become friends in early years and they grow up together their friendships continue into secondary school and into adult life as well.

Today, primary threes' are taking part in a number trail, throughout the number trail the children will be building on problem solving skills and there will be teacher led activities and then the children will be left on their own to go around to problem solve all the different areas. They're developing different numeracy skills but they are doing it together, it's not just their own class it's brought to a wider group of children it's brought to a wider group of children. Children out of a young class may say certain things but out of another classroom you will hear different aspects of how to solve maths problems, ideas of maybe children in the other classroom haven't thought of.

The children benefit an awful lot from Shared Education of course friendship is the main building point of it, their communications, their listening skills their talking skills, all of these things are promoted through our Shared Education lessons and through that we are hoping that they are going home to their parents to talk to each other and to build friendships, meet people from different communities that they have never met before As coordinator where we see the programme going is more of an outreach into the community not just for our pupils in two schools but their parents and families and wider community as a whole.

The parents are part of a shared focus group. They also attend and help out at the lessons at each of the schools, we go to each other's events there's a lot of things that we take for granted when you look back and see the journey we have come we realise that we have made massive steps.

All my three boys have went through the programme, one is currently in the programme at primary three but the two others older children have thoroughly enjoyed it, they've met new friends, they have really enjoyed all of the activities that are on offer. This programme has brought them together into a friendship group where they can work together and really enjoy their friendship together.

I notice a lot of differences on my child, whenever he has this Shared Education lesson. Obviously, he comes home talking about it. The other parents as well we all get together and talk about it and it's really good because apart from all the activities they have together it helps him make friends.

I wanted to join the school council because I wanted an opportunity to make stuff happen for other people and encourage other people to do what they want to.

I learn about how you shouldn't hold a grudge against other people even if they are a bit different than you it doesn't really matter. Each year we are trying to build upon the previous years so we have everybody involved, top down, board of governors meet up at least twice a year.

Our staff meet together for continued professional development opportunities, they train together, and they go to courses together. They share best practice together as well so they plan for their shared lessons at the start of the year and evaluate those lessons at the end of the year. It might be difficult to get people in a room but once that happens and bridges are built and you normalise the relationship then once that happens then who knows where it can take you.

We have a number of children now who young adults and can drop in to see me and will say, I'm still friends you know who was my partner friend in Hart Memorial, the children do talk about their friends that they met in both schools. It's about building relationships and building friendships and making a difference to children's lives now and in the future.

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