

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

Report Author(s)

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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 Neighbourhoods
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 (ROSI)**

Our traded CPD offer, ROSI (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 CO₂ 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.

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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

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