

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Education

THE RAISE PROGRAMME

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Mr Givan (Minister of Education): This statement sets out a package of measures to raise achievement to reduce educational disadvantage.

Within these measures the primary intervention is the introduction of a whole community approach to education to raise achievement to reduce educational disadvantage, titled the RAISE programme. Also included is a programme of creative arts in schools and teacher research exchange. Together, these elements provide a comprehensive package of investment to target the causes and consequences of educational disadvantage.

I am committed to delivering better outcomes for all children and young people across our society. The recent report by the Independent Review of Education Panel emphasised the importance of investing in education to support a more prosperous, harmonious, happier, and healthier society. It explains that education is the greatest investment any society can make in its own future.

The report highlighted the various types of educational disadvantage in Northern Ireland. These include socio-economic barriers; a gender gap (particularly for working class boys); and challenges facing vulnerable learners which included those who have experienced time in care, minority groups, and Special Educational Needs (SEN) learners. More can and should be done to close the attainment gap and address the wide range of barriers to learning that many children and young people face.

The Fair Start report published in 2021 by an Expert Panel examined the link between educational underachievement and socio-economic background. Its goals included drawing up an Action Plan for change to “ensure all children and young people, regardless of background are given the best start in life”. The Panel advocated that addressing educational underachievement “means placing equality of opportunity at the core of everything we do”.

Today's announcement seeks to address a key element of its action plan by promoting a whole community approach to education. Investing in communities and families in the most disadvantaged areas through place-based partnerships. Improving outcomes for all children and young people, from cradle to career, ensuring every child is happy, learning and succeeding.

The RAISE programme will invest in place-based approaches to raise achievement to reduce educational disadvantage; to enhance whole community-based partnerships which will offer a fair start for every child and young person regardless of background.

Today I am announcing 15 localities in which the programme will operate. In each of these areas a bespoke strategic plan will be developed by schools and other settings, families/carers, and communities, employers and other delivery partners. Collaboration enabled by these plans will build on good practice, test innovative approaches and identify and enhance pathways which promote equality of opportunity for those at risk of exclusion, marginalisation and under-achievement.

While the RAISE Programme will be the primary focus of the package of measures, the community-informed interventions established under RAISE will be complemented and supported by a range of cross-cutting strategic interventions delivered on a regional basis and by two further programmes; one relating to creative arts in schools and one relating to teacher research exchange. These two programmes emanate from the Republic of Ireland and are being made available to schools in Northern Ireland for the first time. There will be significant learning opportunities for educational professionals in both countries to benefit from the learning from the overall package of programmes.

This investment is possible through funding I have secured through the Shared Island Fund. Funding of £20 million pounds is available for 2 years with a potential extension for a further 2 years. The majority of the funding (£17 million pounds) is earmarked for the RAISE programme. This will enable this important new programme to be created and will implement one of the key recommendations of "A Fair Start".

The overall investment will put children and young people at the centre of a place-based approach to education. This will allow communities to consider the specific challenges their young people face and bring forward programmes to address these issues that hinder them in their learning and prevent them from fully enjoying all the benefits that education can bring. This may include ways to improve school attendance, support emotional health and well-being, promote literacy and numeracy, strengthen links with employers – such interventions will be community informed for the benefit of the learner.

At the heart of this approach is the concept that education extends beyond the school gates. With that in mind, my Department will wish to work collaboratively with colleagues in health, justice, communities, economy and others to maximise the impact of the investment and this model of delivery.

This is an ambitious programme of work and an innovative approach to education delivery. It is one that recognises that our most vulnerable learners face a range of

barriers and need wrap around care and support to support their readiness to learn and allow them to thrive in education. There are already excellent examples of schools working in partnership with families, community organisations, youth services and others to meet the holistic needs of their pupils. I want to expand on that approach and test new ideas and concepts that can develop a vital evidence-base for this important work, lead the way in innovative practice and inform policy across Northern Ireland for the benefit of our children and young people.