IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION

Date and Time:- **Tuesday 10 February 2026 at 10.00 a.m.**

Venue:- **Rotherham Town Hall, The Crofts, Moorgate Street, Rotherham. S60 2TH**

Membership:- **Councillors Monk (Chair), Brent (Vice-Chair), Adair, Blackham, Bower, Clarke, T. Collingham, Elliott, Fisher, Garnett, Harper, Hughes, Ismail, Pitchley, Reynolds, Ryalls, Sutton, Ms. L. Hickey, Mr. M. Hemmingway and Mr. J. Newman.**

This meeting will be webcast live and will be available to view via the Council's website. The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details**.**

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 2nd December, 2025 (Pages 3 - 9)

To consider and approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2nd December, 2025 as a true and correct record of the proceedings and to be signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

4. Exclusion of the Press and Public

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

5. Questions from Members of the Public and the Press

To receive questions relating to items of business on the agenda from members of the public or press who are present at the meeting.

6. Corporate Parenting Partnership Board Update

To receive a verbal update from the Vice-Chair following the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board meeting held on 3rd February, 2026.

7. Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Short Inspection November 2025 (Pages 10 - 44)

To receive and note the outcome of the Ofsted inspection regarding the effectiveness of Children's Services in Rotherham and endorse the priorities identified for continued focus.

8. Educational Attainment Update (Pages 45 - 62)

To receive a comprehensive overview of Education and Inclusion performance in Rotherham for the 2024/25 academic year with highlights where outcomes are improving and where concerted action is required It frames performance through the lens of improving life chances, tackling inequalities (disadvantage, SEND and ethnicity), and strengthening inclusion across the system.

9. Work Programme (Pages 63 - 66)

To consider and approve the Commission's Work Programme.

10. Improving Lives Select Commission - Sub and Project Group Updates

For the Chair/Project Group Leads to provide an update on the activity regarding sub and project groups of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

11. Urgent Business

To consider any item(s) the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

The next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission will be held on Tuesday 17 March 2026 commencing at 10.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 2 December 2025

Present:- Councillor Monk (in the Chair); Councillors Adair, Blackham, Bower, Brent, Clarke, Elliott, Garnett, Harper, Hughes, Pitchley, Reynolds, Sutton and Ms. L. Hickey (Co-optee).

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors T. Collingham, Fisher, Ismail, Mr. M. Hemmingway and Mr. J. Newman (Co-optees).

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 4TH NOVEMBER, 2025

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th November, 2025.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 4th November, 2025 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to report.

21. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for Minute No. 41 (Fostering Transformation Programme incorporating the Children's and Young Peoples Services Prevention of Future Death Reports) as defined in Paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual).

22. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

23. FOSTERING TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (INCORPORATING PREVENTION OF FUTURE DEATHS REPORT)

Consideration was given to the report which sought to address the need to review the current Fostering Programme in the light of changing sufficiency needs for children and young people in care in Rotherham. This incorporated the response of the Council to the tragic death of Marcia Grant and the formal Prevention of Future Deaths' report following the inquest in July 2025.

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, introduced the report highlighting how foster carers played a vital role in keeping children safe and helping them thrive. Their contribution was deeply valued by all, but sadly a foster carer, Marcia Grant, tragically died in the spring of 2023. Heartfelt condolences were again expressed to Marcia's family and to acknowledge the incredible work she did for the service and for Rotherham's children.

An inquest into her death took place in July this year, during which the Council was asked to address three key issues:-

1. How the Council could ensure there were enough placements available.
2. How the Council could manage the forms within the placement process.
3. How the Council could improve overall risk assessment in relation to placement decisions.

Nicola Curley, Strategic Director, outlined how the Council had responded to the Preventing Future Deaths report and how the Council had provided a detailed response. The Fostering Transformation Board would take the points forward to ensure lessons were learned and improvements continued.

By way of a presentation (included within the agenda documentation) the Strategic Director highlighted:-

- Fostering Overview.
- Fostering Transformation Board.
- Incident of Concerns.
- Findings and Prevention of Future Deaths Report.
- Action Taken in 2023.
- Action Taken from 3rd September, 2025.
- Next Steps.

Details were shared of the Learning Academy, serving the whole of Children's Services which was currently reviewing the training offer related to risk assessments. This included how risk assessments were managed, documented, and recorded. The updated training would be made available to all staff, as it was relevant not only to fostering but also to children's social work.

A discussion and a question-and-answer session ensued and the following were raised and clarified:-

- Reassurance that lessons have been learned.

- Action to increase foster carers against balancing those retiring and whilst none were lost to other fostering providers, recruitment efforts

meant numbers were being maintained rather than losing ground.

- The service had a dedicated team that actively monitored and projected numbers, looked at where improvements could be made with encouragement initiatives in place for anyone interested.

- Rotherham was successful compared to many other areas, but what is needed is a strong middle-age group of carers. This is being addressed and will hopefully improve over time.

- Need for reassurance that processes around seeking emergency placements were not compromised by end of day requests and the challenges facing placement capacity.

- Unregulated provision required senior sign off and a clear hierarchy for decision-making with robust mechanisms in place. The fostering service push back if there were placement concerns. This means that foster carers say they feel valued and respected in these processes.

- Balancing the needs of children and carers and involvement in matching decisions.

- The need for clear supervision and checks to ensure there were no outstanding tasks or gaps and for inclusion of supervision to be included in the action plan.

- Specific details shared that contributed to the unfortunate death of Marcia Grant which were picked up by the Assistant Coroner and whether had these been known earlier would this have led to a different decision around placement.

- Clarification provided on where collaboration and co-production started and finished in terms of the Fostering Transformation Board, the membership and the mechanisms of reporting into this overarching meeting.

- Request for an update to be brought back to Improving Lives following evaluation of the Fostering Transformation Plan and how this was going to be taken forward.

- Demographic changes in the population and how this could be adapted for the Fostering Service and any barriers removed.

- High level of promotion and activity for the approaches used to attract potential foster carers.

- Monitoring of the progress of the Fostering Transformation Plan and embracing best practice.

- Value of foster carers and the high regard from the service.

- Quality of handovers to foster carers and the ongoing work looking at detailed planning to support best possible matching in future

- System changes and the actions now being taken to embed individualised referral forms and processes.

- Assurance auditing and oversight by the Cabinet Member to shape practice.

- Sharing of best practice and liaison with other Local Authorities. Suggestion of a further seminar highlighting the importance of the role of Members as Corporate Parents.

The Chair advised of the need to consider the confidential Fostering Transformation Plan. In private session a discussion ensued on the contents and a number of points were made around:-

- Methodical communication and record keeping thus reducing risk.
- Confidence in improved oversight and reporting lines.
- Support for staff
- Review of areas of practice following Assistant Coroner's decision.
- Defined broader learning easily disseminated.

The Chair formally thanked officers for their attendance, the frank and instructive questioning by the Improving Lives Select Commission Members and to the other Members of the Council that took time to attend.

Resolved:- (1) That the Preventing Futures Deaths' response sent to the Assistant Coroner be noted.

(2) That the Fostering Transformation Action Plan created in response to the wider issues in relation to fostering sufficiency and actions required from the Preventing Future Deaths' report be supported.

(3) That an update report on the progress of the Transformation Action Plan be brought back to a future meeting in due course.

(4) That a Members' Seminar be arranged highlighting the role of Elected Members as Corporate Parents.

24. THE ROTHERHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORT 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the contents of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Assurance Report 2024/25 which provided

an update on the key partnership activity during the year, based on the strategic priorities. The impact of the work against these priorities was to be demonstrated alongside a summary of any activity by the key partner agencies.

This report also covered what the partnership had done as a result of the arrangements, including Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member, Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding, Practice and Supportive Services and Darren Downs, Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Independent Scrutineer.

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, introduced the report highlighting how everyone had worked together to keep children and young people safe in Rotherham.

By way of a presentation (included within the agenda documentation) the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Independent Scrutineer highlighted:-

- Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- Statutory Safeguarding Partners.
- Rotherham SCP Governance.
- Inspection of Partner Agencies.
- Progress against Strategic Priorities.

The Strategic Director was pleased to add that Darren Downs, Independent Scrutineer and Chair, was praised for his effective leadership. While many authorities have moved away from independent chairs and scrutiny, Rotherham had chosen to retain this position, which was reflected in the high quality of work.

Furthermore, this added to the work with the Chief Executive in fulfilling additional responsibilities across South Yorkshire as the Council's Lead Safeguarding Partner, following recent changes in the Working Together guidance. The collaboration was described as helpful and productive. Notable improvements included progress in the Vulnerable children in Education group and efforts around neglect, highlighted by a successful neglect conference during Safeguarding Awareness Week.

The Cabinet Member also reiterated that just to add an extra layer of assurance she met with the Safeguarding Partnership every three to six months.

A discussion and a question-and-answer session ensued and the following were raised and clarified:-

- Delivery of training and consistent approach to improving attendance.

- Number of home interviews offered for young people missing from home and return stood at 91.5% with the take up sitting at 84%.
- Consistency of approach by officers and keeping track through the various meetings.
- Communication and assurances provided to parents, carers and young people about the potential risk of online harm with the increase of enabled devices especially around this time of year with gifts.

The Chair thanked officers for their informative presentation and contributions.

Resolved:- That the update on the RSCP Annual Assurance Report 2024-25 be received and the contents noted.

25. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited consideration of the Improving Lives Select Commission's Work Programme. Since the last meeting the following was now noted:-

- Arrangements were in hand for a dedicated workshop session to review the Thresholds of Need document as part of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy.
- Children's Capital of Culture Workshop - Impact and Legacy for Children and Young People to be arranged late March/early April, 2026.
- Workshop confirmed relating to the support available for women who have had one or more child removed following cessation of PAUSE Project to be held on Monday, 2nd March, 2026 at 2.30 p.m. at the Town Hall.
- A slight change of agenda items for the February, 2026 meeting. The agenda would now include the recent Ofsted Inspection Report Outcome and Educational Attainment Update.
- The SACRE Annual Report (for information) would move to March, 2026 along with the Children Not in School Update and Community Cohesion Projects Update.
- Notice of an agenda item coming to the Health Select Commission on 22nd January, 2026 relating to the Safeguarding Adults Board Strategic Plan which also includes the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report. An invitation had been extended to include any interested Improving Lives Select Commission Members commencing at the earlier start time of 4.00 p.m.

Resolved:- That the updated Work Programme for 2025/26 be approved.

26. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - SUB AND PROJECT GROUP UPDATES

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity.

It was confirmed that the review into the impact of secondary school policies on school attendance levels, ensuring an education for vulnerable children and/or trauma experienced children and how this impacted the Council's broader duties of safeguarding and school attendance had now begun to progress with some questions being prepared for circulation to secondary schools.

Once responses have been received the review would be moved forward.

Resolved:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

27. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

Public Report
Improving Lives Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Improving Lives Select Commission – 19 January 2026

Report Title
Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Short Inspection November 2025

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?
No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report
Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)
Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services
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Ward(s) Affected
Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report is to advise Improving Lives Select Commission (ILSC) of the outcome of the Inspection of Children's Services (ILACS) by Ofsted in November 2025. This was a judgement Short Inspection, and the Local Authority received an Overall Effectiveness grade of Outstanding. All sub-categories also received a grade of Outstanding with the exception of 'the experiences and progress of Care Leavers', which received a Good. There are two improvement actions, both related to Care Leavers.

Recommendations

That ILSC note the outcome of the inspection regarding the effectiveness of children's services in Rotherham and endorse the priorities identified for continued focus.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council local authority children's services 3 to 7 November 2025

Background Papers
Framework for Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services, Ofsted, August 2025

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
n/a

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Short Inspection November 2025

1. Background

1.1 Children's Services across the country are subject to regular inspections by Ofsted in a variety of formats. The main vehicle for evaluating the overall effectiveness of the delivery of social care services is via the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). These judgement inspections take place approximately once every three years. Rotherham's last judgement inspection was in June 2022, when it received an overall rating of Good. When a Local Authority is Good or above, its next inspection is designated a short Inspection – this means one that takes place over a two week period.

1.2 Since Rotherham's last ILACS, Ofsted has added a new judgement category around care leavers and there are now four areas of scrutiny:

- Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
- Experiences and progress of children in care
- Experiences and progress of care leavers
- Impact of Leaders on social work practice with children and families.

culminating in an Overall Effectiveness judgement.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The ILACS had been anticipated for some time and was announced on 27 October 2025. Significant offsite work took place in that first week, including interviews with the Lead Member, the Chief Executive and the Independent Chair of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

2.2 Fieldwork took place in the second week with 10 Inspectors interviewing staff from all parts of the Service (Family Help, Front Door, Duty and Assessment, Locality, Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering, Adoption, Education services, and Commissioning) and reviewing significant numbers of children's files. Children and young people were also interviewed by the Inspectors and gave their views about services provided by the Council.

2.3 A final report was published by Ofsted on 16 December 2025. It was extremely pleasing to be judged Outstanding across 3 of the 4 categories, with an **Overall Effectiveness Judgement of Outstanding.** The impact of leaders on social work practice, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and the experiences and progress of children in care were all rated Outstanding. The experiences and progress of care leavers was rated Good.

2.4 The report stated that:

Progress is evident across all areas of social work practice.

Children in need of help and protection, and those in care, now benefit from an outstanding service delivered by a stable, highly skilled workforce. Practitioners know their children well, advocate fiercely for them, and build relationships that promote safety and belonging. Further investment in the early help and family help model is enabling more children to remain safely within their family networks with timely, targeted support that is making a measurable difference to their lives.

Decisive action has been taken to strengthen pathway planning, embed relational support, and promote opportunities for safe independence when care leavers are ready.

The voice of children is now a defining strength of the service.

2.5 Inspectors found that the Council placed children's experiences and voices at the heart of decision-making and practice, recognising a strong culture of learning, continuous improvement and cross-organisational commitment to children and families.

2.6 This outcome reflects years of dedicated work by social workers, practitioners, leaders and partners across Rotherham to improve services, rebuild trust and keep children safe and supported. While this recognition is significant for the Council and the borough, it is important to emphasise that improvement is a continuing journey and that there is still work to do, as evidenced in the actions required in relation to Care Leavers.

2.7 This achievement places Rotherham among an elite group of just nine local authorities in England to hold both an Outstanding ILACS rating – the highest possible judgement under Ofsted's *Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services* framework – and the top Area SEND outcome, which assesses how effectively councils support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. It is the only council in the Yorkshire and Humber region to achieve this combination.

2.8 Ofsted highlighted a number of strengths across services, including:

- **Children's voices are central to assessment,** planning and support, with lived experience actively shaping services. This includes initiatives such as the Children in Care Council, 'In Care Voice' group, and 'Look Ahead' for care leavers, as well as outreach programmes, SEND sufficiency planning, and increasing placements within the borough. Young inspectors and young journalists also play a key role in holding services to account and improving practice.

- **Leadership impact is strong,** with clear vision, stable management, and robust corporate and political backing, *reflecting sustained and visible council-wide commitment to placing children at the heart of strategic decision-making since the last inspection.*

- **Children who need help and protection** receive timely, effective support, and risk is managed well.

- **Children vulnerable to exploitation** “receive a highly effective service from Evolve, the specialist exploitation team”. Multi-agency work is strong and the relational approach increases safeguarding of children.

- **Children in care experience stability**, feel listened to and are supported to achieve their ambitions.

- **A culture of reflective practice, learning** and sharing good practice is embedded across teams.

2.9 The inspection also recognised the Council’s approach to workforce engagement, which meant staff felt valued, proud to work for Rotherham, and inspired to deliver the very best for children, young people, and families.

2.10 **Plans for Care Leavers**

Although services to Care Leavers were judged Good, there were also two improvement actions in relation to this area of practice:

- The quality of pathway plans for care leavers
- The quality of health history information provided to care leavers

2.11 These areas of practice will form part of the Care Leaver Service Delivery Plan, and updates will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board at regular intervals. The improvement actions will also be scrutinised formally by the Improving Lives Select Commission.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 That ILSC note the outcome of the inspection regarding the effectiveness of children’s services in Rotherham and endorse the priorities identified for continued focus.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 There was no consultation on this report as it is an external document.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The Strategic Director will be accountable for ensuring all actions are undertaken to address the improvement actions stated in the report. These will be complete by September 2026.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no procurement or financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The legal basis for a Chief Inspector to inspect the overall performance of a local authority is under section 136 of Education and Inspections Act 2006. This focusses on how effectively local authorities undertake various functions toward children in care and care experienced young people under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 as referenced under section 135 of the Act. The outcome of the report under section 137 is noted as outstanding overall with improvement action points required to care leavers services.

7.2 By virtue of section 3 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007, the local authority must provide a written statement of action which they propose to take in light of the report. In view of this, there are no legal implications by following the recommendation at 3.1.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 Human resources will continue to provide advice and support the Directorate with workforce issues.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The Ofsted report demonstrates significant progress since the last inspection in 2022. It highlights improved practice across the service impacting positively on children and their families. The report recognises how children's voice has helped shape service delivery.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 There are no direct implications outlined in this report.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are no direct implications outlined in this report.

11.2 There is no anticipated carbon impact associated with the report and its recommendations: a carbon impact from attendance at bimonthly delivery meetings is assessed to be negligible, as most meetings are hosted online. Improving outcomes for children in need of help and protection may have benefits for their resilience to climate change, in the longer-term.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 It is recognised that achieving an outstanding grade for the effectiveness of children's services requires effective joint working with internal and external partners. The inspection report demonstrates strong collaboration between partners is underpinning the work to achieve better outcomes, especially for vulnerable children.

12.2 Ofsted highlighted a "cross-organisational commitment to children and families" as central to the borough's success. Ofsted praised the Evolve exploitation team, part of a broader multi-agency model, for delivering trauma-informed support to vulnerable children.

12.3 The inspection noted that children's voices are integrated into all assessment, planning, and support processes.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The Children and Young People's Service Directorate Leadership Team oversee delivery of children's services through Performance Management, Assurance and Change Management boards. The identification of risks and the mitigations will be managed through these governance arrangements.

14. Accountable Officers

Nicola Curley, Strategic Director, Children & Young People's Service

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Name	Date
The Executive Director with responsibility for this report	Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services	12/01/26
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Cusworth	15/01/26

Report Author: Nicola Curley, Strategic Director, Children & Young People's Service
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This report is published on the Council's website.

Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 November 2025

Lead inspector: Catherine Heron, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	**Grade**
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Since the last inspection in 2022, services for children, young people and families in Rotherham have improved further, driven by a confident leadership team with strong corporate and political backing. This united commitment has placed children's experiences and their voices at the heart of strategic improvement. Progress is evident across all areas of social work practice.

Children in need of help and protection, and those in care, now benefit from an outstanding service delivered by a stable, highly skilled workforce. Practitioners know their children well, advocate fiercely for them, and build relationships that promote safety and belonging. Further investment in the early help and family help model is enabling more children to remain safely within their family networks with timely, targeted support that is making a measurable difference to their lives.

Senior leaders' ambition for their care leavers has grown significantly. Decisive action has been taken to strengthen pathway planning, embed relational support, and promote opportunities for safe independence when care leavers are ready. While some variability remains, the leadership team is actively addressing this, ensuring

that every young person is well prepared and supported for adulthood and where every decision is made with their futures in mind.

What needs to improve?[1]

- The quality of pathway plans for care leavers. (Outcome 4, national framework)
- The quality of health history information provided to care leavers. (Outcome 4, national framework)

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: outstanding

1. Children requiring help and protection benefit from a wide range of services delivered through well-established and well-coordinated family help hubs. These hubs provide a continuum of support from pregnancy, through adolescence and beyond, ensuring that children and their families receive timely, targeted early help to prevent escalation of risk and need. The rapid allocation of early help workers is providing swift interventions and support where it is needed. Assessments are thorough, child focused and grounded in the experiences and voices of children and families. Creative early help workers build on the strengths of families, helping to increase their resilience, recognising parents and carers' natural talents and positive attributes. Workers connect families and their network to services at the earliest opportunity, leading to co-produced plans that reflect family goals.

2. When children's needs change and risk increases, effective relationships between family help hubs and statutory services ensure that children receive the right services at the right time. Family help workers and social workers support the child and family to understand what is happening and navigate the next steps. When it is safe to step down from statutory services, this happens thoughtfully and is reflective of the level of need and parental agreement. Children and families can reconnect with professionals they know and trust in the family help hubs.

3. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides a timely, proportionate and child-focused response to safeguarding concerns. Professionals across agencies demonstrate a strong understanding of intervention thresholds. MASH social workers triage contacts robustly and act swiftly to protect children at risk of harm and those in greater need. Clear communication between agencies helps to build the fullest picture of the child's lived experience. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Social workers sensitively consult children's parents when it is safe to do. Experienced and skilled managers provide robust oversight at all decision-

[1] The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the Children's Social Care: National Framework. This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

making points. Children's records show decisive management guidance, enabling social workers to explore information with confidence and clarity. This results in timely and effective initial screening that supports children to receive the right help and at the right time.

4. The MASH baby clinic plays a vital role in the early identification and safeguarding of unborn babies. Thorough multi-agency information-sharing, supported by informed parental consent, ensures that coordinated safeguarding measures are in place before the child is born. Timely allocation of assessments to highly skilled practitioners ensures that risk factors are identified, including disguised compliance, with a clear analysis of the impact on the child. Pre-birth assessments are of excellent quality. They are family led, historically informed and thoroughly consider parental capacity.

5. The out-of-hours team provides a robust and responsive service when children need help and protection outside normal working hours, including weekends. Joint working between the out-of-hours team, daytime team and other agencies is strong.

6. Social workers develop meaningful relationships with children, including disabled children, using a range of tools to engage them in direct work. Workers from the disabled children's service have accessed a wide variety of training to support them to communicate with this group of children in formats such as Makaton and British Sign Language.

7. Social work assessments of children's needs are of consistently high quality. Assessments are detailed, analytical and underpinned by the child's voice. Each child's unique needs and risks are clearly identified, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Family history is fully explored by professionally curious social workers, who involve family networks in safety planning. While risk is well recognised, assessment tools are not consistently used to support analysis. This is mitigated by robust management oversight, which objectively reviews assessment quality, recommendations and proposed next steps.

8. When a safeguarding response is required, strategy meetings are held promptly and are very well attended by police and other agency professionals. Child protection enquiries are thorough and lead to well-coordinated responses where the child's vulnerability and voice are central to decision-making and planning. When child protection conferences are required, these are timely and result in effective information-sharing forums, which involve parents and children's extended family members. Partner agencies consistently engage and contribute to coordinated multi-agency planning that is child centred and needs led. Conference chairs oversee and review child protection plans effectively.

9. Children's plans, including those for disabled children, are developed alongside families, using restorative practice that empowers them, so they are central to decision-making and support plans. Core group meetings are held regularly and

involve relevant family members and professionals. This helps identify changing need and ensures coordinated responses that help make and sustain changes so that children's circumstances improve.

10. Children who are missing from education or who are electively home educated are promptly identified through robust support and effective safeguarding systems. Engagement with children and families fosters a positive working relationship and ensures that parents have information to make informed decisions about their child's education, and, when possible, supports children to get back into full-time education.

11. Children at risk of going missing from home and being exploited receive a highly effective service from Evolve, the specialist exploitation team. Children are routinely offered timely return home interviews, enabling professionals to understand the reasons for children going missing, and to inform safety and trigger plans for children. When concerns are escalating, multi-agency child exploitation meetings are convened promptly to share intelligence and coordinate disruption strategies. Comprehensive exploitation risk assessments are completed by social workers and inform multi-agency interventions. Children receive support from knowledgeable, skilled practitioners who build trusting relationships through consistent, trauma-informed engagement. This relational approach increases children's confidence in trusted adults, enabling disclosure and strengthening protective factors.

12. When risks to children persist despite intervention, the Public Law Outline process is initiated effectively to improve children's circumstances and avoid unnecessary escalation to court. Parental engagement is meaningful, helping parents to understand the seriousness of concerns and what needs to improve. Additional assessments are undertaken, including of extended family members as potential carers, ensuring that all safe and sustainable options to improve children's situations and keep them within their families are explored. Senior leaders robustly track children's experiences during pre-proceedings, ensuring that decision-making remains timely, proportionate and focused on the child's best interests. For some children, this improves their situation, so they are diverted away from legal proceedings.

13. Children are supported to remain at home or within their family and friends network when it is safe to do so. The Engage team provides bespoke practical and emotional family support to help achieve this, using a relational approach alongside other social care interventions. Evidence-based programmes and community resources engage families and empower them to make sustained change.

14. Since the last inspection, the local authority designated officer (LADO) service has strengthened. Allegation screening and allegation management meetings are thorough and timely, with a clear focus on safeguarding children and vulnerable

people. Awareness of the LADO role across external agencies and engagement with the service have increased, resulting in improved relationships.

15. Children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless are listened to and taken seriously, with professionals responding quickly and respectfully. Their safety is prioritised and, where appropriate, efforts are made to help them remain within their family network, when this is safe and in their best interests. Children are informed of their rights, including the option to enter care, and this is reflected in their records even if advocacy offers are not always explicitly documented. Children receive intensive, practical support, whether moving into accommodation or reconnecting with family, and this support continues for as long as necessary.

16. Children who are privately fostered benefit from a timely, child-centred safeguarding response that ensures that their needs are understood, their voices are heard, and their well-being is actively promoted. The child's voice, parental consent and the views of all involved parties are central to the assessment process, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and well informed. Child in need plans are meaningful and reviewed regularly, ensuring that the arrangement remains suitable and that the child continues to make progress.

17. There has been a strong focus on the identification of young carers since the last inspection, which has significantly strengthened the assessment and support of young carers, ensuring that their unique needs are recognised and addressed in a timely, child-focused way. Children benefit from a range of targeted practical and emotional interventions that give them time away from caring responsibilities and space to be children. For those already receiving support from children's social care, their carer-related needs are now fully integrated into existing plans, including early help, ensuring a joined-up and holistic approach.

The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding

18. Children move into care only when it is no longer safe for them to remain at home, and this decision is made with very careful consideration of their individual needs, safety and long-term well-being. Family and friends networks have usually already been explored by social workers, who recognise the importance of maintaining safe and familiar relationships and cultural identity. Where kinship carers have already been identified through network mapping and strong relational work, this often means suitability assessments are already complete. This enables children to move into safe and known environments even in an emergency.

19. When kinship carers are not a viable option, alternatives such as foster care and residential care are carefully and sensitively explored by social workers. Wherever possible, these decisions are made with the fullest understanding of what is known about the child at the time of the decision for the child to come into care. Sometimes, it is not always possible to secure the most appropriate placement for

a child immediately, particularly in urgent or complex situations. This results in a small number of children having short-term placements.

20. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have undertaken a wholescale review and transformation of their sufficiency strategy. Fostering and residential services have been reset and rebuilt and are now providing a more resilient and responsive range of placements to meet children's needs. This has successfully increased the availability of local homes for children, reduced unplanned moves and increased placement stability.

21. Social workers carefully and sensitively assess children's needs to help them identify suitable homes that can best meet the child's needs. Managers and senior leaders oversee key decision points for children to come into care and ensure that moves are well coordinated and, when possible, thoughtfully planned. A range of permanence options are explored as soon as children enter care, and their progress is monitored through highly effective panels and planning meetings that result in timely decision-making for children.

22. There is a strong focus on providing a secure family life for a child within kinship arrangements while they grow up and beyond. Concentrated efforts support kinship carers to become special guardians at the earliest opportunity if this is the right plan for the child. Applications to court are timely and high-quality evidence informs court decisions for children. Special guardian support plans are detailed and promote the stability of these arrangements.

23. Most children, including disabled children in care and those living outside the borough, live in stable homes, allowing them to form trusting and consistent relationships with those who care for them. On the rare occasions when a registered home is unavailable, a very small number of children live in unregistered children's homes for the shortest period. The arrangements are meticulously monitored and subject to weekly senior management oversight and scrutiny. The quality assurance (QA) mechanisms of these arrangements are further strengthened by the commissioning service, which carries out visits to settings and engages providers in applying to register with Ofsted. The very small number of children in these placements receive a high frequency of visits and multi-agency support to continually assess their safety and care.

24. Since the last inspection, the fostering service has been strengthened, which has prioritised stability for children and improved training and support for foster carers. The comprehensive training offer provides foster carers with a wide range of training and learning events, including needs-led therapeutic approaches from the Empower team, which is an in-house therapeutic service. There is strong management oversight across the fostering service from team managers to the assistant director level, providing senior leaders with a clear line of sight to children and carers' experiences. Fostering recruitment plans are ambitious and underpinned by strengthened governance through the new Fostering Transformation Board.

25. Fostering and kinship assessments are of high quality, with strengths and vulnerabilities proportionately weighted. Assessments are timely and occasional delays are purposeful to ensure thorough information-gathering and analysis. Foster carers report positive, respectful and well-informed assessment experiences and are well prepared for panel.

26. Care is taken to ensure that homes are suitable for children and meet their needs well so that children make progress from their starting points. There is a strong emphasis on children living as close to their communities as possible, when it is safe to do so. Therefore, when children live out of the area or in children's residential homes, for the majority this is according to their assessed needs.

27. Children return home when it is in their best interests. Decisions are well considered, involving relevant professionals and family and based on assessments that are underpinned by evidence. Planning ensures that families continue to receive support when the child leaves care and includes safety planning, so families know how to respond if they experience challenges or difficulties.

28. Early permanence is secured for children through a plan for adoption supported by robust assessments when it is in the children's best interests. Concurrent planning explores all viable options so that decisions for children are timely and well considered. The matching process is thoughtful, focused on the suitability of the match and takes into consideration children's individual needs as well as their need to live with brothers and sisters. Introductions for children with their adoptive parents are well managed. This helps children settle with their permanent family.

29. The strong working relationship between the local authority and the regional adoption agency helps to ensure that the needs of local children with a plan of adoption are met. There is a clear recruitment strategy in place to increase the number of adopters approved by the agency. The assessment, training and support of adopters is robust. High-quality preparation training supports prospective adopters to fully understand the varied needs of children who need adoptive families and prepares them well for a child joining their family.

30. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are well supported by committed social workers who are sensitive to their cultural needs and their previous experiences. Social workers strive to match children with carers who are culturally aware and able to support children to access appropriate resources within their community.

31. Children's plans are child centred and individual and well informed by thorough assessments that highlight children's wishes and feelings. Children are actively encouraged to participate in their reviews with other important people. Creative approaches by social workers, such as using board games, engage children so they feel confident to express their views and influence their care decisions. Review recommendations are clear and aspirational for children. Letters to

children after reviews from independent reviewing officers (IROs) are child centred and warm in tone, providing poignant messages that celebrate the child's achievements and progress and help them to understand their plan.

32. Children receive timely and responsive support for their health and emotional well-being wherever they live. Health assessments, dental and optician checks are arranged promptly and sensitively, helping children feel cared for and prioritised. The Empower therapeutic team provides consultations for professionals and children's carers to help them respond with empathy and insight to children's mental health needs, and provides bespoke therapy directly to children when necessary.

33. IROs champion children's rights and engage children and ensure that children's voices are heard and respected. Children have meaningful relationships with their IROs. Many have known their IROs for several years, resulting in IROs having a deep understanding of the child and their unique history. IROs keep in touch with children's social workers about children's progress and the impact of their care planning, which creates a solid foundation of support to children.

34. Children are visited regularly by skilled social workers, who have the time to purposefully engage with them. Social workers are professionally curious and interested in their children's progress and safety. They build positive relationships with those who matter most to children and involve them in planning and decision-making, but always with the child's voice front and centre. They undertake high-quality direct work with children that aligns with the child's interests and understanding. Workers convey important information about the child's history and the reasons for decisions in a nurturing and sensitive way.

35. Children are supported to keep in touch with important people in their lives. Family time assessments are well written and consider risks and family vulnerabilities, strengths and children's views. Assessments influence child-focused family plans that are flexible and involve professionals being present only when necessary to keep children safe. Social workers' meaningful collaboration with parents, despite complex challenges, increases parental engagement and helps children to maintain important bonds and links to their personal identity, past and present.

36. Children are supported and motivated to achieve their educational aspirations. Collaborative work between teams across the organisation ensures that children are supported to achieve academically. The virtual school is very well led by experienced leaders, who are supported by committed and skilled staff who deliver a range of targeted support to children in care and their schools. The voice of the child, attendance targets and aspirational goals are consistently reflected in personal education plans. As a result, children make positive progress from their starting points, and most children remain in education, employment or training after Year 11.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

37. Children in care are allocated a personal adviser (PA) well in advance of them leaving care or reaching their 18th birthday. PAs consistently attend children's care planning meetings and carry out joint visits with the child's social worker, contributing to children's care planning. This arrangement allows children to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with workers who will continue to support and befriend them into adulthood.

38. PAs are genuinely interested in their care leavers' well-being and progress. PAs have a detailed knowledge of young people's needs and histories and are persistent in making sure that young people receive the right levels of visiting and help that meets their individual needs. Consequently, care leavers are confident in asking for help and reassurance when needed. All the care leavers who inspectors spoke with were incredibly positive about their PA and the support they have received.

39. PAs promote a culture of keeping in touch with their care leavers and this is reflected in the high numbers of care leavers in contact. PAs use a range of methods to engage with young people, including via home visit, text message, phone call or voice note. When young people reach 21, their support needs are reviewed, and young people are consulted on whether they wish to continue to receive support. These conversations are well recorded. For young people who opt out, they are reminded through a minimum of annual contact that they can return for support when they need it.

40. Pathway assessments and plans include the practical steps and support that young people need, but they are very long, and young people do not find them a useful document. Leaders have already recognised this and consultation with young people has resulted in a revised format so that plans have a greater impact and value.

41. The 'Journey' hub is a valued and well-resourced centre for care leavers to access a range of services from multi-agency professionals, such as housing, virtual school and health. Activities in the hub provide young people with a safe space, opportunity to connect with others, spend time with their PA or use facilities such as the kitchen and washing machines. This serves as a significant part of the keeping in touch service for care leavers and increases the likelihood that they will access support when they need it.

42. Care leavers live in suitable accommodation. Young people who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe where they live. There is a range of housing options, but leaders recognise that more work is needed to increase sufficiency further to provide care leavers with even more choice. Some young people have access to independent flats that help them to develop the skills needed to manage their own tenancies. If successful, these flats become their 'forever home'. Some care leavers choose to remain living with foster carers in 'staying

put' arrangements. Their living circumstances are encouraged, supported and regularly reviewed through pathway planning.

43. Care leavers in Rotherham benefit from council tax exemption and have priority status when applying for local council housing. Leaders are advocating for their care leavers by actively engaging with other regional areas to improve reciprocal arrangements so that young people who live out of borough have the same rights and entitlements to housing and council tax exemption.

44. Care leavers' physical and emotional health needs are well considered. Care leavers are supported to register and access universal services alongside engaging in the health drop-in sessions with a named nurse at the Journey hub. Care leavers are not routinely receiving their health history document or reminded how to access this information. Talking therapies are promptly offered to care leavers struggling with emotional needs or experiencing periods of mental ill health. Young people also have full access to the local authority employee assistance programme. This enables young people to have choice on where they access help.

45. Care leavers are encouraged to access education and career opportunities and reach their potential. Care leavers spoke highly of the virtual school and the practical and emotional support that they receive to access employment, education and training. Care leavers are provided with information about their rights and entitlements and are aware of the local offer. Leaders are ambitious to continue to strengthen the offer according to care leavers' needs and wishes.

46. PAs' work with highly vulnerable care leavers focuses on reducing risks and encouraging change. Risks associated with drugs and alcohol misuse and harmful relationships are recognised effectively. PAs engage with multi-agency networks to provide wraparound support to young people and increase their safety, understanding the young person's behaviour in the context of past trauma. PAs talk openly to young people about worries, while remaining respectful and acknowledging that change cannot be forced. Instead, PAs are persistent and regularly remind young people that they care about them and are available to provide support when they are ready.

47. Care leavers in custody receive an effective response. PAs are sensitive to young people's individual needs. They show them empathy and are persistent when encouraging young people to stay in touch and access support. Workers make regular visits and recognise young people's need for connection to their community, for example sending them local newspapers. PAs contribute to young people's resettlement plans in preparation for young people's release.

48. Care leavers who are seeking asylum are well supported in Rotherham. PAs understand the unique needs of this group of young people and ensure that their plans meet their needs.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: outstanding

49. Since the last inspection in 2022, there has been sustained and visible council-wide commitment to placing children at the heart of strategic decision-making in Rotherham. Across party political leadership and senior management, children's social care is recognised as a core responsibility, with a shared ambition to improve outcomes for children and families. There is a strong and embedded commitment to corporate parenting and the rights of children and young people, underpinned by a strategic vision that translates into tangible action. Sustained investment and ambitious planning have enabled development across children's services, including in sufficiency of homes for children.

50. The dedicated Strategic Director has established and nurtured a confident children's services leadership team that remains highly effective and strategically focused, providing consistent direction and oversight across children's services. Transitions for new leaders have been carefully managed to strengthen leadership while ensuring continuity and minimal disruption to service delivery.

51. The voice of children is now a defining strength of the service, reflecting a significant and sustained improvement since the last inspection. This progress has been driven by strong, visible leadership that empowers staff to place children at the heart of everything they do. Senior leaders have aligned systems and expectations so that children's views are consistently captured, respected and used to shape both individual care plans and wider service development. The redesign of the corporate parenting partnership board creates meaningful opportunities for children to hold leaders to account alongside groups such as the 'In Care Voice' (children in care group) and 'Look Ahead' (care leavers group), young inspectors and young journalists, who also have real impact.

52. Professional relationships across the partnership remain strong, mature and purposeful, enabling consistent collaboration and shared accountability for children in the borough. The partnership understands the needs of local children well and defines its shared priorities around these. The active and committed safeguarding executive group jointly delivers strategic oversight and invests in the sustainability and responsiveness of the safeguarding infrastructure.

53. Senior leaders are outward looking and always seeking to improve. They have a track record of responding effectively to areas for development, new demands and challenges. They are responsive to emerging needs and lead a culture of learning and accountability. Senior leaders have prioritised previous areas for improvement, embedding them into everyday practice to ensure that children receive consistently high-quality support. As a result, practice has strengthened across all areas of the service.

54. The effective QA framework plays a critical role in helping leaders and managers to understand the quality of children's experiences across services. It is comprehensive in scope and underpinned by high-quality performance data, audit

activity, and feedback from children, families and practitioners, supporting the self-evaluation to be founded in evidence. Importantly, the high-quality data and insight generated through QA activity is equally accessed by elected members, strengthening corporate oversight and reinforcing a shared accountability for improving outcomes. This collective understanding ensures that strategic decisions are informed by the issues leaders know matter most, and that is children's safety, well-being and lived experience.

55. The organisation embraces a culture of continuous learning and improvement, where good practice is not only recognised, but also celebrated, shared and embedded to strengthen outcomes for children. Insights from frontline practice, audits and feedback are translated into clear recommendations and tangible changes, which are cascaded across the service through practice development sessions, targeted briefings and reflective learning forums. This ensures that staff are consistently equipped with the knowledge, tools and confidence to deliver high-quality, relational care. Clear governance structures provide senior leaders with effective oversight and assurance that learning is being applied where it matters most, resulting in stronger practice.

56. Leaders have nurtured a confident, proud and inspired workforce through visible leadership, strategic investment, and a clear focus on professional development. Staff morale is high, and turnover is stable, with low use of agency staff. Workers' caseloads are manageable, but leaders aim to reduce these further. Workers are confident to seek support when they feel workloads are excessive. When this happens, managers are responsive and take effective action. To support this, leaders have increased capacity through the appointment of family workers within locality teams and advanced practitioners in the care leavers' teams.

57. Supervision is highly effective and mostly regular, providing workers with a helpful reflective space. Staff are consistently very positive about the support and opportunities available to seek advice, guidance and support from their managers. Written records of supervision identify clear actions that workers progress in the desired timescales.

58. This strategic approach to workforce engagement ensures that staff feel informed, empowered and actively connected to the council's vision for children's services. Workers told inspectors that they feel valued and are proud to work for Rotherham. They described a vibrant learning culture and working conditions that place great value on reflection, professional growth and staff influence. This results in workers feeling valued and inspired to do the very best for children, young people and their families.

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ILACS Short Inspection Outcome

Update to Improving Lives Select Commission – February 2026

Nicola Curley – Executive Director, CYPS

Background

- The ILACS Inspection was announced in October half term
- Been anticipated since May 2025
- Judgement inspection three years after we achieved Good in 2022
- Care Leavers a new judgement

Judgement Criteria

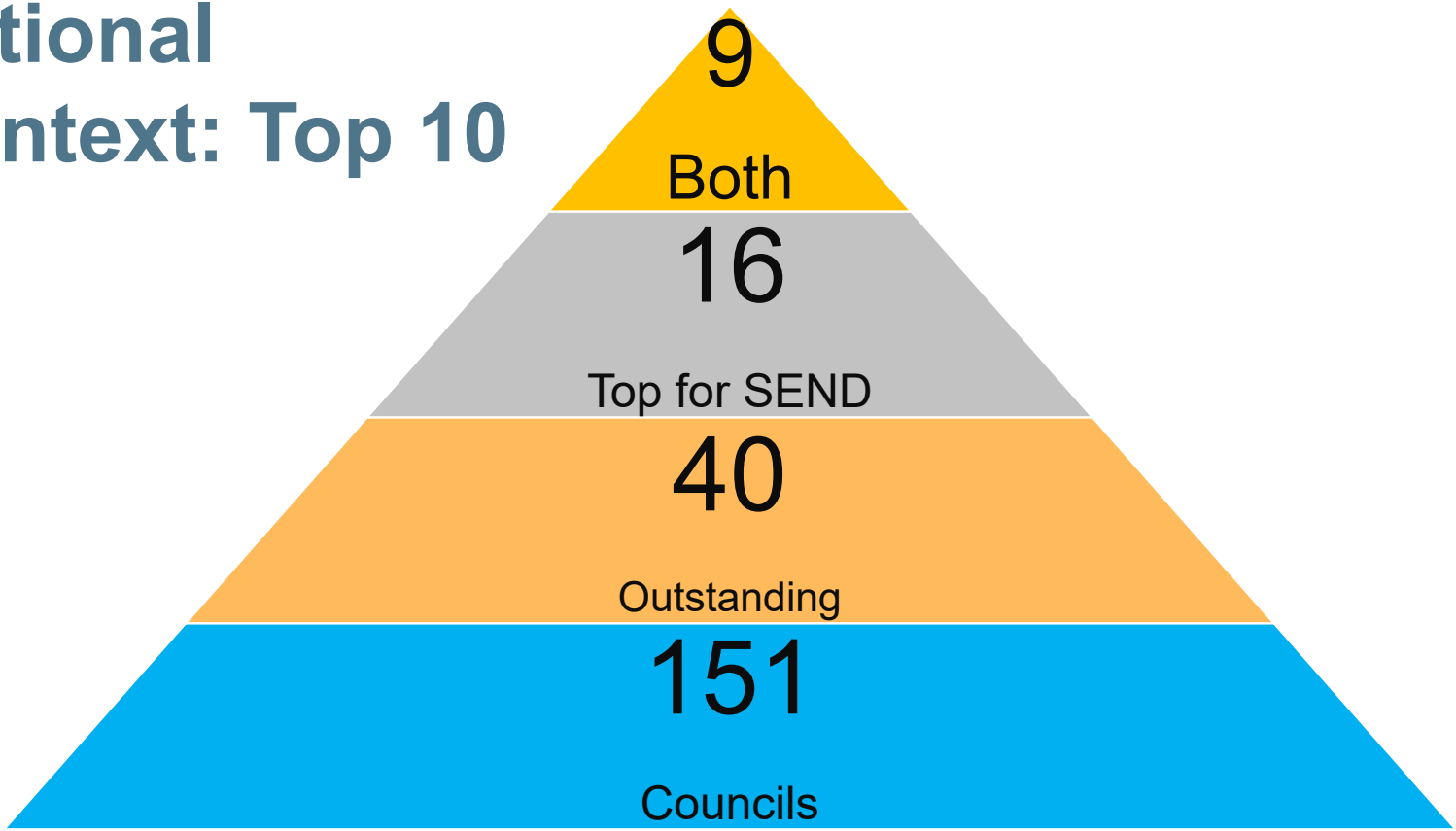
- Children who need help and protection
- Children in care
- Care leavers
- Impact of leaders

Leading to an Overall Effectiveness judgement

And the outcome was…….

- Children who need help and protection **Outstanding**
- Children in care **Outstanding**
- Care leavers **Good**
- Impact of leaders **Outstanding**
- Overall Effectiveness **Outstanding**

National Context: Top 10



Rotherham: One of Only 9 Authorities to Achieve Both

Overall Assessment

Progress is evident across all areas of social work practice.

Children in need of help and protection, and those in care, now benefit from an outstanding service delivered by a stable, highly skilled workforce. Practitioners know their children well, advocate fiercely for them, and build relationships that promote safety and belonging. Further investment in the early help and family help model is enabling more children to remain safely within their family networks with timely, targeted support that is making a measurable difference to their lives.

Decisive action has been taken to strengthen pathway planning, embed relational support, and promote opportunities for safe independence when care leavers are ready.

The voice of children is now a defining strength of the service.

Detail of the Judgement: Help and Protection

Children in need of help and protection, and those in care, now benefit from an outstanding service delivered by a stable, highly skilled workforce.

- Family Hubs support families in their community
- Comprehensive early help with high quality assessments
- Strengths based; connecting families
- MASH – timely, proportionate, child-focused
- Pre-birth assessments are of excellent quality
- Child voice and unique needs; plans developed alongside families
- CP enquiries thorough and multi-agency
- CP plans good and the CP process effective and involves families well

Detail of the Judgement: Help and Protection

- OOHs responsive and well resourced
- Comprehensive support for vulnerable children in education
- Highly effective service for missing and children at risk of exploitation
- Effective preventative work to keep children at home
- PLO used robustly when needed
- LADO strengthened
- Response to U18 homelessness strong
- Private fostering: child centred
- Significantly strengthened offer for young carers

Detail of the Judgement: Experiences and Progress of Children in Care

Children move into care only when it is no longer safe for them to remain at home, and this decision is made with very careful consideration of their individual needs, safety and long-term well-being.

- Strong engagement with the child, friends and family
- Placement decisions are made carefully
- Transformation of the sufficiency strategy – availability of local homes
- Appropriate identification of kinship carers and good support
- Court applications are timely and successful
- Excellent oversight of unregistered placements
- Homes are suitable and meet children's needs well
- Fostering service strengthened – assessments of high quality and foster care

Detail of the Judgement: Experiences and Progress of Children in Care

- Strong step down arrangements for children and their families
- Adoption processes are strong with good emphasis on early permanence – strong RAA
- Work with separated migrant children
- Direct work and lifestory work of high quality (IRO letters poignant)
- IRO champions
- Skilled social workers – effective plans
- Family time assessments and work with parents strong
- Virtual School support educational aspiration, support in school and high levels of EET
- Strong In Care Voice; Young Inspectors; Young Journalists

Detail of the Judgement: Care Leavers

PAs have a detailed knowledge of young people's needs and histories and are persistent in making sure that young people receive the right levels of visiting and help that meets their individual needs

- Early allocation creates meaningful and trusting relationships – incredibly positive
- Pathway plans done with young people, but the template used isn't effective
- Journey – highly valued
- Range of housing options
- Advocacy around the wider offer
- Named nurse drop in
- Support from Virtual School
- Vulnerable CL supported with persistence and empathy
- Look Ahead group

Detail of the Judgement: Impact of Leaders

There has been sustained and visible council wide commitment to placing children at the heart of strategic decision-making in Rotherham

- Quality of political leadership
- Senior management across the Council
- Sustained investment and ambitious planning
- Strength of Corporate Parenting Partnership Board
- Strength of partners and Safeguarding Exec
- Effective QA framework – data and audit
- Culture of learning and celebration of good practice
- High quality supervision
- Staff morale and confidence

Impact on Staff

*A **confident**, **proud** and **inspired** workforce*

…staff feel informed, empowered and actively connected to the council's vision for children's services. Workers told inspectors that they feel valued and are proud to work for Rotherham. They described a vibrant learning culture and working conditions that place great value on reflection, professional growth and staff influence. This results in workers feeling valued and inspired to do the very best for children, young people and their families.

Actions that are needed

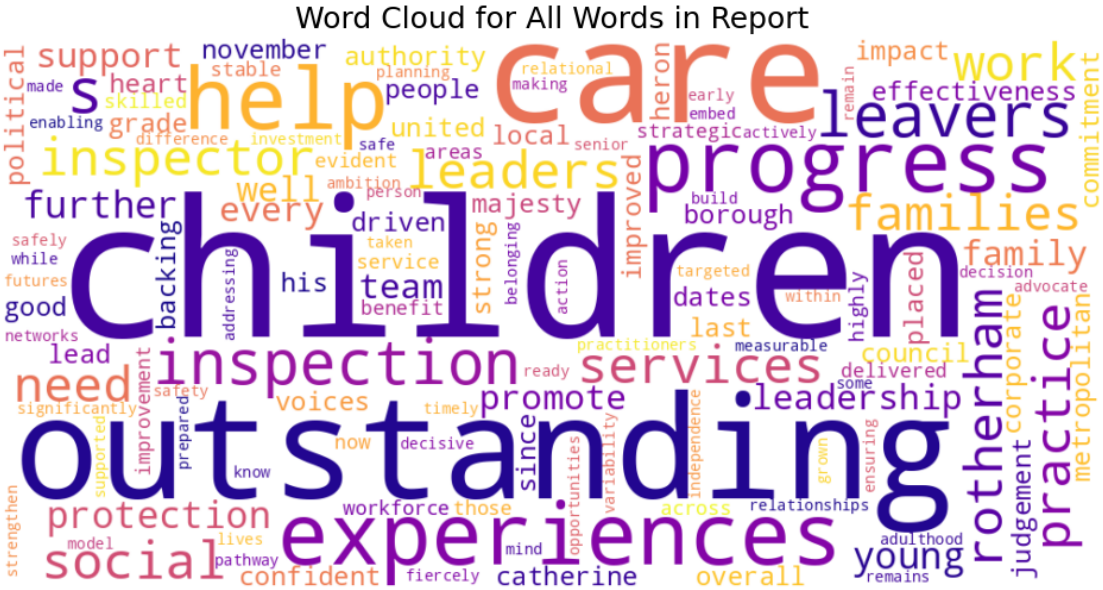
- The quality of pathway plans for care leavers.

(Outcome 4, national framework)

- The quality of health history information provided to care leavers.

(Outcome 4, national framework)

Final Words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Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Public Report
Improving Lives Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Improving Lives Select Commission – 10 February 2026

Report Title
Educational Achievement Update

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?
No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report
Nicola Curley, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

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Ward(s) Affected
Borough-Wide

Report Summary
This report provides a comprehensive overview of Education & Inclusion performance in Rotherham for the 2024/25 academic year. It builds on the detailed Education Performance Outcomes briefing to present the information in a format tailored for the Improving Lives Select Commission. The report highlights where outcomes are improving and where concerted action is required It frames performance through the lens of improving life chances, tackling inequalities (disadvantage, SEND and ethnicity), and strengthening inclusion across the system.

Recommendations
It is recommended that Members:

1. Consider and accept the Education & Inclusion Annual Performance Report for 2024/2025.

2. Note the areas for continued focus (phonics; KS2 reading/GPS; KS4 Attainment 8 and grade 5+; disadvantage and SEND gaps; Gypsy/Roma outcomes).

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers
None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
No

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

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1. Background

1.1 Rotherham has 123 schools, of which 82.9% are academies (102/123). There are 3 nursery schools, 10 infant schools, 9 junior schools, 77 primary (infant and junior) schools, 16 secondary schools, 7 special schools and 1 pupil referral unit (see table below).

Total number of schools and settings (as at end of August 2025)

Type of School/Setting	Number	LA-maintained	Academy
Nursery Schools	3	3	0
Infant Schools	10	4	6
Junior Schools	9	1	8
Infant and Junior Schools	77	11	66
Secondary Schools	16	1	15
Special Schools	7	0	7
Pupil Referral Units	1	1	0
Total	123	21	102

1.2 For 2024/2025, headline attainment and participation measures referenced in this report draw on local collections and Department for Education (DfE) provisional datasets. Progress 8 scores are not available for 2024/25 and 2025/26 due to the absence of KS2 baseline assessments following Covid-19 disruption.

1.3 Although, 102 schools are independent of the local authority, we are ambitious to support all of our schools and to develop a shared commitment to achievement, inclusion and the wellbeing of all our children.

1.4 **School OFSTED Inspection Overview (End of Summer Term 25)**

The way schools are inspected changed in September 2024 meaning Ofsted no longer give an overall judgement. The new framework grades schools over key judgements of:

- Quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership & management
- With additional provision judgements, if appropriate, of:
  - Early years provision
  - Sixth-form provision

1.4.1 In Rotherham there were 16 of our 123 schools that had been inspected under the new framework where the outcome has been published, with a further 4 inspected in the summer term still awaiting report publication.

1.4.2 The inspection judgements below include the national averages as at 31st July 25.

Inspection Judgement	Outstanding			Good			Requires Improvement			Inadequate		
	LA No.	LA %	National	LA No.	LA %	National	LA No.	LA %	National	LA No.	LA %	National
Quality of Education	2	13%	17%	10	63%	67%	4	25%	15%	0		2%
Behaviour and Attitudes	4	25%	29%	10	63%	64%	2	13%	6%	0		1%
Personal Development	3	19%	35%	12	75%	61%	1	6%	3%	0		0%
Leadership and Management	2	13%	21%	12	75%	68%	2	13%	10%	0		2%
Early Years Provision	3	19%	27%	9	56%	67%	1	6%	6%	0		0%
Sixth Form Provision	0		34%	0		60%	0		6%	0		1%

2. Key Issues

2.1 Areas of Strength

Early education take-up for eligible two-year-olds remains strong at 83.5%, significantly above national (15+ percentage points).

Academic Year	Rotherham	National Average	Regional	Stat Neighbours
2017/18	78.6%	71.8%	73.0%	77.2%
2018/19	79.4%	67.8%	71.4%	76.1%
2019/20	77.9%	69.2%	72.4%	77.8%
2020/21	72.3%	61.8%	66.8%	71.7%
2021/22	83.1%	71.9%	76.1%	78.6%
2022/23	89.3%	73.9%	76.6%	77.4%
2023/24	88.4%	74.8%	75.8%	78.0%
2024/25	83.5%	65.2%	65.2%	64.6%

2.2 GLD

Rotherham's school performance in the assessment of a Good Level of Development (for children aged 5 years) improved at the same rate as the national average. Children on SEND Support achievement for a GLD is 3% points above the national average and the percentage of children with an EHCP achieving GLD has also increased.

2.2.1 Rotherham children on SEND Support have consistently achieved above the national average and in 2025 this gap increased. The performance of children with an EHC plan has remained constant compared with national for the past two years.

2.3 Phonics

Rotherham's local authority schools' collective achievement was in line with the national average and above all Rotherham school's average.

2.4 **Key Stage 2 SATs**

- Key Stage 2 outcomes improved year-on-year in the combined reading, writing and mathematics (RWM) measure showed that at least 60.0% were working at expected standards (EXS+) and 6.3% working at the higher standard (HS), narrowing the gap to national at the higher standard (HS).

- 66.8% of boys met the expected standard in Writing (which is teacher assessed), which is the same as the national level. The Rotherham gap for disadvantaged pupils at the EXS+ in RWM combined has narrowed from 27.8% in 2024 to 25.7% in 2025. This remains higher than the national gap of 21.7%. The percentage of pupils in Rotherham with SEND support achieving the EXS+ in Reading, Writing & Mathematics combined increased in 2025 by 4.2%, outperforming national counterparts by 1.0%.

- Asian Pakistani pupils continue to perform above their local counterparts in KS2 RWM combined; SEND Support pupils at KS2 EXS+ outperform national by approximately one percentage point.

- Primary and secondary admissions continue to secure high levels of first-to-third preference allocations on national offer days.

2.5 **GCSEs**

GCSE English

Rotherham's Students achieving grades 4 (pass rate) or more in English stands at 70.3%, with students achieving grades 5 or more being at 55.2%. The national average English pass rate was 70.6%. Nine of our schools achieved above the national average pass rate at grade 4 or more.

2.6 **GCSE Mathematics**

Rotherham's students achieving grades 4 or more in Maths stands at 66.3%, with students achieving grades 5 or more being at 45.8%. The national average mathematics grade 4-pass rate is at 71.9%. Three of our schools achieved above the national average pass rate at grade 4 or more.

2.7 **A Level and Level 3 Qualifications**

The cohort for children taking A levels was down in 2025 with more young people taking Level 3 equivalent qualification. This was in line with national trends. A - A* grades improved by 2.2% in Rotherham, this was partly due to three local school making significant gains.

2.8 **Areas of continued focus:**

- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (GLD) stands at 64.9%, which is 3.4 percentage points below the national average with persistent gender and disadvantage gaps remaining. Mirroring national, girls outperformed boys in GLD but the gap between boy and girls locally was greater than national (14.4% as opposed to 13.8%).

- Phonics Year 1 achievement was 77.0% (All LA average), 2.9 percentage points below the national average and the gap between for boys and disadvantaged pupils requiring targeted support widened.

Disadvantaged Pupils

- In 2025, there were 736 disadvantaged pupils (24.5% of the cohort) who sat the phonics assessment.

- Disadvantaged pupils in Rotherham achieving the expected standard in Y1 phonics is 63.7% (a decrease of 3.7% compared to 2024) / non-disadvantaged pupils 81.2%. The gap was 16.3%, compared to 14.5% in 2024.

- Disadvantaged pupils nationally achieving the expected standard in Y1 phonics is at 66.8% / non-disadvantaged pupils 83.3%. The gap is 16.5%.

- The difference between the LA gap to the national gap is 3.1%. With Rotherham being below National.

- KS2 reading at Expected standard (EXS+) and higher standard (HS) remain below national; Gypsy/Roma outcomes continue to be significantly below both local and national averages.

- KS4 Attainment 8 is 41.8 vs. national 46.2 (–4.4 points); grade 5+ in English & Maths combined is 38.4%, 7.2 percentage points below national; SEND attainment gaps persist at KS4 (Attainment 8 and grade 5+); disadvantage gaps at KS2 remain wider than national despite some narrowing.

2.9 **Drivers of Performance and Inequality**

Analysis points to persistent literacy challenges (phonics and reading) feeding into upper key stage attainment and compounding disadvantage for pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils with SEND (especially those with EHC plans), and Gypsy/Roma pupils. The gender gap mirrors national patterns but is marginally wider locally in GLD and phonics. Targeted system support and high-quality teaching, alongside attendance, speech, language and communication (SLCN) development, and inclusive practice, are central to closing gaps.

2.10 **Actions being taken:**

2.10.1 **1. National GLD Target**

The Department for Education (DfE) has introduced a new national statutory target for the Good Level of Development (GLD). For Rotherham, this means achieving a 9% increase by 2028. The statutory target for your local authority will be considered "achieved" if the following two conditions are met:

a) The proportion of children in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 73.3%;

b) and b) Disadvantaged children have benefitted at least equally from this improvement; that is, that the proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 56.6%.

In response, the Council has:

- Completed a needs analysis.
- Convened a summit on 5 December, bringing together practitioners and leaders from Health, Education, Social Care, Public Health, and other sectors. The outcomes from this summit will inform the development of a GLD Better Start Plan, scheduled for publication in March 2025.

2.10.2 **2. Phonics Improvement Project**

As part of the DfE's Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) programme, and in partnership with Barnsley Council, we will:

- Identify 10 schools with the lowest phonics outcomes.
- Host a spring term conference.
- Provide new phonics teaching resources and support to these schools.

2.10.3 **3. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) Achievement**

We are leading a Yorkshire and Humber regional initiative to improve outcomes for children from GRT backgrounds:

- A local school has successfully secured a DfE bid.
- Regional conferences will take place in the spring term.

2.10.4 **4. Partnership with DfE RISE**

Local authority officers meet termly with DfE Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) officers to:

- Identify schools that need support and those that can offer expertise.

- Review progress of schools currently supported by RISE and Rotherham's Education Strategic Partnership.

2.10.5 **5. Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership**

We have established the Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership, a forum for:

- Local authority officers
- Maintained school leaders
- Multi-academy trust CEOs
- Elected members
- Regional school improvement specialists (Education Hubs). This partnership develops a local education improvement strategy and shapes school improvement programmes and services.

2.10.6 **6. Inclusion and SEND Support**

Since 2024, the Council has provided non-traded (free) access to the Specialist Inclusion Team, a team of specialist teachers and SEND professionals for all schools.

This ensures schools receive advice and support to improve inclusion and outcomes for children with SEND.

2.10.7 **7. Attendance Improvement**

From September 2025, we introduced a new approach to improving school attendance, offering enhanced support to schools facing the greatest challenges.

2.10.8 **8. Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Support**

The Council provides non-traded support to all schools for children with social, emotional, and mental health needs. This complements our local inclusion panels, which include schools, social care, and health colleagues, to develop solutions for children at risk of exclusion.

2.10.9 **9. Addressing Educational Disadvantage**

In partnership with Rotherham school leaders, the Council published **"**Addressing Educational Disadvantage in Rotherham" in May 2024, providing guidance to tackle disadvantage effectively.

2.10.10 **10. Professional Development (ROSIS)**

Our traded CPD offer, ROSIS (Rotherham School Improvement Service), delivers an extensive programme of training, conferences, and professional development to the majority of Rotherham schools.

For example:

- In September 2025, we hosted a conference on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, featuring national and local speakers.
- All sessions and workshops were made available online.

2.10.11 **11. School Improvement Support**

The Council provides school improvement support to all local authority-maintained schools, underpinned by termly review meetings that celebrate success and agree actions. These schools consistently perform above the Rotherham average.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Members are asked to consider and accept the Education & Inclusion Performance Report for 2024/2025 and note the improvement actions set out by the directorate and partners.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Engagement has taken place through the Rotherham Strategic Education Partnership (RSEP), involving maintained headteachers, MAT CEOs, local authority officers, elected members and regional school improvement partners. A cross-sector Early Years summit (5 December 2025) brought together practitioners and leaders from Health, Education, Social Care and Public Health to inform a GLD ‘better start’ plan for publication in March 2026.

4.2 All school have been consulted on appropriate attainment targets for the academic year 2025/26.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1

- Jan–Mar 2026: Publish EY GLD “Better Start” plan; confirm phonics RISE cohort; set baselines and targets for 2025/26.
- Spring Term 2026: Deliver phonics conference and distribute teaching resources; commence coaching in priority schools.
- Summer Term 2026: Mid-year impact review at RSEP; targeted reading/GPS interventions consolidated; KS2 test readiness support.
- Autumn 2026: Report attainment outcomes; evaluate interventions; refresh priorities for 2026/27.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications in this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct HR implications in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The actions and priorities outlined in this report have significant implications for improving life chances and reducing inequalities among children and young people in Rotherham. Targeted interventions in early years, phonics, and reading aim to close persistent attainment gaps for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, and Gypsy/Roma communities. Enhanced inclusion support, attendance strategies, and mental health provision will help ensure that vulnerable learners remain engaged in education and receive timely support. By focusing on early development, literacy, and inclusive practice, the proposals contribute to better long-term outcomes, including school readiness, academic achievement, and emotional wellbeing.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 There are no direct implications.

11. Implications for CO_2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are no direct implications.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 There are no direct implications.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 **Key Risks:**

- Persistent attainment gaps for disadvantaged pupils, SEND learners, and ethnic minority groups may undermine progress.
- External factors such as economic pressures and rising demand for SEND provision may limit capacity.
- Attendance issues and social/emotional needs could lead to increased exclusions or disengagement.

13.2 **Mitigation Measures:**

- Strengthen cross-sector collaboration through the Rotherham Strategic Education Partnership and Early Years summit actions.
- Deliver targeted improvement programmes (GLD Better Start Plan, phonics RISE project, GRT achievement initiative).

- Maintain access to specialist inclusion and social emotional and mental health support for all schools.

- Monitor progress through reviews and adapt interventions based on impact data.

- Provide professional development and resources to build school capacity and resilience.

14 **Accountable Officer(s)**
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education & Inclusion

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Name of Strategic Director	19/01/26
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Cusworth	26/01/26

Report Author:
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This report is published on the Council's website.

Educational Achievement Update 2024/25

Niall Devlin

Service Director

Education & Inclusion

Overview

- **Educational Performance Overview**
  - The update reviews attainment, inclusion, and equity across Rotherham schools for 2024/25 academic year.
- **Key Successes and Challenges**
  - Strong early education participation and GLD improvements contrast with ongoing phonics and GCSE challenges.
- **Focus on Inclusion and Equity**
  - Efforts are focused on disadvantaged pupils, SEND support, and ethnic minority groups like Gypsy/Roma communities.
- **Strategic Priorities and Collaboration**
  - Targeted interventions, professional development, and attendance improvement drive aligned educational outcomes.

School Landscape and Governance

TYPE OF SCHOOL/SETTING	TOTAL	LA-MAINTAINED	ACADEMY
Nursery Schools	3	3	0
Infant Schools	10	4	6
Junior Schools	9	1	8
Infant & Junior Schools	77	11	66
Secondary Schools	16	1	15
Special Schools	7	0	7
Pupil Referral Units	1	1	0
Total	123	21	102

School and early years inspections (end of summer term 2025)

- 99% of Early Years providers are Good or Outhandling
- Ofsted inspection framework for schools changed and on loner provided an overall judgements- 16 of our 123 schools have been inspected under the then new framework in 2024/25 :

Area inspected	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Quality of education	2	10	4	0
Behaviour and attitudes	4	10	2	0
Personal development	3	12	1	0
Leadership	2	12	2	0
Early Years	3	9	1	0
6th Form	0	0	0	0

Strengths

MEASURE	ROTHERHAM	NATIONAL
Early Education Take-up	83.5%	65.2%
GLD (SEND Support)	Above national	-
Phonics Year 1 (LA Marinated schools)	77.0%	79.9%
KS2 RWM Expected St andard	60.0%	Narrowing the Gap
GCSE English Grade 4+	70.3%	70.6%
A level A –A* grades improved	2.2%	Aligned with national

- Rotherham's school performance in the assessment of a Good Level of Development (for children aged 5 years) improved at the same rate as the national average.
- Rotherham's local authority schools' collective achievement was in line with the national average and above all Rotherham school's average.
- Key Stage 2 outcomes improved year-on-year in the combined reading, writing and mathematics (RWM) measure
- 66.8% of boys met the expected standard in Writing (which is teacher assessed), which is the same as the national level.
- SEND Support pupils at KS2 EXS+ outperform national by approximately one percentage point.
- Nine of our schools achieved above the national average pass rate at grade 4 or more in English.

Areas of Focus

Early Years Development Gaps

- Early years GLD is 64.9%, below national average, with significant gender and disadvantage disparities.

Phonics and Literacy Challenges

- Phonics achievement in Year 1 is 77%, below national average, with widening gaps for disadvantaged pupils.

Key Stage 2 Attainment Issues

- Reading and attainment scores at KS2 and KS4 lag behind national levels, with persistent SEND and ethnic group gaps.

GCSE Achievement Mathematics

- Rotherham's students achieving grades 4 or more in Maths stands at 66.3%. The gap is bigger for boys

Need for Targeted Interventions

- Addressing literacy, phonics, and inclusive practices is critical to closing gaps and improving educational equity.

The Next 12 months

1. Publish the Best Start plan by April 2026 to show how we can increase our performance by 9% by 2028
2. Phonic Intervention projects starting in February 2026 and then roll out during the academic year.
3. Lead on the regional Gypsy, Roma and Traveller intervention
4. Continue partnership with the DfE RISE
5. Build on the Rotherham Strategic Education Partnership
6. Continue to improves access to specialist education outreach services
7. Deliver the new attendance support
8. Support schools to address education disadvantage
9. Continue to support schools' CPD through ROSIS
10. Build on School improvement with our Local Authority maintained schools

Appendix 3: Improving Lives Select Commission –Summary Work Programme 2025/26

Chair: Councillor Monk **Vice-Chair: Councillor Brent**
Governance Advisor: Natasha Aucott/ Debbie Pons **Link Officer: Kelly White**

The following principles were endorsed by OSMB at its meeting of 5 July 2023 as criteria to long/short list each of the commission's respective priorities:

Establish as a starting point:

- What are the key issues?
- What is the outcome that we want?

Agree principles for longlisting:

- Can scrutiny add value or influence?
- Is it being looked at elsewhere?
- Is it a priority – council or community?

Developing a consistent shortlisting criteria e.g.

T: Time: is it the right time, enough resources?
O: Others: is this duplicating the work of another body?
P: Performance: can scrutiny make a difference?
I: Interest – what is the interest to the public?
C: Contribution to the corporate plan

Meeting Date	Responsible Officer	Agenda Item
17-Jun-25	Monica Green/ Chris Macdonald	Draft Kinship Local Offer (pre-decision scrutiny)
	N/A	Closed session following meeting to discuss and draft 2025-2026 work programme
22-Jul-25	Helen Sweaton/ Anne Hawke	CYPS Performance Report 2024-2025
	Niall Devlin/Sarah Whitby	Elective Home Education Revised Policy (pre-decision scrutiny)

16-Sep-25		CAMHS Update including:
1 substantive agenda item	Helen Sweaton	• Annual update on children's social, emotional and mental health- updates on all provision for children with SEMH needs, CAMHS services including pathways, interventions and waiting lists, and support children are able to access from wider provisions such as the education and voluntary sector. • Neurodiversity Update- service update, Choice and the Peer Support Service.
04-Nov-25	Stuart Williams Niall Devlin/ Cary-Anne Sykes	Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028 Update Revised SEND Sufficiency Strategy- pre-decision scrutiny (Cabinet in February 2026)- will also include a progress update on the SEND Inspection areas for improvement.
28-Nov-25	Scott Matthewman/ Jacqueline Clarke	Unpaid Carers Strategy Revision Workshop (HSC Workshop with ILSC invited due to young carers aspect)
02-Dec-25	Nicola Curley Chris Macdonald/ Darren Downs	Fostering Transformation Programme incorporating the update on the Response to the Prevention of Future Deaths Report Rotherham Safeguarding Childrens Partnership Annual Assurance Report 2024-2025
02-Feb-26	Nicola Curley Niall Devlin	Ofsted Inspection Outcome Educational Attainment Update

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17-Mar-26	Kelly White	Community Cohesion Projects Update - Building Bridges Together Project and the Together for Tomorrow Project Update.
	Niall Devlin	Children Not in School Update (including EHE, CME, exclusions, attendance and part-time provision).
	Niall Devlin	SACRE Annual Report 2024/25 (for information only)

28-Apr-26	Sam Barstow & Niall Devlin	Safeguarding Children From Radicalization (Prevent Programme Update and Keeping Children Safe in Education Update)
	TBC	Child Exploitation Strategy Update
	Stuart Williams	Corporate Parenting Partnership Board Annual Report 2024-2025

Ongoing Review

On-going	N/A	Reviewing the impact of secondary school policies on school attendance levels and ensuring an education for vulnerable children and/or trauma experienced children

Pre-Decision Scrutiny

26th January, 2026	Emma Ellis/ Kayley Charlton	Review the Domestic Abuse Strategy Refresh as part of the pre-scrutiny process prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

Items to be Considered by Other Means (e.g. off-agenda briefing, workshop etc.)

Visit/Workshop 29th January, 2026 at 10.30 a.m.	RPCF - Jayne Fitzgerald	Rotherham Parent Carers Forum Update- RPCF vision and plans, voice of the community and the impact of the work completed with partners. **TO BE COMBINED WITH BELOW**
Visit/Workshop 29th January, 2026 at 10.30 a.m.	Cary- Anne Sykes	**TO BE COMBINED WITH ABOVE** **Threshold of Needs Document Update Workshop**
2nd March, 2026 2.30 p.m. Town Hall Workshop	Stuart Williams	**Cessation of the Pause Project** Support available for women who have had one or more child removed, following cessation of PAUSE Project.
21st April 2026 10.00 a.m. Town Hall	Polly Hamilton	**Children's Capital of Culture Workshop** Impact and Legacy for Children and Young People