

# RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee Strategic Area Plan





## RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee

### Strategic Area Plan

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# RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee Strategic Area Plan

## What is the RAISE Programme?

The RAISE Programme is a whole community and place-based approach to tackling educational disadvantage in 18 localities<sup>1</sup> across Northern Ireland, supporting the Department of Education’s vision that “every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding”.

TransformED NI, a Strategy for Educational Excellence in Northern Ireland, outlines the Minister of Education’s priorities in a comprehensive strategy for the transformation of teaching and learning in Northern Ireland. The RAISE Programme is the signature approach to tackling educational disadvantage in this regard and will complement existing school-based programmes.

The RAISE Programme’s Strategic Objectives are:

- Raising achievement and addressing educational disadvantage; and
- Raising aspirations through a whole community approach to education.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**  
Raising **achievement** and addressing educational disadvantage;  
and  
Raising **aspirations** through a whole community approach to education

**RAISING ACHIEVEMENT**

- ✓ Raising standards with a focus on increasing literacy, numeracy and digital skills outcomes for all pupils;
- ✓ Reduce the gap between FSME and non-FSME pupils;
- ✓ Improve pathways for children which motivate and support learners at risk of exclusion, marginalisation and underachievement;
- ✓ Increase opportunities and empower education professionals through professional learning programmes.

**RAISING ASPIRATIONS**

- ✓ Increase the value of education to families and children;
- ✓ Increase pupil attendance, engagement, confidence and aspiration;
- ✓ Increase the proportion of school leavers going to positive destinations;
- ✓ Improve relationships between education settings and children and young people, parents and community;
- ✓ Build capacity within communities and increase collective impact through a whole community approach.

**INTERMEDIARY BENEFITS**

<sup>1</sup> Belfast has been sub divided into four areas.



The RAISE Programme helps to deliver on the mission set by the ‘A Fair Start’ report to ensure all children and young people regardless of background are given the best start in life. It aims to raise educational achievement and aspirations using a combination of Locality-Led Projects and Cross-Cutting Initiatives.

A series of Locality-Led Projects will be identified through an open call to deliver against the objectives and needs set out in the Strategic Area Plan for each RAISE locality. Cross-Cutting Initiatives will complement locality led projects by responding in a strategic way to priorities common to several localities and bringing additional opportunities to communities around key themes.

This bespoke Strategic Area Plan sets out the context for Millisle and Donaghadee and identifies the key issues that underpin educational disadvantage in the area, highlights potential proposals on how to address the identified gaps in provision and support the educational achievement of children and young people in the locality.

This Plan has been developed through a co-design process involving public engagement and creative approaches to give voice to organisations, children and young people and parents in the locality. The Locality Reference Group has played a critical role in informing, shaping and developing this Strategic Area Plan on behalf of the locality. It was produced in accordance with the guidance on the development of a Strategic Area Plan which can be found on the [DE website](#)<sup>2</sup>. This Plan is owned by the locality and the Locality Reference Group.

The Department of Education recognises the commitment of local stakeholders and the Locality Reference Group to this co-design process.

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<sup>2</sup> [Developing a Locality Strategic Area Plan, Department of Education](#)

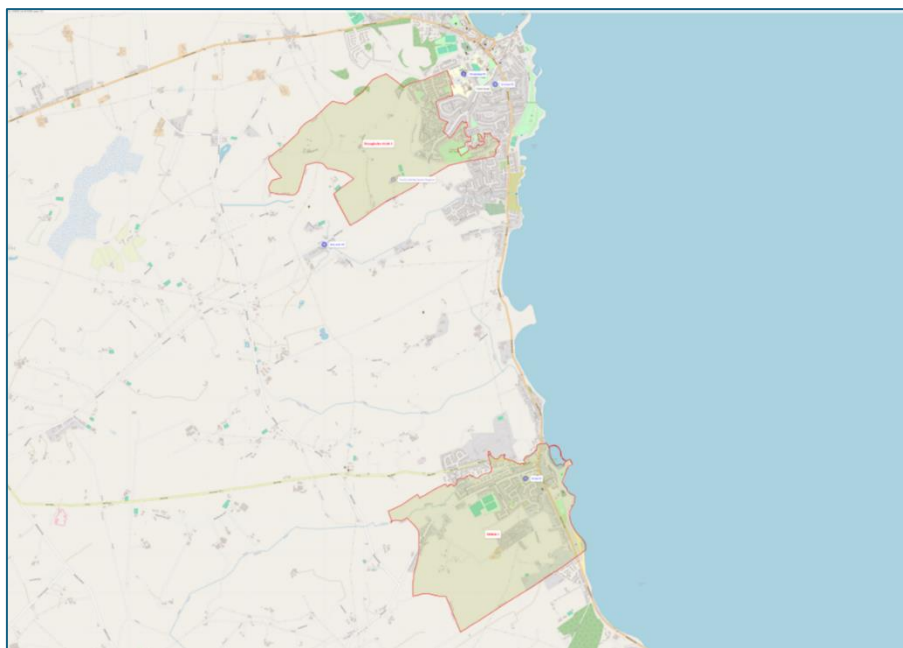


## Introducing the RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee Locality

Millisle and Donaghadee are two areas within the Ards and North Down Council. Established on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, Ards and North Down is one of the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland. As part of the local government reorganisation, the Council was formed through the merging of the former Ards Borough Council and North Down Borough Council and is located on the eastern parts of Northern Ireland. The council is divided into seven District Electoral Areas (DEAs) including Ards Peninsula, Bangor Central, Bangor East and Donaghadee, Bangor West, Comber, Holywood and Clondeboye, and Newtownards.

Millisle and Donaghadee are the focus for the RAISE Programme. Millisle falls under the Ards Peninsula DEA, whilst Donaghadee sits under Bangor East and Donaghadee DEA.

The map shows the Super Output Areas (SOA's) identified are Millisle 1 and Donaghadee South 1.



The population of Ards and North Down in the 2021 census<sup>3</sup> was 164,913 which represents 8.6% of the Northern Ireland population. 45,724 are aged between 0-25 years, which equates to 27.9% of the population and of the 45,724, 51.8% are male and 48.2% are female.

There are 4,160 children and young people (0 – 18 years old) living in the Ards Peninsula and 4,139 children and young people (0 – 18 years old) living in Bangor East and Donaghadee.

<sup>3</sup> [Ards-North-Down-Area-Profile-2025.pdf](#)



There are 605 children and young people enrolled in nursery, primary and post-primary schools in RAISE locality of Millisle and Donaghadee.<sup>4</sup>

**Millisle** is a village on the Ards Peninsula about three miles (4.8 km) south of Donaghadee. Population of Ards Peninsula is 25,410 and Millisle has a population of 2,571 people.

**Donaghadee** is a small town, about 18 miles (29 km) east of Belfast and about six miles (10 km) south east of Bangor. Donaghadee has a population 7,325.<sup>5</sup>

The RAISE Programme has engaged with key stakeholders through over 20 individual meetings as well as: an engagement event with community, schools and other interested stakeholders; consultation workshops with children and young people and parents / carers; a Strategic Area Plan workshop for stakeholders and; a series of meetings of the Locality Reference Group.

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<sup>4</sup> Data source: NI Annual School Census

<sup>5</sup> [2023 Mid-Year Population Estimates for Small Geographical Areas within Northern Ireland | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)



## Key Statistics - Why is the RAISE Programme needed in Millisle and Donaghadee?

The vision for RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee is:

***To create a connected, confident and inclusive community in Millisle and Donaghadee where every child and young person feels valued, supported, and equipped to succeed — in school, in life, and beyond.***

According to School Census data<sup>6</sup>, there are 605 number of pupils enrolled in nursery, primary and post-primary schools in RAISE locality of Millisle and Donaghadee. Of these pupils:

- 44.6% of pupils within the locality are not achieving 5+ GCSEs A-C including English and Maths. The Northern Ireland average is 25.25%.
- 39% of pupils in the RAISE Millisle And Donaghadee locality are in receipt of Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME). This is compared to the Northern Ireland average of 25.9%.
- 16% of pupils have a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) compared to the Northern Ireland average of 8% and 13% are in the SEN Categories 1 and 2, compared with the Northern Ireland average of 11.5%.
- The absence rate is 10.4% well above the Northern Ireland average of 6.6%.
- There are stark differences in attendance for those children and young people with Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) and those who don't. Primary school children receiving FSME are four times more likely to have an attendance rate below 85% and post-primary school pupils receiving FSME are almost three times more likely to have an attendance rate below 85%.

The data contained in the table below relates to the two SOAs identified in Millisle and Donaghadee for RAISE Programme<sup>7</sup>.

<b>Pupil Numbers:</b> (including nursery pupils) 605
<b>Statemented Pupils:</b> 96
<b>Stages 1&amp;2:</b> 78
<b>Total SEN:</b> 174

<sup>6</sup> Data source: NI Annual School Census

<sup>7</sup> Data source: NI Annual School Census and NI Annual Leavers Survey



<b>FSME:</b> 230
<b>Newcomer Pupils:</b> less than 10
<b>Children looked after:</b> less than 10
<b>Irish Traveller:</b> *
<b>Roma:</b> *
<b>% of school leavers Not achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C incl. Eng/Math 2017/18 to 2021/22:</b> 44.6%

\*data suppressed due to fewer than 5 pupils

The Annual Review of Local Assessment of Needs 2024 for Ards & North Down<sup>8</sup> notes that the proportion of children in relative poverty (before housing costs) was estimated to be 24% in 2022/23, which was higher than the estimate of 18% in 2021/22. Children living in absolute poverty rose from 15% to 19%, over the same period.

Based on the evidence provided from the Local Assessment of Need 2023<sup>9</sup>, and feedback Education Authority (EA) Youth Service received from all stakeholder engagement activity to date, the key needs for children and young people in Ards and North Down were identified as follows:

- Educational underachievement, including alternative pathways.
- Mental health, including support around resilience.
- Drugs and alcohol, including addiction and early intervention support.
- Relationships, including education on relationship and sexuality education and child sexual exploitation.
- Health and fitness, including vaping and healthy diet.
- Risk of becoming involved in paramilitary and organised crime activity.
- Good relations, including engaging and building friendships outside typical community backgrounds.

When asked what type of programmes young people wanted Youth Services to provide, they highlighted – skills for life, help with mental health, help with general health, feeling included, and employment and educational training.<sup>10</sup>

Youth Services in Ards and North Down are delivered by a range of diverse groups and organisations, including statutory, voluntary, uniformed and church based, many of which are supported with grants from the EA. These range from rural groups with small memberships to large urban organisations.

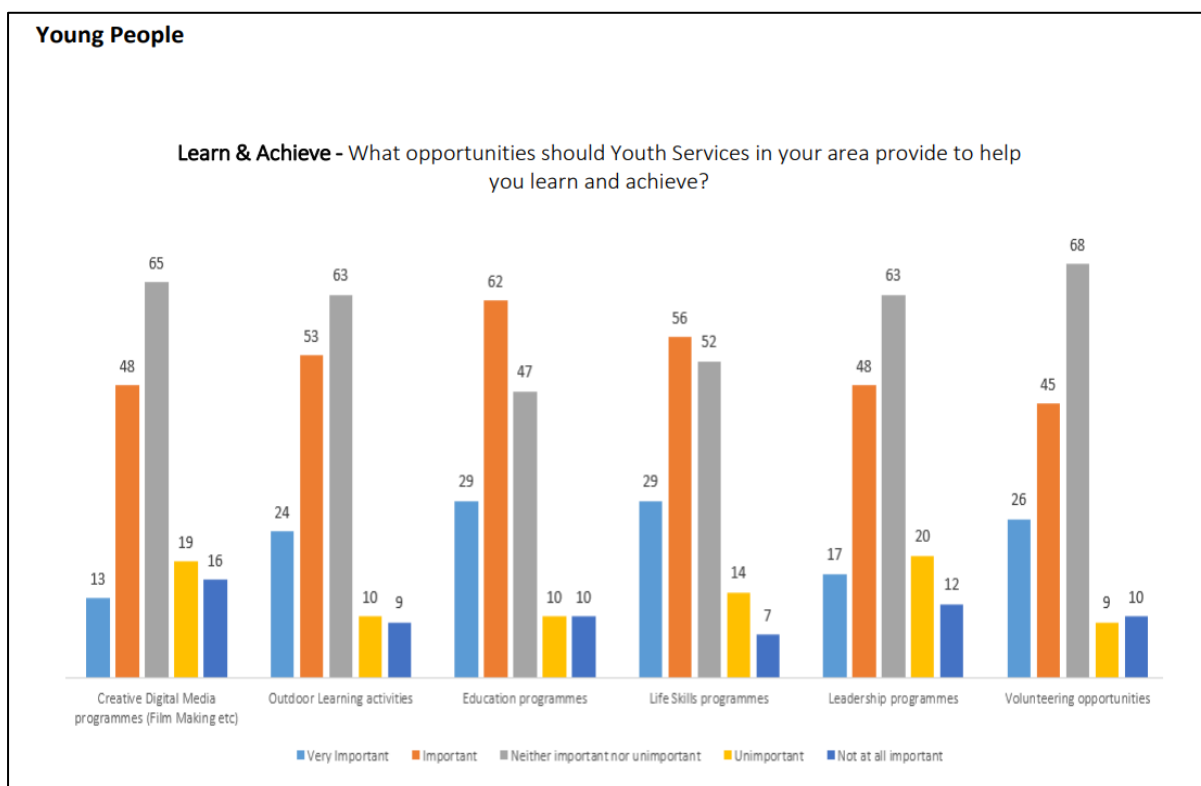
<sup>8</sup> Ards & North Down Area Profile 2025 – EANI Funding

<sup>9</sup> Local Assessment of Need – EANI Funding (Local Assessment of Need Ards and North Down Area 2023)

<sup>10</sup> Local Assessment of Need – EANI Funding (EA Youth Service Local Assessment of Need Ards and North Down Area 2023)



The table below highlights the value placed on educational opportunities by young people as all areas were ranked as 'important'.<sup>11</sup>



According to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) data, 58% of the population in Ards Peninsula A1 (Millisle) are economically inactive and 45% in Bangor East and Donaghadee.<sup>12</sup>

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and South Eastern Area Outcomes Group priorities for 2025-2028<sup>13</sup> have been identified as follows:

- Early intervention/early help family support for all;
- Early intervention mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- School disruption; and
- Poverty/cost of living.

<sup>11</sup> [Local Assessment of Need – EANI Funding \(Local Assessment of Need Ards and North Down Area 2023\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Bangor East and Donaghadee Census Data](#)

<sup>13</sup> [SEAOG – Action Plan – Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership \(CYPSP\)](#)



## Existing Collaboration and Complementary Investment

Financial support is currently provided for the delivery of several interventions in the Millisle and Donaghadee areas. For example, Ards and North Down Council delivers annual summer schemes. These camps take place for two weeks in Donaghadee where up to 50 children aged 5 – 11 years attend. Millisle Youth Forum host two Summer Schemes for up to 50 children which are volunteer driven with financial support from the council for activities.

Labour Market Partnership within Council also offers a range of opportunities for the local communities to either upskill or support with getting employment including a range of academies such as Classroom Assistant Upskilling Academy ; Work Ready Programme; Admin/ Business Services Programme; Academy for People with Disabilities; Transport Academy; SIA Academy (Security Industry Authority); Classroom Employability Academy; Childminding Academy; Childcare Academy and Employer Led Upskilling Programme. This list is not exhaustive. In terms of capital investment, there are plans submitted to upgrade the Lagoon area of Beach Park in Millisle, but these have not been passed as yet, and funding will be an issue.

There is one Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) in Ards and North Down, which is in Bangor and this does not cover the RAISE locality of Millisle and Donaghadee.

SureStart only covers part of the RAISE locality of Millisle and Donaghadee covering Donaghadee South 1 in the Ards Peninsula area. It does not cover Millisle 1.

Ards & North Down Strategic Community Planning Partnership have devised ‘The Big Plan for Ards and North Down’<sup>14</sup>, which will look at key priorities they would like to achieve by 2032. These include that all people in Ards and North Down benefit from:

- opportunities to fulfil their lifelong potential;
- being equipped to enjoy good health and wellbeing;
- communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure;
- a prosperous and inclusive economy; and
- an environment that is valued, well-managed and accessible

The Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) provides the overarching framework for strategic planning and coordination of services for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>14</sup> [The Big Plan for Ards and North Down - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)



Within this structure, the South Eastern Area Outcomes Group operates at a regional level to identify and address key priorities across the South Eastern area. Beneath this, Locality Planning Groups function at a community level to ensure local needs and voices are reflected in planning and delivery. They focus on developing and supporting multi-agency early intervention approaches, improving outcomes for children, young people and families at a local level. There is also a focus on how service delivery organisations can engage more effectively with each other to better understand local issues and to work together to produce more effective responses to those issues. This tiered approach supports collaboration, shared responsibility, and evidence-informed planning across all levels.

### **Community Collaborations**

Current collaborations are strong between:

- Millisle Youth Forum and Millisle Primary School
- Donaghadee Youth for Christ and Donaghadee Community Development Association
- County Down Rural Community Network and Ards Community Network
- Community Policing teams, with good interagency connections.

### **Ards Peninsula Extended School Cluster**

Ards Peninsula Extended School Cluster consists of : Millisle PS (lead school), Ballywalter PS, Portavogie PS, Grey Abbey PS, and Portaferry Integrated PS.

Millisle PS also works with Kircubbin IPS, West Winds PS and St Mary's Portaferry within Aspire Shared Education project.

### **North Down & Ards Area Learning Community**

Post primary schools who serve a number of pupils from the identified SOAs work together including Strangford Integrated College, Glastry College and Bangor Academy.

**Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP)** – part of community and culture supports the delivery of the following programmes, working with young people aged 11 – 18 years:

- Donaghadee Youth for Christ: PCSP Small Grants funding for drop-in project addressing ASB, healthy relationships, preventative workshops on alcohol, vaping, drugs, and looking after your mental health.
- North Down & Ards Women's Aid: End Violence Against Women & Girls (EVAWG) \* funding for Education & Awareness Raising programme, working in schools across the borough.
- Lisburn YMCA: EVAWG funding for Healthy Relationships programme in post-primary schools across the borough



- Lisburn YMCA: PCSP funding to deliver Drugs & Alcohol Early Intervention Training in post-primary schools across the borough.
- Additionally, Council Community Safety Team have been funded for a Youth Education Programme to address ASB, and this will be delivered in areas of need.

\* Ards & North Down Borough Council are exploring the possibility of how to further support primary school children in relation to EVAWAG.

There is currently ongoing investment within the locality focussed on tackling educational disadvantage, removing barriers to learning and to support access to educational opportunities. This includes:

- Bangor SureStart - Sure Start only covers part of the RAISE locality of Millisle and Donaghadee covering Donaghadee South 1 in the Ards Peninsula area. It does not cover Millisle 1.
- Department of Education (DE) funding for the SENCo Implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016. Killard House School, Millisle PS and Donaghadee PS have been able to benefit from this funding. Also provides Extended Schools Cluster funding.
- Skills for Life and Work (SfLW) - with the aim to provide vocational education and training programme for young people aged 16–17 who have left school with low or no qualifications. All Council areas were able to avail of this.
- Department of Health (DoH) funding for capacity building programmes.
- Department for the Economy (DfE) for Higher Level Apprenticeship which offers participants the opportunity to gain qualifications from Level 4 to Level 7 (masters degree) and gain the skills that employers need and are relevant to the local economy, therefore improving the prospects of good earning and sustained employment.
- DfE also fund the ApprenticeshipsNI which offers participants who are school leaver age and above (16+) the opportunity to gain qualifications at Level 2 (GCSE Equivalent) and 3 (A Level equivalent) in a range of occupational areas.
- PEACEPLUS Youth Programme which supports young people aged 14-24, who are not in education training or employment to improve their capabilities across a range of outcome areas such as good relations, personal development, citizenship and employability, enabling them to progress to education, training programmes or employment.
- Regional Colleges deliver programmes across the province. These programmes are delivered by South Eastern Regional College (SERC) which supports young people from RAISE locality of Millisle and Donaghadee.

**Other investment includes:**

- EA's SEN Early Years Inclusion Service – expansion of EA service to provide regional support to early years settings - funded under 'A Fair Start'.



- Special Olympics Ulster – cross departmental support for individuals with intellectual disability to take part in sporting opportunities.
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) Language Launchpad 2024/25 to increase training and to create resources to support children’s speech, language and communication development.
- Pre-school Education Inclusion Support Fund (PSEISF) for pre-school settings with children undergoing statutory assessment of their educational needs provision.



## Needs Analysis

### Views of Children and Young People

The RAISE Programme are using the Lundy Model of Participation<sup>15</sup>. This rights-based framework ensured that children and young people were provided with a safe and inclusive space to express their views, were supported to develop and articulate their voice, had their views actively listened to by an audience with the power to act, and saw their input have genuine influence on the development of the Strategic Area Plan.

Stranmillis University College Centre for Research in Educational Under-Achievement (CREU) through the RAISE OPEN Future Workshop consulted with a group of young students aged 12-16 from Killard House Special School located in Donaghadee. The group consisted of two girls and five boys, all of whom are members of the school council. The participants represented a range of local areas, including Donaghadee, Bangor, Portavogie, and Millisle.

This workshop provided valuable insights into the experiences, aspirations, and challenges of young people in Special School education. Through role play, art, and open discussions, the young experts shared both their appreciation for their communities and schools, and their perspectives on areas for improvement. Throughout the session, the young experts were incredibly positive and enthusiastic about their school, and emphasised that overall, they felt that their needs were recognised, understood, and well-supported. The young experts expressed genuine enjoyment in being part of a school where they felt valued and respected.

Their feedback also highlights the importance of friendships, engaging learning experiences, and meaningful academic challenges. While they greatly appreciated the support they receive, they also identified areas where the school environment could be enhanced further, particularly in terms of facilities, equipment, and resources that better cater to their specific needs. They emphasised the need for improved school facilities, expanded opportunities for socialising and work experience, and greater access to resources that support both learning and wellbeing.

Stranmillis University College CREU also engaged with 30 young people aged between 10-11 years from the Millisle area. The young people here provided valuable insights into their community, education, and aspirations, highlighting both strengths and challenges. While they expressed pride in their hometown and recognised its unique assets, they also voiced concerns about limited opportunities, lack of social spaces, and educational

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<sup>15</sup> [Enabling the meaningful participation of children and young people globally: The Lundy Model | Research | Queen's University Belfast](#)



barriers. Their perspectives on school were particularly striking, revealing a mix of appreciation for friendships and supportive teachers alongside frustrations with workload, discipline, and perceived inequalities.

Their aspirations reflected a hopeful yet realistic outlook on the future, acknowledging both ambition and the challenges of adulthood. Importantly, the young experts identified key barriers to their learning, including stress, negative peer influences, mental health struggles, a lack of resources, and proposed solutions to address these issues. Their priorities emphasised the need for improved support systems, increased investment in mental health and well-being, and more inclusive and engaging learning environments.

In addition, the Locality Co-ordinator carried out an engagement session with 13 young people (Years 7–14) in Millisle Youth Forum. The session focused on their experiences, education, and future aspirations.

In terms of community life, the young people enjoy local features like the beach/lagoon, football, and supportive community. They expressed a desire for more local activities, such as a junior football team and more youth forums. In terms of education, they would like a more practical curriculum, better support for medical conditions, and improved communication with teachers. Limited local opportunities and A-level subject choices were seen as barriers.

These young people highlighted the following support needs – the importance of life skills education such as setting up a bank account, job expectations, mock interview support, communication skills, entrepreneurship, and workplace behaviour. They also suggested more revision support outside school, including tutoring and study clubs.

With regards to aspirations the young people shared diverse career goals including law, education, trades, healthcare, the military, sports, and university studies. They emphasised the need for support and resources to help them reach these goals. In total 50 young people aged 10-16 years old were consulted as part of this process from the community and voluntary youth sector and school sector.

## Views of Parents and Carers

Parenting Focus held parental engagement sessions in Donaghadee and Millisle to explore the perspectives of families on what they perceive to be the barriers preventing our children and young people from ‘being happy, learning and succeeding’. While there were small numbers attendance in Donaghadee, the discussion was insightful and complemented by broader parental input from the Millisle area.



In Donaghadee, parents emphasised the need for greater investment in communities to foster belonging, inclusion, and holistic support for children. A key theme was the protection of funding for early intervention services, particularly in mental health, which parents felt was increasingly under threat. There was a strong desire to revive the principle of “it takes a village to raise a child”, highlighting the importance of collaboration between schools, families, and community organisations. Parents felt that schools often operate separately from the wider community and expressed a desire for schools to become more inclusive, accessible spaces that host events, provide wraparound support, and offer leadership opportunities to pupils. Communication was also a concern, with inconsistent and sometimes exclusive methods (e.g. private social media groups) limiting parent involvement. Parents reported feeling excluded from decision-making processes and called for a more open and responsive approach from school leadership. Financial barriers to extracurricular opportunities, limited free local provision, and concern over children’s mental health were recurring issues. Overall, parents called for stronger school-community connections and more meaningful, practical support to help them fulfil their role in their child’s development.

In Millisle, ten parents attended the session and shared a range of views on the challenges and opportunities around supporting their children’s education. Parents stressed the importance of encouragement at home, positive routines, and consistency between school and family expectations. While many parents valued tools like school communication apps, they also expressed a need for clearer information about teaching methods to help them support learning at home. Barriers such as time constraints, unfamiliarity with school approaches, and lack of access to peer support were identified.

Parents suggested the development of informal parent sessions and peer networks within schools to build confidence and community. Larger class sizes and the cost or timing of after-school activities were additional concerns. To improve engagement, parents proposed more structured induction for new families, regular opportunities for feedback, and a genuine open-door approach that encourages dialogue with school staff. Suggestions also included hosting community events, improving access to school libraries, and offering “Skills Days” where parents and professionals share their experiences to inspire children and connect learning to the real world. Parents were clear in their desire for more inclusive, practical, and community-led approaches to education that support both children’s academic progress and their broader wellbeing.

In addition to the above, non-attendance has been identified as a significant barrier and cannot be attributed to any single cause, but rather it is the result of a complex range of factors impacting attendance and participation across the localities.



Parenting Focus also carried out a parent survey. 25 parents / carers from Millisle and Donaghadee responded from each education sector (12% early years, 72% primary and 64% post-primary). 36% of parents / carers who responded to the survey had neurodiverse children and 60% of respondents specified 'other' in relation to a particular group their children belonged to that may need additional support.

A total of 64% of respondents had had not difficulty with attendance, 36% had children who experienced school related anxiety and 20% school avoidance / refusal. The main barriers to their children engaging in learning were lack of confidence / motivation, anxiety or emotional distress and additional learning needs.

Extra support with reading skills, GCSE English and Maths (older pupils), speech, language and communication and accessing the curriculum were the areas in which parents / carers believed their children needed extra support. Creative approaches to learning outside of school was the most popular additional learning support followed by targeted small group learning, learning through play youth work mentors and afterschool and breakfast clubs. 24% of parents / carers responded that their child would also benefit from more support in managing their behaviour in post primary school and at home. In relation to support for themselves, parents / carers most popular response was for support with emotional regulation, then signposting to other services and improved communication with school.

## Gaps in provision

The RAISE Programme has carried out a comprehensive process of stakeholder engagement, including meetings, workshops, and consultations with service providers, schools, young people, and families. Most services for children, young people and families in Millisle and Donaghadee are statutory, with additional support provided by local volunteers and a small number of community organisations. There is limited infrastructure of existing collaborations. Some of the key gaps identified throughout the engagement:

- 1. Lack of local Early Years support**
- 2. Academic support and structures**
- 3. Limited pathways for Vocational Training and Real-Life Skills development**
- 4. Absence of a dedicated role to coordinate services and community sectors**
- 5. Non-attendance**



## Emerging Priorities

**Emerging Priority – To strengthen the relationships between schools, families, young people, and the wider community.**

There has been consistent acknowledgement from the outset of engagement in Millisle and Donaghadee that the community infrastructure in the area is limited. Despite a number of volunteer-led active groups, community/voluntary organisations and service providers operating in the area, there is no single local point of coordination. Stakeholders report that services often operate in isolation reducing efficiency and limiting the impact of interventions.

A central coordinating function could greatly enhance collaboration, improve referral pathways, and strengthen strategic alignment across sectors. It was identified by the Locality Reference Group that schools feel they are not aware of the range of relevant statutory or community/voluntary provision, particularly for children, young people and families who are in need of services and improved connections as a high priority. Parents also identified the need for better co-ordination and communication between themselves, schools and community. There is an opportunity for the RAISE Programme to build capacity and strengthen relationships between education and other sectors to leave a legacy in this locality.

**Emerging Priority - Out-of-school community based learning and study support to improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 2 and 4 pupils.**

44.6% of pupils within the locality are not achieving 5+ GCSEs A-C including English and Maths. The Northern Ireland average is 25.25%<sup>16</sup>. According to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) data, 58% of the population in Ards Peninsula A1 (Millisle) are economically inactive and 45% in Bangor East and Donaghadee.<sup>17</sup>

Young people at post primary level identified the challenges for them in accessing supported spaces for study and revision after school partly due to distance travelled between school and home. They wanted to have spaces where they could work independently or with peers with the support of adults.

Opportunities for primary age children to continue learning outside of school are needed in this locality. Parents identified a need for more community-based opportunities to support their children's learning. The outdoor environment in Millisle & Donaghadee

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<sup>16</sup> NI Annual Leavers Survey

<sup>17</sup> [Bangor East and Donaghadee Census Data](#)



provides the potential for outdoor learning and play-based learning, with a focus on key literacy and numeracy skills. Family learning sessions can engage parents in learning through games and interactive activities that could be continued at home.

### Emerging Priority - In-school small group learning support programmes to improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils.

School leaders recognised the effectiveness of the previous Department of Education Engage Programme and are keen to combine in-school teacher-led literacy and numeracy support with out-of-school community-based learning opportunities. Both parents and practitioners highlight a significant lack of structured academic support outside of school, particularly for pupils struggling or without support at home.

Millisle Primary School and Donaghdee Primary School leaders recognise that some pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, from the RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee locality, identified by PTE/PTM/CAT4 data are under achieving.

While informal help exists in some areas, there is a clear need for out of school learning support and small-group interventions to close learning gaps and build learner confidence.

A critical gap exists in numeracy support. Unlike literacy, there is no dedicated EA numeracy intervention service. Though online resources are helpful, they cannot replace skilled, in-person intervention. Access to trained staff, either EA specialists or trained school personnel is essential for early and effective Maths support.

### Emerging Priority – Attendance at post-primary level

Whilst there are services in place to support children and young people not attending school, there is a lack of coordinated, targeted interventions specifically aimed at addressing the complex factors contributing to poor attendance at post primary level. This gap in provision limits the ability to effectively support those most at risk of disengaging from education and highlights the need for a more collaborative approach.

There are many varied reasons as to why a young person's attendance is not as expected including mental health and wellbeing and difficulties in accessing learning opportunities. There are also particular challenges in the RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee locality due to the number of post-primary schools that young people attend and the distance travelled daily.



Example data from one post primary school in the Millisle and Donaghadee RAISE locality shows that average attendance for Year 8 – 11 at approximately 82%. This includes school refusers. Attendance drops significantly from 96.5% in Year 8 to 75% in Year 12.

Schools identify the need for community-based collaboration and parental support to reinforce the school's approach to encourage and reward consistent attendance. A particular focus on working with young people 'pre-referral stage', in relation to their attendance, would be an effective target group for the RAISE Programme.



## Summary of Key Needs Identified

The table below provides a summary of the key needs identified in Millisle and Donaghadee. Further detail is provided in the RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee Strategic Area Plan Strategic Objectives section.

Priority Ranking	Objective
1.	<b>Strengthen relationships between children and young people, schools, families and the wider community</b> through a School / Community Coordinator role delivered by a community / voluntary organisation working closely with schools.
2.	<b>Improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 pupils</b> by providing out-of-school community-based learning and study support.
3.	<b>Improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils</b> through in-school small group learning support programmes.
4.	<b>Provide clearer pathways to post-primary opportunities</b> – careers, further & higher education & aspirations.



## Next Steps

To deliver against the objectives and identified needs set out in this Strategic Area Plan a series of Locality-Led Projects will be identified through an open call for projects. Project proposals are invited from a wide range of organisations. Further information is available in guidance notes on the [DE website](#)<sup>18</sup>.

Organisations will submit a Locality-Led Project Identification Template for consideration by an Assessment Panel against agreed assessment criteria. Decisions on the range of projects to be supported in each Locality will be taken by the RAISE Programme Board.

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<sup>18</sup> [RAISE Locality-Led Projects](#)



RAISE Millisle and Donaghadee Strategic Area Plan Objectives						
Objective	Rationale	Measures	Who will benefit?	Scale of Support	Potential Solutions	Priority / Ranking
<b>OBJECTIVE 1: Strengthen relationships between children and young people, schools, families and the wider community</b>						
<p><b>To strengthen the relationships between children and young people, schools, families and the wider community in</b> through a School / Community Coordinator role delivered by a community / voluntary organisation working closely with schools.</p> <p>Focus on a community-wide approach to addressing attendance at post-primary.</p> <p>Targets to be achieved between January 2026 – August 2027.</p> <p><b>Lead RAISE Intermediary Benefits</b> Improve relationships between education settings and children and young people, parents and community.</p>	<p><b>Keys need identified through Strategic Area Plan.</b> There is a lack of established infrastructure in the locality. This objective will ensure a sustainable legacy through improved connections, shared learning and knowledge, parental support and community / school links.</p> <p>Links with existing services such as Family Support Hub, Education Welfare Service and other statutory support services will be critical to support this objective.</p> <p>This will build stronger relationships and increase community engagement through a whole-community approach and increased capacity building.</p>	<p>Families engaged with report improved connection with education settings and improvements in outcomes after accessing services .</p> <p>Children and young people engaged with reporting improvements in outcomes after accessing services.</p> <p>Community stakeholders/school staff engaged with reporting improved relationships with other sectors.</p> <p>Improvements in attendance of post-primary pupils from the Millisle &amp; Donaghadee areas Awareness of community campaign to improve attendance.</p>	<p>All families, children and young people from SOA of Millisle 1 and Donaghadee South 1.</p>	<p>Up to 120 families supported (25% to be targeted relating to attendance).</p> <p>Up to 120 community stakeholders and school staff</p> <p>Up to 100 parents and community stakeholders.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that a possible approach to fulfilling this objective could include: School/Community Coordinator for special, primary and post primary schools and community stakeholders.</p> <p>The role would not involve service delivery. The role would be to liaise between home and school, signpost to existing services, support other RAISE activities in the area and facilitate shared learning between families, community and schools.</p> <p>There would also be a focus on linking with post-primary schools to develop a community campaign approach to improving attendance.</p> <p>The role could provide a locality legacy through shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge: Needs and gap analysis.</li> <li>• Information (including relevant data): Development a local directory of relevant support services.</li> <li>• Learning: Linking with in-school and out-of-school learning support to ensure connectivity and smooth pathways for pupils and families to support services.</li> <li>• Organising community engagement events, aspiration building workshops for children and young people and training sessions for community stakeholders and school staff.</li> </ul>	<p>1. (High)</p>



					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure: schools learning from each other through issue focused Area Learning Communities activities, with a concentration on those pupils with an 85-90% attendance rate.</li> <li>• Campaigning: use the knowledge, information, learning and infrastructure for partnership working to continue to improve attendance.</li> </ul>	
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**OBJECTIVE 2: Improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 pupils**

<p><b>To improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 pupils</b> by providing out-of-school community-based learning and study support.</p> <p>Targets to be achieved between January 2026 – August 2027.</p> <p><b>Lead RAISE Intermediary Benefit</b> Raising standards with a focus on increasing literacy, numeracy and digital skills outcomes for all pupils.</p>	<p><b>Academic achievement data</b> 44.58% (NI% 25.25%) percentage of leavers who did not achieve 5+ GCSE A*-C include English and Maths 2017/18 -2021/22.</p> <p><b>Key need identified through Strategic Area Plan</b> Out of school learning and Study Support: Learning sessions and study support for primary pupils and their parents and post primary pupils (especially for those completing GCSEs) in wider community settings.</p>	<p>Numbers of pupils attending sessions Parent engagement in family learning sessions.</p> <p>Pupils and parents reporting that the learning club/study support has had a positive impact on confidence, school engagement and attainment.</p> <p>Regular review and monitoring to be carried out to ensure learning sessions are effective. Alterations/adjustments to be made to ensure effectiveness.</p>	<p>Pupils in Key Stage 2 and 4 from SOA of Millisle 1 and Donaghadee South 1, particularly those children on FSME identified by PTE/PTM/CAT4 data as under achieving.</p>	<p>Up to 100 Key Stage 2 pupils.</p> <p>Up to 30 Key Stage 4 pupils.</p> <p>Up to 100 parents.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that a possible approach to fulfilling this objective could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out of school learning clubs/sessions delivered by organisations specialising in outdoor/creative arts / play-based/interactive learning using inclusive learning techniques, with a key literacy and numeracy skills focus, supported by local volunteers.</li> <li>• Learning delivered in outdoor settings, using local assets such as beaches and green spaces for family learning activities.</li> <li>• Establishing regular out-of-school learning sessions (one in each area / primary and post primary) in local community venues, with additional learning enrichment opportunities, working with local schools to align with literacy, numeracy and digital skills priorities.</li> <li>• Working with post primary schools to offer tailored support.</li> <li>• Engaging parents in family learning sessions regarding support they require and how to support their child learning at home.</li> </ul>	<p>2. (High)</p>
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**OBJECTIVE 3: Improve to improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils**

<p><b>To improve to improve literacy and numeracy skills for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils</b> through in-school small group learning support programmes.</p> <p>Targets to be achieved between January 2026 – August 2027.</p> <p><b>Lead RAISE Intermediary Benefit</b> Raising standards with a focus on increasing literacy, numeracy and digital skills outcomes for all pupils.</p>	<p>Academic achievement data 44.6% of pupils within the locality are not achieving 5+ GCSEs A-C including English and Maths NI Average is 25.25%.</p> <p>Key gap identified through Strategic Area Plan Significant lack of structured academic support outside of school, particularly for pupils struggling or without support at home. While informal help exists in some areas, there is a clear need for out of school learning support and small-group interventions to close learning gaps and build learner confidence. A critical gap exists in numeracy support.</p>	<p>Agreed improvement in PTE/PTM/CAT4 data.</p> <p>Regular review and monitoring to be carried out to ensure programme are effective.</p> <p>Alterations / adjustments to be made to ensure effectiveness.</p>	<p>Pupils in Key Stage 1 from SOA of Millisle 1 and Donaghadee South 1, identified by PTE/PTM/CAT4 particularly those children on FSME data as under achieving.</p>	<p>Up to 120 pupils.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that a possible approach to fulfilling this objective could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-school small group learning support programmes delivered by teachers in each of the two local primary schools.</li> <li>• Teacher(s) identified by the respective schools.</li> <li>• Strong working relationship with feeder post primary schools by June 2026 to enable effective data-sharing for those pupils transitioning from P7 to year 8.</li> </ul>	<p>3. (High)</p>
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**OBJECTIVE 4: Provide clearer pathways to post primary opportunities**

<p><b>Transitions/Improving pathways</b> – careers, further &amp; higher education &amp; aspirations.</p> <p>Targets to be achieved between January 2026 – August 2027.</p> <p><b>Lead RAISE Intermediary Benefit</b> Improve pathways for children which motivate and support learners at risk of exclusion, marginalization and underachievement.</p>	<p>Opportunities for young people to engage in vocational education, apprenticeships, or hands-on skills training are limited in the locality. This decreases post-school options, particularly for those not pursuing traditional academic routes, and contributes to a sense of disconnection from future employment prospects.</p>	<p>80% of participating pupils reporting increased confidence about their next educational stage.</p> <p>75% of parents reporting improved understanding of transitions, career pathways, and post-school options.</p>	<p>Those pupils who are transitioning post16+.</p> <p>Children and young people from both SOA will benefit.</p> <p>Pupils from Killard House Special School.</p>	<p>Up to 200 pupils.</p> <p>Up to 50 parents / carers.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that a possible approach to fulfilling this objective could include: To support successful transitions and raise aspirations among children and young people in Millisle &amp; Donaghadee by improving access to career guidance, highlighting further/higher education opportunities, and clear post-16 pathways over the next two years.</p> <p>Implement structured transition support programmes in at least 6 schools, including Killard House Special School.</p>	<p>4. (Medium)</p>
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