

## Laura O'Hare

Teacher, Shimna Integrated College

---

I was a pupil at Shimna Integrated College and now I'm back: I run a cross-community language project with primary schools. Each school gets paired up with one from a different sector, and they meet weekly to learn German or Spanish. We have fourteen schools involved at the moment and two more are keen to join in September. It's incredible how our project has developed – at one point it looked like we wouldn't continue, but the IEF found us more funding.

Recently we got the primary school principals together to talk about possible future collaboration, and at times like that you see how the relationships have been building beyond the language lessons.

The children love meeting up; they get very disappointed if they have a lesson without their partner school. We start by taking them to the YMCA outdoor centre for team-building and ice-breaking and we have found you can foster good relationships from the beginning. It's great when you see it in action; last week I was teaching a partnered class and I divided the pupils into groups. One of the girls wasn't happy and asked if she could swap groups because she wanted to be with her new friend from the other school. I thought that was brilliant!

After the first year we had a "graduation" ceremony and the comments from parents were so positive. So many of them came along to support us and made a point of telling me all the great things they'd heard from the pupils. So now we plan to branch out into the wider community and we are devising a course for parents as well so they can enjoy the experience too.

---

15/20

The IEF helped source continuing support for the Sharing Languages, Sharing Cultures project when the original funding came to an end. The IEF recently granted Shimna IC funds to increase the capacity of its 6th form.

