

# SCRUTINY REPORT

**MEETING:** Children and Young People Scrutiny  
**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> March 2026  
**SUBJECT:** RISE School Report  
**REPORT FROM:** Ben Dunne Director of Education and Skills  
**CONTACT OFFICER:** Damian Kay School Assurance Officer

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

In January, the Department for Education (DfE) wrote to the responsible bodies of schools demonstrating low attainment outcomes for all pupils and for disadvantaged pupils. The DfE strongly encouraged these schools to engage with the Universal RISE service, which provides nationally coordinated subject-specific improvement support across Maths and English.

The RISE Maths Hubs offer specialist collaboration and professional development through a network of 40 hubs, supporting schools to strengthen mathematics teaching and improve pupil outcomes. Engagement planning is underway locally to identify schools that would benefit from targeted hub support.

The RISE English Hubs 34 hubs nationally—provide CPD and intensive in-school support focused on early reading, systematic synthetic phonics, and literacy. This support is driven by audit processes and may include access to resource funding. Recently, the Local Authority has promoted the English Hub offer to two of the primary schools named in the DfE letter. Additional developments within the Universal RISE programme include:

- targeted Literacy Specialist input for Key Stage 3 reading from 2025
- 'Unlocking Reading' CPD for all secondary schools from 2026
- Reception-focused early language and literacy CPD and intensive support from September 2026, aligning with the Local Authority's Good Level of Development (GLD) improvement objectives

Across the named schools, attainment concerns vary in scale and subject focus. Several primary schools have experienced significant year-on-year drops in Reading, Writing and Maths (RWM) combined performance, with some also reporting notable declines in individual subjects such as Reading or Maths. A number of schools show disproportionately low progress in Reading, despite more stable outcomes in Writing or Maths. Schools with high proportions of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) or Pupil Premium cohorts also feature prominently.

In secondary settings, declining Attainment 8 scores are directly linked to reductions in English and Maths grades (9–5 and 9–4), with gender-specific underperformance in some schools. While some academy trusts report confidence in cohort-specific fluctuations resolving in 2026, the need for structured external support remains evident. Where applicable, Local Authority Quality Education Professionals (QEPs) continue to provide termly challenge and support, with targeted improvement plans in place.

## 2.0 ISSUES

Across the schools named, several important themes emerge:

1. Declining or inconsistent outcomes in Reading, Writing and Maths
  - Several primary schools show sharp year-on-year declines in KS2 outcomes, particularly in Reading and Maths (e.g., Primary Schools 1, 4, 5).
  - Writing is a persistent area of underperformance across multiple schools, even where Reading and Maths are improving (e.g., Primary Schools 6 and 7).
2. Significant attainment drops in secondary English and Maths
  - All three secondary schools saw notable reductions in pupils achieving Grades 9–5 and 9–4 in English and Maths.
  - Gender-specific issues are evident:
    - Girls underperformed notably at High School 1.
    - Boys represent a significant concern at High School 3.
  - Although High School 2 experienced a sharp drop, leaders attribute this to a cohort issue, and the trust has a strong track record within the RISE programme.
3. High proportions of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Pupil Premium
  - Several schools have significantly above-average proportions of EAL and disadvantaged pupils (e.g., Primary 1, Primary 7, High Schools 1 and 2).
  - These contextual factors heighten the need for targeted literacy, early language, and reading support—areas directly addressed by RISE English Hubs.
4. Early Years and Phonics concerns
  - GLD outcomes at Primary School 3 are well below national despite phonics performance being broadly in line.
  - This reinforces the need for early language intervention, which the expanded Reception support offer from September 2026 is designed to address.
5. Need for strengthened school improvement capacity
  - Several LA maintained schools are already receiving QEP support, with variable levels of improvement.
  - Some academies have existing trust-level interventions (e.g., High School 3 with an Executive Head appointed).

Overall, while some improvement activity is underway, the performance issues align closely with the areas RISE is designed to address.

## 3.0 CONCLUSION

Engagement with the Universal RISE service represents a significant opportunity for the schools identified by the DfE to access high-quality, nationally coordinated subject expertise. The range of support available spanning phonics, early reading, literacy development across phases, and collaborative maths improvement—aligns directly with the areas of underperformance evident across the primary and secondary schools highlighted.

The data demonstrates that many of the schools have experienced substantial declines in key performance indicators, including RWM combined at primary level and English/Maths grade thresholds at secondary level. Persistent weaknesses in Reading, and in some cases Writing, are evident in several settings, alongside significant subject-specific drops in Maths. These patterns, combined with contextual challenges such as high EAL and Pupil Premium proportions, reinforce the importance of engaging with external evidence-based support.

Where Local Authority QEP involvement is already in place, it provides a strong foundation for challenge and monitoring, but the breadth of need across the cohort of schools indicates that additional specialist input through RISE may be essential to securing sustained improvement. The

RISE programme's expanding offer for Reception, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 3 further strengthens its relevance to the local improvement agenda, including the GLD target for early years.

Overall, the data and school-level summaries demonstrate a clear case for encouraging and, where possible, facilitating uptake of the Universal RISE service. Its structured, specialist, and nationally quality-assured support provides a timely mechanism to address the persistent attainment challenges identified by the DfE and to help schools secure better outcomes for all pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged.

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**List of Background Papers:-**

**Contact Details:-**

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Executive Director sign off Date: