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RISE targeted intervention process evaluation, interim report 2

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**Authors: Philip Wilson, Rose Suddaby,
Martha Julings and Georgina Cowen
(York Consulting LLP); Kathryn Crowther
and Louise Starks (KMC Research); Dr
David Greatbatch and Sue Tate**



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Executive summary

Introduction

Introduced in spring 2025, the design and implementation of Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) is central to the goal of raising standards for all children in all schools across the country as part of the government's Opportunity Mission.

The bespoke RISE targeted intervention focuses on 'stuck' schools that haven't improved, or improved enough, within their current structure but are believed to have the capacity to do so. The 9 RISE regional teams have the option to match an eligible school, via its responsible body (RB), to a high-quality supporting organisation to drive forward improvements.

Evaluation aim

This process evaluation, which began in summer 2025, aims to gather regular, real-time views from a range of experiences and perspectives amongst individuals involved in the RISE targeted intervention at multiple points in time to:

- understand ongoing delivery and implementation experiences
- identify what's working well and areas for improvement
- inform ongoing design and delivery
- understand participants' perceptions of impact on school improvement

This is the second update report following the first report in February 2026. The process evaluation started in April 2025 will continue until autumn 2027.

Method

This formative process evaluation involves in-depth interviews with individuals from a sample of all organisations involved in delivering or receiving the RISE targeted intervention. It runs alongside DfE's monitoring of attainment, absence, behaviour and finance outcomes to help measure RISE performance over time.

Wave 1 fieldwork took place in June, July and September 2025 and involved 89 initial interviews with RISE advisers (18), headteachers (35), RBs (18), supporting organisations (18) from the summer 2025 cohort. Workshops were also held with the 9 regional teams.

Wave 2 fieldwork, reported here, took place in December 2025, January and February 2026, and consisted of a further 132 interviews to follow-up the above participants from wave 1 (summer 2025 cohort) and conduct additional interviews with the autumn 2025 cohort (17 headteachers, 11 RBs and 15 supporting organisations) to assess any early changes in delivery.

The focus of wave 2 interviews was to continue to assess experiences of initial and ongoing processes and expectations of the programme. This included views on the suitability of matches made, relevance and process of support being agreed, confidence to support school improvement, and evidence of early outcomes. The evaluation will revisit the summer 2025 cohort at roughly 6-month intervals in a further 2 waves of interview.

Looking forward, as well as continuing to follow up the experiences of those that joined RISE in its first term of implementation, the sample will expand to also include 3 waves of interviews with a sample of schools which ‘flow’ into the RISE targeted intervention from late spring and summer 2026 to help assess delivery and implementation for those joining the programme in its second year.

Emerging findings

The following findings are structured around stakeholders’ understanding of RISE roles as well as their perspectives relating to each of the chronological steps in delivery.

Understanding of RISE roles

Headteachers and RBs (both summer and autumn cohorts) understood the distinct contributions of RISE advisers and supporting organisations, with advisers undertaking initial diagnosis and acting as liaison, challenge and quality assurance. Supporting organisations developed the RISE school improvement plan, then coordinated and delivered the planned support package.

The majority of autumn cohort headteachers and RBs had an even clearer understanding of the role of RISE advisers and supporting organisations compared to the summer

cohort schools at the same stage. This suggests that the guidance, early communications and dialogue with RISE advisers was improving headteachers' and RBs' understanding.

Supporting organisations matched to schools in the summer cohort felt there was a clear understanding of their role to coordinate, lead and deliver the planned support package, both within their organisations and amongst the RBs, RISE advisers and headteachers they worked with. This clarity of understanding of the supporting organisation role was still developing amongst the autumn cohort of RBs and schools.

Initial contact from DfE regional teams

There were fewer issues around the initial contact with autumn cohort RBs and headteachers about their selection to be part of the RISE targeted intervention, compared with the previous summer cohort.

According to RBs, the majority of schools reacted positively to being selected for the RISE targeted intervention, with headteachers generally welcoming the support.

Matching RISE advisers with schools

The majority of autumn cohort schools and RBs considered the process of matching of RISE advisers to be successful, describing positive relationships and constructive dialogue.

Relationships between the majority of summer cohort schools and RISE advisers continued to be described as positive by headteachers and RBs.

Initial diagnosis

Overall, the initial diagnosis has worked effectively for the autumn cohort, with the majority of autumn cohort headteachers and RBs expressing that their initial diagnosis aligned well with their school's needs and priorities.

By the end of September 2025, all autumn cohort headteachers had met with their RISE adviser. Most had been recommended to be paired with a supporting organisation.

Match with supporting organisations

The majority of autumn cohort supporting organisations were engaged by mid-October to mid-November, with most schools and RBs informed of their match in November. Experiences of the matching process varied: some headteachers found it smooth and

well-aligned with their needs, a few RBs felt the process was rushed or insufficiently tailored to school context, geography or existing partnerships.

RISE advisers reported that matching improved from the summer to the autumn cohort, with clearer guidance and more consistent processes.

Schools, RBs and supporting organisations agreed that strong matches depended on close alignment of ethos, context and pedagogical approach. Effective partnerships featured trust, respect, context sensitivity and collaborative working, enabling more impactful support on curriculum, teaching and leadership.

Developing a RISE school improvement plan

Most stakeholders described the RISE improvement plan development process as collaborative, and drawing on the initial diagnostic findings.

Timescales were a concern for many headteachers, RBs and supporting organisations, who felt the drafting period was rushed. However, the majority of headteachers and RBs still viewed their plans as achievable.

Stakeholders were asked about Universal RISE as one of the things considered for support when developing a school improvement plan. Awareness of Universal RISE varied, with some schools and RBs valuing hub support and others highlighting unclear communication and access barriers.

Approving a RISE school improvement plan

Most schools and other stakeholders felt that the approval process for school improvement plans worked well and became smoother over time. Action to provide clearer guidance, more consistent quality assurance and a shared understanding of what strong plans should contain had reduced revisions in the autumn cohort.

For autumn cohort schools, most leaders felt the approved plans were well-designed, aligned with existing priorities and improvement work, and strengthened by collaborative co-construction with RISE advisers. Summer cohort schools also largely viewed plans as robust. Most headteachers, supporting organisations and RBs believed the plans were achievable within two years, provided that capacity, stability and careful prioritisation were maintained.

RISE advisers and supporting organisations indicated that they had a clearer understanding of what RISE school improvement plan funding could be used for, as a

result of improvements in guidance. Supporting organisations felt that this helped them make more confident and informed decisions about eligible expenditure.

Implementing a RISE school improvement plan

Headteachers reported receiving a wide range of support from their supporting organisations. Many also worked collaboratively on curriculum audits, planning, sequencing and modelling effective practice, alongside strategic leadership support from senior leaders such as CEOs or directors.

Supporting organisations were widely praised for strong expertise by other stakeholders, though some capacity and capability gaps were reported.

RB capability and capacity to support schools varied. Many RBs were committed to supporting implementation of the plan but a few were constrained by limited staffing or specialist expertise, especially in smaller MATs or local authorities.

Adaptation, administration and termly review of RISE school improvement plans

Most schools, RBs and supporting organisations made sensible adjustments to their improvement plans over time, though some were unsure how much flexibility was allowed. Although in most cases the administrative processes worked well, a few supporting organisations reported confusion and heavy workload around RISE invoicing, underspend rules and repeated paperwork.

Termly RISE adviser reviews were generally viewed as helpful for tracking progress and addressing barriers.

Early outcomes

Stakeholders broadly believed RISE was supporting meaningful improvement, mainly through added capacity, specialist expertise and early gains in teaching, curriculum and SEND practice. Some schools report perceived improvements in attendance and behaviour.

Success is generally defined through better attendance, behaviour, teaching consistency, leadership strength and curriculum coherence, though many note improvements are hard to attribute solely to RISE. A range of indicators measuring these changes were regarded as foundations for later gains, even if not immediately reflected in outcomes.

Conclusions

The task of the process evaluation is to identify areas where implementation is working well and less well to support on-going improvements to programme delivery. This is set out below, assessing progress to date, changes remaining and lessons for policy and delivery.

Progress to date

This second wave of the RISE targeted intervention process evaluation suggests a programme that is maturing operationally, with clearer roles, and smoother early-stage processes since summer 2025. Overall, most stakeholders described RISE as collaborative and capable of accelerating improvement when matching between the school and supporting organisation is successful.

Headteachers had a clearer understanding of the RISE targeted intervention, supported by communication of roles and relationships between the cohorts. Headteachers of autumn cohort schools generally welcomed RISE support compared with the first cohort. Most stakeholders felt RISE adviser diagnosis was conducted in a timely, transparent and constructive way and aligned with school priorities.

RISE advisers have learnt from their initial experiences and described ways they have adapted and developed their approach to initial engagement and diagnosis of need.

Well-matched supporting organisations were described by most schools and RBs as taking a collaborative approach, building on existing school improvement plans and the RISE advisers diagnostic to produce achievable actions. In these cases, school leaders valued new ideas and believed their RISE school improvement plan was achievable within the two-year window. Supporting organisations felt there was improved clarity on what could be funded in the later cohort compared with the earlier cohort.

Implementation of the support was characterised by rich professional development, targeted subject support and leadership strengthening.

Understanding of the RISE adviser termly reviews is developing as RISE advisers have begun undertaking them. There was evidence of perceived early positive outcomes described by summer cohort stakeholders, although most said that it is still too early for schools to demonstrate firm pupil-level outcomes linked to RISE. None of the schools in

the summer or autumn cohort of schools have yet had external exams since they began receiving support from RISE.

Where the positive ethos described above is present, the RISE targeted intervention is well-placed to translate early practice improvements into durable gains in teaching quality, curriculum strength, inclusion and outcomes for pupils.

Challenges

Communications:

- a few headteachers felt excluded from seeing the diagnostic assessment, which is shared with the RB, early enough or at all
- some schools and RBs were uncertain what would happen following the RISE adviser's initial diagnosis in terms of elapsed time relating to selection of a supporting organisation, permission to start development of the school improvement plan and its sign-off
- a few schools and RBs still wanted more explanation of how the matching process was undertaken to arrive at the recommended supporting organisation
- mixed understanding of the RISE adviser role in relation to termly reviews needs to be resolved to maximise the value of their role to monitor intervention delivery

Monitoring:

- in a few cases, RISE advisers, headteachers and RBs raised concerns about supporting organisation capacity to support multiple schools simultaneously, citing delays in activities and changes in staff

Timescales:

- the time for the supporting organisation to engage with the school and develop the action plan was reported to be about 2 weeks. Schools and other stakeholders felt this created undue pressure and risked the quality and depth of detail for the RISE school improvement plan

Lessons for policy development and delivery

Communications:

- further refinements on explaining why the initial assessment tool (AT1) is shared with RBs and not headteachers would help address headteacher concerns. Further encouragement for RBs to share this with headteachers would also help
- communicating to schools and RBs about what will happen following the RISE adviser's initial diagnosis in terms of elapsed time relating to selection of a supporting organisation, permission to start development of the RISE school improvement plan and its sign-off, will help reduce uncertainty and manage expectations
- further clarity on how the matching process is planned to be undertaken to arrive at the recommended supporting organisation would help some schools and RBs understanding
- ensuring a common understanding of the RISE adviser role in termly reviews will help alleviate concerns and further promote positive engagement of all stakeholders

Monitoring:

- monitoring the number of RISE schools assigned to individual supporting organisations and their capacity to support each school effectively, will be important to the reputation of the RISE targeted intervention

Timescales:

- compressed timescales for developing the school improvement plan should be reviewed to see if they could be extended

Introduction

Background

The regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) programme aims to break the link between young people's backgrounds and their future success.

RISE aims to drive high and rising standards across all schools and for all children and young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, ensuring they have the knowledge, skills and support to thrive. The specific objectives of RISE support will be to ensure that:

- every school can self-navigate a path to improvement, drawing on all necessary support within and beyond their school or responsible body (RB) such as a local authority or trust
- every area of the country has a coherent set of local priorities enabling local partners to work collaboratively across their area, supported by regional RISE teams
- schools facing challenges improve rapidly, with sharply targeted support for 12 to 24 months from a supporting organisation with a strong track record of improvement, such as a local authority partnership or a multi-academy trust (MAT)

RISE provides support at 2 levels¹:

- Universal RISE aims to mobilise the strengths already in the system to raise standards everywhere. This includes signposting effective practice, encouraging peer-to-peer support through conferences, and bringing schools together to share knowledge and innovation.
- RISE targeted interventions for eligible schools facing the greatest challenges. RISE advisers engage with eligible schools and their RB to agree an improvement plan, backed by resources to reduce barriers to improvement.

¹ [Regional improvement for standards and excellence \(RISE\): school support](#) [accessed on 11/03/26]

Schools are supported to improve over 12 to 24 months and are monitored by regular Ofsted inspections

This formative process evaluation is focussed on the RISE targeted intervention offer. After a small-scale lead-in of around 30 schools from January 2025, RISE support was introduced from April 2025. By the end of February 2026 there were 400 schools eligible for the RISE targeted intervention.²

The RISE targeted intervention

[Eligibility for the RISE targeted intervention](#) covers schools that Ofsted identifies as needing to improve. The bespoke RISE targeted intervention focuses on ‘stuck’ schools that haven’t improved, or improved enough, within their current structure but are believed to have the capacity to do so. To be eligible, a school must have been identified by Ofsted as requiring improvement, must not have had a change of RB since its last inspection, and, from September 2026, will include schools judged as ‘requires significant improvement’. The 9 RISE regional teams have the option to match an eligible school, via its RB, to a high-quality supporting organisation to drive forward improvements.

RISE advisers (who are often CEOs of a MAT) won’t deliver the specialist support directly; however, together with regional RISE teams, they will regularly review implementation, progress and engagement with the targeted intervention. There were 65 RISE advisers recruited through 2 cohorts by October 2025.

The RB for each school (the trust board for an academy or the governing body and local authority for a maintained school) will continue to be accountable for the schools they run, including driving school improvement. RISE teams will work with schools, via their RB, in delivering the RISE targeted intervention.

Any funding as part of the RISE targeted intervention will consider views from the RISE adviser, improvement organisation, and the school through its RB. This funding will go directly to the RB of the school unless otherwise agreed.

² [RISE programme: lists of advisers and targeted schools - GOV.UK](#)

A set of guidance documents were developed for RISE teams, schools, RBs and supporting organisations. These describe the detailed steps involved in the RISE targeted intervention.

RISE targeted intervention is delivered over 5 phases:

- phase 1: identify eligible schools and inform them and their RB they are entering a targeted intervention
- phase 2: initial diagnosis followed by either matching with a high-quality supporting organisation or recommending reviewing progress only
- phase 3: a supporting organisation works with the RISE school and RB to diagnose and plan, co-constructing a costed school improvement plan
- phase 4: implement the agreed improvement plan using delivery partners
- phase 5: monitor the school and supporting organisation to review progress

The funding bands that could be allocated for RISE targeted intervention were³:

- Band 1: up to £40,000
- Band 2: up to £80,000
- Band 3: up to £100,000⁴

Evaluation aim

This process evaluation, which began in summer 2025, aims to gather regular, real-time views from a range of experiences and perspectives amongst individuals involved in the RISE targeted intervention at multiple points in time to understand how well the policy is operating and identify areas for improvement to maximise potential impact.

Wave 1 gathered views from a range of stakeholders to help answer the following top-line questions.

³ From RISE Assessment Tool 3

⁴ Reduced from £120,000 prior to 1 September 2025

- effectiveness of RISE implementation: how well are the initial processes and implementation of the RISE targeted intervention functioning from all perspectives (especially schools). Are there aspects that could be improved?
- expectations and alignment: what are the initial expectations of schools and RBs regarding the role of the RISE adviser, regional staff and overall support package? How does RISE align with existing improvement frameworks implemented by the RB?
- quality of relationships: how good is the relationship between schools and advisers, and others involved in the support?
- shared vision and responsibility: does the agreed improvement plan reflect a shared vision between the school, adviser, RB and supporting organisation, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for implementing improvement actions?
- credibility and relevance of advice and support: does the diagnostic advice lead to plans that are seen as credible, timely and focused on the right issues? What are schools' opinions on the quality, depth and relevance of the diagnostic and RISE targeted intervention?
- overall effectiveness and barriers: to what extent is RISE overall seen as a helpful and effective support offer and are there obstacles or barriers which limit that effectiveness?

Wave 2 interviews explored the above after a further 6 months with a focus on:

- progress made through working with a supporting organisation: examples of early outcomes achieved? What are the expected indicators for success?
- ongoing review: How well are the roles of RISE advisers, RBs and supporting organisations working to review progress towards the improvement actions?

This is the second update report following the first report in February 2026. The process evaluation started in April 2025 will continue until autumn 2027, examining whether effective support is sustained, barriers are addressed, and a positive impact on school improvement is evident over time.

Methodology

Design

The formative process evaluation methodology involves interviews with individuals from a sample of all the organisations engaged with delivering or receiving the RISE targeted intervention. This sits alongside DfE's data and monitoring to assess the RISE intervention's impact on success measures such as attainment, absence, behaviour and finances.

Wave 1 fieldwork took place in June, July and September 2025. The method involved interviews:

- with 18 RISE advisers (against a target of 18 based on 2 in each region)
- with 35 headteachers (against a target of 36 based on 4 in each region) from the summer 2025 cohort ⁵
- with 18 RBs (against a target of 18 based on 2 in each region) ⁶
- with 18 supporting organisations (against a target of 18 based on 2 in each region)

and workshops:

- with 9 DfE regional teams (in 2 groups to manage numbers)

Wave 2 fieldwork took place in December 2025, January and February 2026 – the focus of this report. Participants from wave 1 were re-contacted for follow-up interviews⁷. In addition, one set of interviews with stakeholders from the autumn 2025 cohort were undertaken to help monitor the impact of any early changes in delivery since summer 2025. These additional interviews were regionally spread and were:

⁵ Three schools were being monitored as part of the RISE targeted intervention, all others were being matched to a supporting organisation. One RB asked researchers not to speak to the headteacher until wave 2.

⁶ Including 5 local authorities

⁷ Summer 2025 sample interviews were undertaken with: 20 RISE advisers, 32 headteachers, 17 RBs (including 5 local authorities), and 17 supporting organisations

- with 17 headteachers (against a target of 18) from the autumn 2025 cohort
- with 11 RBs (against a target of 9) including 3 local authorities
- with 15 supporting organisations (against a target of 9)⁸

Wave 3 fieldwork will begin in summer 2026 and will expand to include a sample of schools flowing into RISE targeted intervention in spring and summer 2026 (and their RBs, advisers, and supporting organisations). Interviews with these ‘flow’ schools will take place at intervals of between 6 and 12 months until autumn 2027.

An evaluation framework was drafted and agreed with DfE to address the research questions (Appendix A).

Sample

The sample of schools for each wave were created from the department’s Managing School Improvement (MSI) database which holds detailed information about all participating schools.

Initial contact was made with an email to the headteacher, copying in the RB. Replacements were made for sample schools because:

- in wave 1 there was no response to emails or phone calls (5) or they declined to participate (3)
- in wave 2 there was no response to emails or phone calls (6) or they declined to participate (2)

There was no evidence of systematic non-participation, with a mixture of attitudes - both positive and negative - to aspects of the RISE targeted intervention.

The selection of RISE advisers, RBs and supporting organisations followed a similar spread by region and phase, and where possible they were linked to schools also being interviewed to aid triangulation of findings.

⁸ over-sampled due to a slow initial response

Scheduling of interviews

The summer 2025 and autumn cohort interviews were undertaken with:

- most RISE advisers being interviewed in December 2025 and January 2026
- most headteachers being interviewed between December 2025 and February 2026
- most RBs and supporting organisations being interviewed in January and February 2026

Individual topic guides were drafted in line with the evaluation framework and signed off with DfE prior to interviews taking place. Topic guides were designed to ensure consistency and to provide a framework for discussion, whilst still allowing for flexibility as interviews unfolded naturally.

This is the second of 4 waves of interviews over a 2 year evaluation. Issues will be revisited and further evidence gathered as future waves are undertaken.

Characteristics of the sample of schools

The school phases in the autumn 2025 sample consisted of:

- 8 primary schools
- 7 secondary schools
- 1 all-through school
- 1 special school

The school types in the sample consisted of:

- 7 academy converters
- 4 sponsor-led academies
- 2 community schools (local authority maintained)
- 1 free school
- 1 voluntary-aided school
- 1 university technical college (UTC)

- 1 academy special converters

School phases and school types of summer 2025 cohort were balanced similarly to the above and described in the previous report.

Approach to analysis

Interview scripts were coded based on the topic guide question structure with some open coding to capture unanticipated themes. This was undertaken using NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, to support thematic analysis of views across different respondent groups. Triangulation at the school level was undertaken through researcher analysis sessions where multiple researchers compared interpretations and discussed key themes.

Precise quantification of findings is hard by nature with qualitative interviews as not all respondents in each respondent group gave answers covering every issue question or gave unclear responses that could not be assigned to a theme.

To provide a feel for scale, the following relational quantifiers have been used (they are intentionally non-specific to avoid spurious accuracy in this qualitative research):

- a few – 2 to 4 respondents, dependent on the sample size
- some/minority – up to around half the sample
- most/majority – over half the sample
- all/almost all – everyone in the sample or very close to that amount

Emerging findings

Understanding of RISE roles

Summary

RISE advisers continue to understand their role primarily as being a point of liaison between RBs, schools and supporting organisations.

The majority of summer cohort headteachers and RBs understood the role of RISE advisers and supporting organisations. There was a better understanding of the RISE adviser role in the termly reviews since the first round of reviews had taken place.

The majority of autumn cohort headteachers and RBs had an even clearer understanding of the role of RISE advisers and supporting organisations than the summer cohort. This suggests that the guidance, early communications and dialogue with RISE advisers is improving headteacher's and RB's understanding.

Summer cohort supporting organisations felt there was a clearer understanding of their role, both within their organisations and amongst the RBs, RISE advisers and headteachers they work with.

Amongst autumn cohort supporting organisations, all understood that their role was to coordinate, lead and deliver the planned support package. However, clarity around roles and responsibilities amongst the RBs and schools they work with was still developing in some instances.

RISE advisers

All RISE advisers remain committed to the success of the programme and continue to develop relationships with schools. A majority saw their role as involving initial diagnosis, brokering a supporting organisation (if required), liaison between RBs, schools and supporting organisations and acting as a mediator where issues arise. Some also mentioned termly reviews of progress, ensuring fidelity to the RISE developed school improvement plan, as a key part of their role.

Headteachers

The majority of headteachers (both cohorts) described RISE as a targeted, collaborative school improvement programme that brings external expertise, capacity, challenge and support to accelerate progress. Headteachers see it as aiming to strengthen teaching quality, curriculum, leadership, attendance, SEND practice and data use, often through coaching, CPD, school visits and specialist input from the supporting organisation.

The majority of headteachers in the summer and autumn cohorts reported understanding the roles of RISE advisers and supporting organisations. Understanding of the RISE adviser's role in termly reviews improved once the first cycle of reviews had been completed for the summer cohort, as there was greater clarity around what the meeting entailed. Additionally, headteachers in the autumn cohort were clearer on roles at the same stage of interviews compared with the summer cohort, suggesting that improved guidance, early communications, and ongoing dialogue with RISE advisers had helped to strengthen headteachers' understanding of the RISE adviser role. A few headteachers who were not convinced their school required RISE targeted support had less positive views of the roles of different stakeholders.

Responsible bodies (RBs)

The majority of RBs (both cohorts) generally understood RISE as a two-year school improvement programme that provides additional capacity, external expertise and structured challenge to accelerate progress. They see it as an intervention that adds specialist support, coaching, leadership development and curriculum strengthening. Many view the RISE targeted intervention as a mechanism to bring in high-quality supporting organisations and evidence-based practice, with RISE advisers brokering and overseeing delivery. A few RBs who were not convinced their school required RISE targeted support had fewer positive views of the roles of different stakeholders.

Supporting organisations

Almost all supporting organisations of summer cohort schools felt there was a clearer understanding of their role, both within the supporting organisation and amongst the RB, RISE adviser and headteacher they were working with.

A few commented that, whilst they understood they were accountable for the support delivered, as the supporting organisation, they were not ultimately accountable for the school's improvement, as this responsibility lay with the RB.

All supporting organisations of autumn cohort schools understood that their role was to coordinate, lead and deliver the overall RISE targeted intervention support package.

A few specifically mentioned that offering strategic challenge, where appropriate, to headteachers was also part of their role.

Initial contact from DfE regional teams

Summary

There were fewer issues around the initial contact with autumn cohort RBs and headteachers about their selection to be part of the RISE targeted intervention, compared with the previous summer cohort.

According to RBs, the majority of schools have reacted positively to being selected for the RISE targeted intervention, with headteachers welcoming the support. A few headteachers and RBs remained unsure about the value of the support to their school.

Overall, the issues highlighted in the previous report around some RBs and headteachers viewing initial contact with DfE as slow, or pressured by short response timescales, were not evident in feedback from autumn cohort schools and RBs.

In contrast to the previous report, autumn cohort headteachers generally did not raise concerns about having too many people visiting the school in the early stages of the RISE targeted intervention.

Generally, most RISE advisers felt that the RISE targeted intervention was working more smoothly for the autumn cohort than the previous cohort for the following reasons:

- greater clarity on processes and expectations
- improved guidance and documentation
- RISE advisers were more confident and experienced

Most autumn cohort headteachers were told they would be part of RISE by their RB, although a few said that they heard directly from the DfE regional team. Only minor concerns were raised about this initial process, with a few headteachers describing a

lack of initial clarity around why the school had been selected for RISE or whether they would be part of the programme.

Autumn cohort schools and RBs did not express concerns about being publicly labelled a 'stuck' school through being part of the RISE targeted intervention programme. This contrasts with the summer cohort, where a few schools and RBs raised this as a concern.

The majority of autumn cohort RBs described the reaction from schools at being selected for RISE as positive, saying that headteachers welcomed the support. A few autumn cohort RBs also commented that RISE aligned well with the existing support the school receives from their trust or LA.

“[The headteacher] felt it was supporting them to do better, rather than just coming in and taking control.” – *Responsible body*

However, a few RBs with schools that had only recently joined their trust, felt unsure about the value of the support to their school. They felt that the RISE targeted intervention activity began before they had enough time to implement or demonstrate the impact of their own recently developed improvement plans.

Most RISE advisers described working collaboratively and constructively with the DfE regional teams, using terms such as “responsive” and “supportive”. A few noted positive changes compared to delivery in the summer term, commenting that regional teams appeared to be taking a more flexible and less prescriptive approach.

“Engagement is frequent and solution-focused. Regional colleagues joined initial visits, respond promptly to safeguarding and complexity flags, and provide guidance so decisions don’t complicate sensitive situations.” – *RISE adviser*

Matching RISE advisers with schools

Summary

The majority of autumn cohort schools and RBs considered the process of matching of RISE advisers to be successful, describing positive relationships and constructive dialogue.

Relationships between the majority of summer cohort schools and RISE advisers continued to be described as positive by headteachers and RBs.

Similarly to the summer cohort, the majority of autumn cohort schools and RBs considered the process of matching of RISE advisers to be successful, describing positive relationships and constructive dialogue. They highlighted a range of factors they felt contributed to this, including the RISE adviser:

- having a good understanding of the school's context and needs, through having experience of similar types of schools or knowing the locality well
- being open, collaborative and communicative in the way that they work with the school and RB

In a few cases, autumn cohort schools or RBs felt they had not yet had enough contact with the RISE adviser to comment on their relationship. In a few cases, RBs described being uncertain about the match or what the RISE adviser could offer them.

Relationships between the majority of summer cohort schools and RISE advisers continued to be described as positive by headteachers and RBs.

“[The RISE adviser is] brilliant ... has a massive amount of expertise which is very valuable.” – *Headteacher*

Many summer cohort headteachers praised strong relationships and accessibility, especially when RISE advisers knew the school's context and provided needs-led support.

There were a few cases where a change of RISE adviser for health-related reasons was reported to have been handled well; however, there was also an instance where a RISE adviser left, and no handover process had taken place.

Initial diagnosis

Summary

Overall, the initial diagnosis has continued to work effectively for the autumn cohort, with the majority of autumn cohort headteachers and RBs expressing that their initial diagnosis aligned well with their school's needs and priorities.

By the end of September 2025, all autumn cohort headteachers had met with their RISE adviser. Most had been recommended to be paired with a supporting organisation.

A few headteachers of autumn 2025 cohort schools mentioned that they had not seen the initial diagnosis document, assessment tool 1 (AT1), at an early enough stage or at all.

By the end of September 2025, all autumn cohort headteachers had met with their RISE adviser. Following this meeting and the RISE adviser's initial diagnosis, almost all schools were recommended for a match with a supporting organisation and one for reviewing school progress. Three of the summer cohort schools in the sample were recommended for reviewing school progress.

Reflections on initial diagnosis

The majority of autumn cohort RBs said they were happy with their RISE adviser's initial diagnosis. They described the process as transparent, collaborative, open-minded and forensic.

"Diagnostic themes were completely right... gave me peace of mind." –
Responsible body

A few RBs described the initial diagnosis document (AT1) as light touch and felt it should have been more thorough. At the other extreme a few headteachers noted that while the intention of bringing together the RB, supporting organisation and RISE adviser was positive, the combined volume of input could feel intense.

Amongst headteachers of autumn cohort schools, most had understood the initial diagnosis process or were appraised of the initial findings, either through a verbal or summarised update from the RISE adviser or having seen the document itself (from the

RB). The majority of headteachers expressed a view that the initial diagnosis focussed on the right things and was aligned with their school's needs and priorities (see case example below). A few specifically focussed on the process of the diagnostic visit by the RISE adviser, describing it as a positive experience.

Case example:

A headteacher described how they felt the diagnostic visit from the RISE adviser was very supportive, contrasting it with a “judgemental and stressful” Ofsted visit. The RISE adviser had provided reassurance in advance that the visit would be about constructively and collaboratively finding areas in need of support, rather than making critical judgements.

“It was all about finding a way to help. It was so refreshing to have an external body coming in and looking at us in a very supportive way.” – *Headteacher*

A few headteachers of autumn cohort schools mentioned that they had not seen the AT1 at an early enough stage, or at all. This has not changed compared with the summer cohort perspective. In these instances, they felt this resulted in misunderstandings of their school as they had not been able to challenge it.

Most RISE advisers felt that the RISE targeted intervention diagnostic phase was working more smoothly for the autumn cohort than the previous cohort.

Match with supporting organisations

Summary

The majority of autumn cohort supporting organisations were engaged by mid-October to mid-November, with most schools and RBs informed of their match in November. Experiences of the matching process varied: some headteachers found it smooth and well-aligned with their needs, a few RBs felt the process was rushed or insufficiently tailored to school context, geography or existing partnerships.

RISE advisers reported that matching improved from the summer to the autumn cohort, with clearer guidance and more consistent processes, though challenges remained in a few cases where capacity, expertise, geography or MAT dynamics limited suitable options.

Schools, RBs and supporting organisations agreed that strong matches depended on close alignment of ethos, context and pedagogical approach. Effective partnerships featured trust, respect, context sensitivity and collaborative working, enabling more impactful support on curriculum, teaching and leadership.

The majority of supporting organisations had been identified and engaged by mid to late October and a few were engaged in early to mid-November. However, most RBs and headteachers said that it was not until November that they were informed of the selection.

Matching process

Some headteachers and RBs described the process of identifying a supporting organisation as positive. Headteachers described the process as straightforward, collaborative, and aligning with their needs. In these cases, schools felt they had a choice of organisation or already had a relationship in place, which helped the match process work more smoothly.

RISE advisers generally viewed the supporting organisation matching process as improving over time, becoming more structured, clearer and smoother from the summer to autumn cohort. Many appreciated the better guidance, clearer expectations and more consistent processes introduced after the first round, which reduced early confusion of the matching process and helped matches progress more efficiently.

Case example:

A headteacher described how they felt the matching process was a positive experience, with the supporting organisation being well matched to their needs. In this case they were able to nominate the supporting organisation (located about 20 miles away) and this was accepted. They had a preexisting relationship, which meant the RISE relationship was able to build on this and has been very collaborative so far.

“He's been very clear that this is not about them coming and telling us, oh, you should do it this way. And then he's always going to start with us going in there and seeing and talking to them about how they've made changes and what went wrong and what worked. And I think that's a big difference.” – *Headteacher*

Challenges

The range of challenges mentioned by a few headteachers and RBs in the selection of a supporting organisation included:

- ethos/values mis-match between school and supporting organisation
- context, especially around SEND/AP or specialist needs
- personality/relationship clashes that hindered early establishment of trust
- geographical distance limiting regular on-site support
- MAT dynamics affecting perceived neutrality or fit

In a few cases re-brokering due to some of the above challenges was necessary.

A few RISE advisers also highlighted challenges: in some cases, matching was delayed or difficult due to limited supporting organisation capacity, misalignment between supporting organisation expertise and school need, geographical location or sensitivities within trusts and local authorities.

Importance of matching by ethos, culture and context

Across both cohorts, schools consistently reported that the match quality of the supporting organisation was the strongest driver of the value they felt RISE provided. Schools, RBs and supporting organisations agreed that partnerships were most successful when the supporting organisation's ethos, context knowledge and pedagogical approach closely aligned with the school's own, this included similar demographics, deprivation profiles and SEND/AP specialisms. This alignment, whether based on prior relationships, local networks, similar demographics or shared improvement journeys, enabled supporting organisations to "speak the school's language," build trust quickly and tailor support in ways staff found credible and relevant.

Schools described the most effective partnerships as those characterised by context sensitivity, mutual respect and a collaborative, non-judgemental tone. RISE advisers also noted that familiarity with school contexts allowed supporting organisations to integrate smoothly into routines, reducing defensiveness and enabling deeper work on curriculum, teaching quality and leadership practice. Many RBs highlighted that such matches could be "exceptionally strong," particularly when supporting organisations brought specialist credibility and a track record of improving similar schools, leading to rapid traction in priority areas such as leadership, curriculum and attendance.

In a few cases, small schools in particular, sometimes found themselves overwhelmed by larger supporting organisation deployment models, highlighting the importance of tailoring support to school size and context. Supporting organisations reported that small schools often have limited leadership capacity and fewer middle-tier roles which makes it difficult for them to engage with intensive or multi-strand support at the same pace as larger schools.

Developing a RISE school improvement plan

Summary

Most stakeholders described the RISE improvement plan development process as collaborative, and drawing on the initial diagnostic findings.

A few schools felt their existing school improvement plans were not fully considered, but most agreed the final plans aligned well with their priorities and existing support. A few headteachers were unsure about the relationship between the RISE school improvement plan and their existing school improvement plan.

Timescales were a concern for many headteachers, RBs and supporting organisations, who felt the drafting period was rushed. However, the majority of headteachers and RBs still viewed their plans as achievable.

Awareness of Universal RISE varied, with some schools and RBs valuing hub support and others highlighting unclear communication and access barriers.

RISE school improvement plan development

Across the autumn cohort, the majority of headteachers, RBs and supporting organisations described the RISE school improvement plan development process as collaborative and co-constructed. Typically, supporting organisations worked with headteachers, RBs and RISE advisers to ensure that priorities were clearly defined, plans were achievable and actions were aligned with school context and capacity.

In the majority of cases, plan development involved reviewing the school's existing school improvement plan, building on diagnostic visits, and agreeing where RISE targeted interventions could add additional capacity or support. Many headteachers explicitly stated that the RISE school improvement plan fitted well with their existing school improvement plan. This was described positively, with several highlighting the value of coherence between previous and new priorities.

“The RISE plan sits alongside and dovetails into the overall school development plan - the latter is very detailed, we didn't want to start taking that apart.” – *Headteacher*

Case example:

The school praised the RISE adviser's management of and support during the development of the improvement plan as they were very good and keeping things simple and not involving the school in extensive paperwork "which I think he probably took on himself." They also mentioned that the RB was equally important in the process and that made it "really easy to tease out what the priorities were." As a result, the school felt that the plan's development was a real collaboration to work out priorities and where the additional funding would help the most and make the most impact.

A few cases highlighted a different experience, where headteachers or RBs felt that the supporting organisation had created plans that were too generic, unfocussed or included priorities (such as behaviour or attendance) that were not issues for that school, although supporting organisations have a duty to maintain oversight in these areas. A few RBs also expressed residual concerns about the supporting organisation matching process and outcome, noting that when the match felt imperfect, the resulting improvement plan sometimes lacked the level of contextual precision they expected. Lastly, a few supporting organisations raised challenges about the improvement-plan spreadsheet format, describing the template as restrictive and difficult to use when trying to reflect nuance or adapt plans iteratively.

Accounting for existing support

The majority of supporting organisations reported that they discussed existing support in the context of the school's needs. Supporting organisations said they deliberately aligned the RISE package to avoid duplication and ensure coherent sequencing in relation to existing support the school was receiving from the trust, diocese, local authority or hubs. For example, these supporting organisations described mapping ongoing activity, such as headteacher induction support, existing trust-level work, or Maths/English Hub involvement, and integrating it into the RISE school improvement plan where it added value.

However, a few supporting organisations noted that in some schools the existing support was weak, inconsistent or insufficient, with some reporting that RBs lacked the capacity or expertise to provide meaningful school improvement input. In these cases,

RISE was designed to fill a gap, offering enhanced capacity and expertise that had not been available previously.

The majority of RISE advisers mentioned checking that existing provision was complementary to the RISE school improvement plan. A few raised concerns that less established RB systems, particularly in areas such as governance and strategic oversight, presented a challenge to school improvement. Examples included an executive leader who was perceived to be too passive, a lack of clarity around a MAT's use of monitoring information and a MAT (comprised of mostly primary schools) with limited experience to support a single secondary school.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that effective accounting for existing support depends on open communication, clarity of roles, and honest appraisal of what current provision can deliver.

Timescales for agreeing the school improvement plan

The majority of supporting organisations, headteachers and RBs were critical of the timescales for developing the RISE school improvement plan. Many described the turnaround as rushed, with two-week deadlines, work coinciding with the end of term, and limited time for detailed diagnostic activity. Although the autumn cohort benefited from earlier deployment of RISE advisers and faster completion of the initial diagnosis compared with the summer cohort, schools and supporting organisations did not experience a longer or more manageable period for developing their RISE school improvement plan. This was because identifying and securing a supporting organisation took longer, meaning that, once appointed, there was still a compressed window for the supporting organisation and school to co-develop and finalise the plan.

“Plans were produced too quickly, with insufficient clarity and limited on-site time.” – *Supporting organisation*

Case example:

One school described how, in terms of designing the plan, it was too fast. The headteacher felt that it was written to meet the deadline and as such the plan was not sufficiently bespoke, or an accurate representation of what the school needed. Therefore, the actions being undertaken were not necessarily those set out in the plan. For example, the supporting organisation is looking at other things under the heading of curriculum, such as middle leader support.

Despite these pressures, the majority of headteachers remained confident that the RISE school improvement plans were achievable within the 2 year timeframe and would support improvement across the school. A few supporting organisations noted that the speed to produce the RISE school improvement plan reduced opportunities for a deeper understanding of the school operations and broader engagement with the extended staff team.

Case example:

The supporting organisation described the development of the improvement plan as “a sequence of professional conversations and iterative drafting”, all completed within what they referred to as “a pressured 2-week period.” The process began with RISE adviser initial diagnosis and an early shared understanding of what needed to improve. From there, the supporting organisation worked closely with the headteacher and a senior trust colleague to refine the KPIs, explaining that they spent several meetings “testing percentages and cohort level expectations so that everything was sharp and realistic.”

Universal RISE

Awareness of Universal RISE appears highest among supporting organisations, RBs and RISE advisers, while headteachers generally reported lower familiarity. A few respondents just did not recognise the term Universal RISE.

Of those who had engaged with Universal RISE, they highlighted that the Maths and English Hubs and the DfE attendance showcases/data tools were the most useful elements of the universal offer. A minority of supporting organisations and RISE

advisers with strong existing hub relationships argued that Universal RISE could be highly valuable if better communicated, regionally tailored and phase specific.

Some supporting organisations emphasised that they were prioritising targeted in-school support before drawing on Universal RISE, often due to capacity constraints or concerns about duplication with hub, trust or local authority provision. A few supporting organisations were unsure if hub support could be used as part of the targeted RISE school improvement plan.

“We seek clarity to avoid duplication ... of inputs. For now, we are prioritising the intensive, in-school elements that the school most needs. My understanding was that we're not meant to be cross-pollinating [between targeted and Universal RISE].” – *Supporting organisation*

Some supporting organisations and RISE advisers identified practical access barriers to Universal RISE support, such as distant or oversubscribed events, limited staff release time, and highly structured hub programmes ill-suited to rapid-turnaround contexts.

Approving a RISE school improvement plan

Summary

Most schools and other stakeholders felt that the approval process for school improvement plans worked well and became smoother over time. Clearer guidance, more consistent quality assurance and a shared understanding of what strong plans should contain reduced revisions in the autumn cohort.

RISE advisers highlighted that quality assurance processes have become more consistent, and both RBs and RISE advisers now have a clearer understanding of what strong plans should include, reducing the number of revisions needed.

For autumn cohort schools, most leaders felt the approved plans were well-designed, aligned with existing priorities and improvement work, and strengthened by collaborative co-construction with RISE advisers. Summer schools also largely viewed plans as robust, although a few felt they were overly complex.

Most headteachers, supporting organisations and RBs believed the plans were achievable within two years, provided capacity, stability and careful prioritisation were maintained.

RISE advisers and supporting organisations indicated that they had a clearer understanding of what RISE school improvement plan funding could be used for following the summer cohort, as a result of improvements in guidance. Supporting organisations felt that this helped them make more confident and informed decisions about eligible expenditure.

Across schools and other stakeholders, the majority described the process of approving school improvement plans as smooth and effective.

RISE advisers highlighted that quality assurance processes have become more consistent, and both RBs and RISE advisers now have a clearer understanding of what strong plans should include, reducing the number of revisions needed.

Initial challenges experienced in the summer cohort schools tended to relate to rushed timelines, occasional uncertainty about roles, or plans being submitted very close to deadlines, which reduced space for discussion. Overall, while early challenges were not uncommon, RISE advisers consistently reported that the process worked well for most

schools, particularly when communication was clear, timelines were realistic, and roles were understood from the outset.

In a few cases across both cohorts, headteachers, RBs and supporting organisations described the approval process as a difficult, back-and-forth exercise when plans weren't agreed on the first attempt, with feedback from DfE RISE teams arriving in fragmented or iterative feedback that required repeated redrafting. Locked templates, tight timelines, and slow or unclear responses added to the administrative burden, sometimes leaving schools or supporting organisations "in limbo" while waiting to know whether plans were approved or needed further changes.

"I authored the plan with input from our directors and the school, then iterated it through DfE approval. The feedback process sometimes arrived in separate pieces (e.g., financial line detail, then named strand leads), which extended sign-off time." – *Supporting organisation*

A few RISE advisers and supporting organisations also described inconsistencies between regions in how detail, evidence or funding rules were interpreted, leading to duplicated work and uncertainty.

Reflections on the approved RISE school improvement plan

For autumn cohort schools, the majority of headteachers and RBs felt that the school improvement plan was well designed for their school, reflecting the right priorities, aligning closely with existing school improvement plans, and building on evidence from monitoring visits, Inspection Data Summary Report data and staff engagement. Many described the plan as achievable, comprehensive, and appropriately focused on key issues such as writing, SEND, leadership development, curriculum quality and outcomes in Years 10 and 11. Several also highlighted that the plan had been co-constructed with RISE advisers who engaged with documentation, listened to school leaders, and ensured that the design complemented ongoing improvement work rather than displacing it. Where this occurred, schools reported that the RISE school improvement plan felt purposeful, contextually relevant, and supportive of staff development, with some noting improved motivation because the plan visibly invested in people.

"Many staff have been remotivated as they feel they are being invested in and that their contribution is being valued." – *Headteacher*

Across summer cohort schools, the majority viewed the RISE school improvement plan as broadly well designed and aligned with their needs. Many headteachers described the plan as robust, fit for purpose, well designed for context, and tailored to the specific challenges they faced, whether related to pedagogy, behaviour, leadership development or curriculum structure. Supporting organisations and RBs largely echoed this positive view, highlighting strong alignment with school development plans, a clear match to contextual needs, experienced contributors, and a plan that has the engagement of heads and trust leaders. A few schools and RBs described the RISE school improvement plan as unnecessary or overly complex (for example, with 25 actions).

Timescales for RISE school improvement plan delivery

Across headteachers, supporting organisations and RBs, the majority felt that the approved RISE school improvement plan was achievable within the available timescales. The majority of headteachers stated that the two-year window was realistic, that the RISE school improvement plan aligned with their existing improvement trajectory, and that the actions were manageable if sequenced effectively. The majority of supporting organisations felt the timescales were appropriate, particularly where the scope was kept tight, funding was in place, and implementation was front-loaded with clear milestones. RBs were similarly positive, with the majority reporting confidence in reaching the intended outcomes.

A minority of respondents across all stakeholder groups noted that achievability was conditional on key factors such as capacity, middle-leader development, careful prioritisation and organisational stability. This included headteachers who highlighted risks linked to staffing turnover or high-pressure targets, supporting organisations who emphasised the need for systemic changes at trust level, and RBs who noted that delayed starts created time pressure.

A few respondents expressed more caution, including concerns about whether two years is long enough for schools with deep structural challenges or whether the scale of improvement expected is realistic for very small or vulnerable settings.

“Technically yes [it’s achievable within the timescales], if everyone is still standing at that point! Post inspection, 2nd year is going to be slightly lighter. Just concerned about getting to the end of the first year at this level of intensity.” – *Headteacher*

Use of RISE funding

Feedback from RISE advisers and supporting organisations suggests that improvements in guidance, combined with increased experience of supporting organisations, have contributed to a clearer understanding of what RISE school improvement plan funding can be used for. Supporting organisations indicated that this helped them make more confident and informed decisions about eligible expenditure.

However, there are still indications of misunderstanding among a few of the autumn cohort. A few supporting organisations struggled with the extent to which temporary capacity, such as administrative support or leadership release time, was permissible, and how hub-funded activity worked alongside allocated RISE budgets. A few summer cohort schools reported uncertainty around whether leadership backfill or trust-led activity was eligible, and how flexibly funding could be adapted as priorities evolved.

Implementing a RISE school improvement plan

Summary

Headteachers reported receiving a wide range of support from their supporting organisations, most commonly extensive staff development through whole-school CPD, coaching, subject-specific training, NPQs and school-to-school visits. Many also worked collaboratively on curriculum audits, planning, sequencing and modelling effective practice, alongside strategic leadership support from senior leaders such as CEOs or directors. Some also received additional capacity, such as seconded staff, SEND support or behaviour and attendance expertise, as well as tools for quality assurance and reviews.

RB capability and capacity varied. Many RBs were committed to supporting implementation of the plan but a few were constrained by limited staffing or specialist expertise, especially in smaller MATs or local authorities.

Supporting organisations were widely praised for strong expertise by other stakeholders, though some capacity and capability gaps were reported.

Support received

Headteachers reported receiving a broad range of support from their supporting organisations, with the majority of respondents highlighting extensive staff development activity. This included:

- whole-school CPD programmes
- targeted coaching and mentoring
- subject-specific training
- leadership development programmes such as NPQs
- reciprocal visits to other schools and opportunities for paired observations

Alongside professional learning, many schools reported working jointly on curriculum activity. This work often included:

- whole-school and subject-level curriculum audits
- lesson planning support
- redesigning or resequencing curriculum content
- modelling of effective teaching practice
- access to subject-specialist expertise

Another strong theme was strategic leadership collaboration. Schools engaged with CEOs, directors, or leaders with Ofsted inspection experience, who worked with them on behaviour and culture, governance, quality assurance, improvement planning and establishing clearer monitoring structures.

“Other members of my senior leadership team have been out on reviews. My departments have been out to see schools. So you know, my English team have been out. My maths team have been out. My science team have all been out to kind of see things in other schools.” –
Headteacher

In addition to professional development and curriculum work, some respondents described receiving additional capacity and staffing support, including seconded leaders, SEND or pastoral capacity, and temporary staffing to stabilise provision. Behaviour, attendance and inclusion support was also referenced by some, ranging from behaviour audits to adaptive teaching coaching and attendance analysis. A few

reported access to specialist tools or programmes, such as instructional coaching platforms, reflection maps or external initiatives. Similarly, a few schools received help with quality assurance, subject deep dives and SEND reviews.

A few RBs also viewed RISE as an opportunity to build networks and share practice across their wider trust, noting examples of good practice being spread to other schools. Supporting organisations generally reported positive relationships with headteachers which had supported effective delivery, although a few noted that “defensiveness” in some schools which acted as a barrier to early engagement.

A few headteachers identified limitations in the support, such as misalignment with school context, insufficient subject expertise, overly directive approaches or delays in planned reviews.

RB capability and capacity to provide ongoing school improvement

Across evidence from supporting organisations, RISE advisers and schools, RB capability and capacity emerge as variable. While most RBs demonstrated strong commitment and constructive engagement, in a few cases, there were capacity constraints, particularly in smaller trusts and local authorities. A few supporting organisations described RBs operating with limited staffing or specialist expertise, which can create bottlenecks in decision making or slow the pace of school improvement practices.

A few autumn cohort schools and RBs noted confusion about improvement priorities and additional pressure where they perceived they were delivering both an existing school improvement plan and a RISE school improvement plan.

Variation in RB governance maturity was observed by a few supporting organisations. In a few instances, RB involvement was described by supporting organisations as largely focused on governance oversight, centred on meetings, monitoring and compliance, rather than deeper engagement with the curriculum, teaching quality or improvement planning.

A few supporting organisations felt the school’s RB would benefit from support through RISE but were unsure whether this was an allowable aspect of delivery.

Supporting organisation capability and capacity

Many RISE advisers and schools gave examples of receiving high-quality support from supporting organisations. Most agreed that these organisations brought strong specialist expertise and experience, particularly in areas such as subject knowledge, SEND and behaviour.

A few RISE advisers identified capacity variation across the system, particularly where supporting organisations were supporting multiple RISE schools concurrently.

Adaptation, administration and termly review of RISE school improvement plans

Summary

Most schools, RBs and supporting organisations made sensible adjustments to their improvement plans over time, though some were unsure how much flexibility was allowed. Formal amendment processes were often seen as slow and overly bureaucratic. In a few cases, changes reflected supporting organisation capacity issues.

Although in most cases the administrative processes worked well, a few supporting organisations reported confusion and heavy workload around RISE invoicing, underspend rules and repeated paperwork.

Termly RISE adviser reviews were generally viewed as helpful for tracking progress and addressing barriers, though a few headteachers found them unclear or lacking value.

School improvement plan amendments and flexibility

A majority of summer cohort headteachers, RBs and supporting organisations reported making changes to the school improvement plan after its initial approval. These adaptations were typically pragmatic refinements, adjusting the sequencing or pace of actions or re-prioritising strands in response to new data. Supporting organisations reported iterative adjustments driven by diagnostic work, changing starting points, or the need for more intensive mentoring than first anticipated. Among RBs, some also

reported refinements, typically through half-termly reviews, updated attendance strategies, minor re-costings, or changes to how support was delivered.

A few headteachers expressed uncertainty about the extent to which plans could be changed or adapted. This uncertainty was viewed as a risk to effective implementation, as respondents felt that successful improvement required the ability to adapt to emerging data, capacity constraints or context changes. Administrative rigidity was highlighted by a few supporting organisations and RBs, who described the formal change process as slow, paperwork-heavy and insufficiently responsive to weekly realities.

A few headteachers highlighted situations where they perceived supporting organisations lacked capacity leading to changed activity, reduced specialist input, or entire strands being removed or scaled back.

Invoicing, administration and resourcing

Although in most cases the administrative processes worked well, a few supporting organisations from the summer cohort described uncertainty around the mechanics of RISE invoicing, including unclear triggers for when invoices should be issued and when funds would be released. Alongside this, some supporting organisations experienced frustrations with restrictions on using unspent funds, such as underspends that could not be re-allocated without submitting additional paperwork (duplicated forms and repeated revisions), placing added burden on administrative teams.

Case example:

One supporting organisation explained that, when it comes to payment for the work completed, they are unsure of the procedures. Their understanding is that the grant funds have not yet been awarded to the RB, so they have not invoiced for any of the work so far. They would like to invoice but are unclear about the trigger points – “should I just randomly send the invoice to the Trust and see what happens?”

Some supporting organisations reported that RISE funding was insufficient, with the actual time investment exceeding the amounts allocated in costed action plans. As a result, some supporting organisations absorbed unfunded work to maintain momentum or ensure continuity for schools.

Termly reviews

Almost all summer cohort schools had received a termly review visit from a RISE adviser. All RISE advisers valued the opportunity to meet and discuss progress with the headteacher, RB and supporting organisation. In a few instances, RISE advisers were able to use these meetings to address aspects of the relationship between headteachers, RBs and supporting organisations.

“The proposed plans to help facilitate that monitoring of the progress with them to hear of any barriers or challenges they're facing and then collectively to bring all three parties together to say are we on track? Where is the progress? And if we're not, what are we going to do to adapt the plan or change the plan?” – *RISE adviser*

The majority of headteachers of summer cohort schools felt the RISE adviser termly review was helpful in giving them confidence that they were progressing in the right direction and at the expected pace. In a few cases, headteachers described a helpful degree of challenge, including to the RB.

A few headteachers did not feel the termly review visit was of any value. In these instances, they did not feel the RISE adviser gave them any useful feedback. A few headteachers reported that their relationship with the RISE adviser was more distant and that the RISE adviser met with their RB but not with themselves. A few headteachers would have liked to meet separately with the RISE adviser without the RB and supporting organisation so they could have a more open conversation.

A few RISE advisers, headteachers and RBs noted there was poor communication around the purpose of the review meeting, and some reported uncertainty and inconsistency in how the RAG-rating⁹ and monitoring processes were interpreted and applied. These stakeholders described a lack of shared understanding of what the RAG system was intended to measure, whether it should reflect the school's progress to date, the likelihood of future improvement, or that an activity had begun. This ambiguity meant that some schools were being rated 'green' because actions were underway, even where no meaningful impact had yet been observed.

The few schools, only receiving termly reviews and no funded support, had differing views on the value of RISE adviser termly reviews. On the positive perspective, the headteacher valued the visit as providing a strategic input and expert advice. On the

⁹ Red, Amber, Green as a measurement of risk to achieving tasks

opposite perspective, another headteacher viewed the RISE adviser termly review as an interruption which they did not feel add any value.

Early outcomes

Summary

Stakeholders broadly believe RISE is supporting meaningful improvement, mainly through added capacity, specialist expertise and early gains in teaching, curriculum and SEND practice. Some schools report perceived improvements in attendance and behaviour.

Success is generally defined through better attendance, behaviour, teaching consistency, leadership strength and curriculum coherence, though many note improvements are hard to attribute solely to RISE. Almost all stakeholders say it is too early to observe pupil-level outcomes, with current evidence mainly showing improved routines, planning, leadership capacity and stronger SEND teaching. A range of indicators measuring these changes were regarded as foundations for later gains, even if not immediately reflected in outcomes.

Stakeholders were asked what indicators of success might include and their perceptions of early outcomes from initial delivery of RISE school improvement plans.

Indicators of success

Across both cohorts, stakeholders describe expected success as improved pupil access to learning, supported by stronger attendance, behaviour, teaching quality and leadership. A majority continue to view attendance and behaviour as clear indicators of early progress, expecting improvements in punctuality, smoother transitions and consistent lesson starts, followed by more pupils in lessons and a reduction in suspensions and serious incidents. Ambitious attendance targets (such as 94% in challenging settings) were considered markers of success. However, a few headteachers expressed nervousness about these expectations - arguing that they do not always reflect local realities, including significant challenges with pupil motivation and complex intake profiles.

“[We’ll see impact] by movement in data, embedded practice changes, improved attendance and reduced suspensions, and eventually external validation (e.g., Ofsted), while recognising timing issues.” —
Headteacher

A majority, particularly in the summer cohort, echoed by a few in autumn 2025, identified teaching consistency and quality as key indicators. These include aligned lesson structures, calmer classrooms, predictable routines and teachers increasingly applying modelling and coaching. The autumn cohort additionally highlighted coherent professional development sequencing strengthened assessment practices and improvements in staff wellbeing and confidence.

Strengthening leadership capacity, especially middle leadership, and achieving governance stability were widely cited. A majority in the summer cohort point to leadership development as critical, while some in the autumn cohort emphasised the importance of alignment between schools, RBs and supporting organisations. A few headteachers expressed frustration that their school circumstances, such as entrenched community challenges, low parental engagement or the pressures of operating as a small school with high staff turnover, were not sufficiently considered when defining indicators or pace expectations.

Curriculum coherence and assessment quality were mentioned by some as further indicators, including more informed curriculum planning, sequenced KS3 maths and clearer assessment systems that identify need earlier. These were regarded as foundations for later gains, even if not immediately reflected in outcomes.

External validation through RISE termly reviews, learning walks and inspection readiness was referenced by a majority of headteachers as key evidence that change is being embedded. Alongside this, some highlight sustainability, reduced reliance on external support and stable staffing as essential long-term markers.

A few stakeholders point to improvements in inclusion and SEND provision, including better deployment of support staff, clearer pupil passports and fewer incidents involving SEND learners. A few also referred to stronger family and community engagement.

“We’ll track reductions in suspensions and truancy ... improved attendance; more students in lessons; and greater consistency in teaching and outcomes.” — *Headteacher*

Across cohorts, stakeholders expressed clear caveats about measurement and attribution. A few noted that improvements may be difficult to attribute solely to RISE, particularly where schools had already initiated a change. Many also acknowledge that while attendance and behaviour may show earlier movement, shifts in curriculum or teaching quality take longer.

A few headteachers across both cohorts, suggest that improvements would have occurred regardless of RISE, as their schools were already moving in the right direction. For these respondents, RISE was seen as helpful in providing structure, accountability or resource rather than fundamentally altering the school's trajectory.

"It will have accelerated some of the work we're already doing." – *Headteacher*

Perceived early outcomes

Across the evidence base, the most common theme (reported by a majority) is that it is still too early for schools to demonstrate firm pupil-level outcomes linked to RISE. Most headteachers and supporting organisations described RISE as being in its early implementation phase, with foundational work underway but insufficient time having passed for measurable impact to appear in data. This focus on groundwork, capacity-building and consistency is noted by almost all as a necessary precursor to future gains in achievement, attendance, and behaviour.

Despite this, some respondents reported perceived early outcomes, most frequently around improvements in teaching quality, curriculum coherence and leadership capacity. These early gains included clearer lesson structures, more coherent subject planning, particularly in maths, science, literacy and early reading, and stronger consistency in classroom routines. Respondents described these changes as increasing staff confidence and reducing reliance on senior leaders, with some schools noting that this coherence was improving pupil engagement and classroom stability. Although these impacts are not yet widespread, they represent one of the most commonly observed early benefits across the sample.

"I think you may certainly see some more settled behaviours, some better routines, things like that. In lot of schools, you may see better embedded frameworks in teaching and learning. [But generally, it is] too early to anchor it in outcomes." – *Supporting organisation*

Early improvements in attendance were described in a minority of schools, with some referencing attendance “moving strongly in the right direction”, reductions in persistent absence, or faster escalation through attendance procedures. Where such improvements were described, they were often linked to RISE-funded staff such as attendance officers or education welfare officers, or to revised systems and processes encouraged through RISE support. However, a few headteachers and RBs emphasised that attendance improvements were already underway prior to RISE, or that trust-wide systems were the primary driver.

Improvements in behaviour were reported in a few schools, often linked to reductions in suspensions, calmer classrooms, and fewer escalations to senior staff. These changes were attributed to strengthened teaching routines, relationship-based approaches and improved SEND-informed practice.

SEND practice strengthening was identified in a few schools, particularly where SEND leadership capacity was a priority. Reported outcomes included clearer teaching assistant deployment, improved pupil passports, better-documented classroom adaptations and increased SENDCo confidence. These developments were often linked to early improvements in inclusion and to supporting a sense of belonging for vulnerable pupils.

Case example:

A secondary school was recommended by a member of staff from their alternative provision supporting organisation, to use intervention maps to improve conversations with young people who were struggling in mainstream classes. In this school it is a simple, accessible A3 printed worksheet which prompts the young person to think about what happened, what they were feeling or thinking at the time, what the impact was, and what might help next time.

It has had a profound effect on dialogue between teaching staff and pupils. It has helped young people by providing a safe, non-confrontational way to express themselves, particularly for those who struggle with direct questioning. It has helped build emotional awareness, encouraged ownership of actions, and supported problem solving. This restorative approach resulted in a calmer school environment through improved understanding of triggers and patterns that young people don't yet have the language to explain. The school has had a batch printed with school logos and their responsible body is planning to roll this out in another school.

Belonging appeared as an emerging theme in a few cases, particularly where RISE embedded trauma-informed approaches, pastoral development or consistent teaching routines that benefitted pupils with anxiety or additional needs. A few headteachers described pupils becoming more engaged and comfortable in classrooms, though most noted that this work was still at an early stage and would require longer to evidence.

“Behaviour and belonging is central through a ‘mattering’ approach and relationship work, contributing to reduced suspensions.” – *Headteacher*

Ongoing quality assurance evidence was referenced by a few respondents, including lesson observations, book looks, half-termly sprints and trust-wide quality assurance processes. These reviews were believed to demonstrate improved consistency and higher-quality teaching, which headteachers viewed as indicators that the programme’s foundations were taking hold, even if pupil outcomes had not yet shifted. Similarly, a few schools identified procedural or case-level evidence, such as increased attendance meetings, letters, fines, or improved SEND documentation. Headteachers and supporting organisations saw these operational improvements as early signs of strengthened systems that should lead to measurable outcomes over time.

Conclusions

The task of the process evaluation is to identify areas where implementation is working well and less well to support on-going improvements to programme delivery. This is done below assessing progress to date, changes remaining and lessons for policy and delivery.

Progress to date

This second wave of the RISE targeted intervention process evaluation suggests a programme that is maturing operationally, with clearer roles, and smoother early-stage processes between the summer and autumn cohorts. Overall, most stakeholders described RISE as collaborative and capable of accelerating improvement when matching between the school and supporting organisation is successful.

Headteachers had a clearer understanding of the RISE targeted intervention, supported by communication of roles and relationships between the cohorts. Additional briefing sessions delivered recently with stakeholders may also have helped with understanding. Headteachers of autumn cohort schools generally welcomed RISE support compared with the first cohort. Most stakeholders felt the RISE adviser's diagnosis was conducted in a timely, transparent and constructive way and aligned with school priorities.

RISE advisers have learnt from their initial experiences and described ways they have adapted and developed their approach to initial engagement and diagnosis of need.

Well-matched supporting organisations were described by most schools and RBs as taking a collaborative approach, building on existing school improvement plans and the RISE advisers diagnostic to produce achievable actions. In these cases, school leaders valued new ideas and believed their RISE school improvement plans were achievable within the two-year window. Supporting organisations felt there was improved clarity on what could be funded in the later cohort compared with the earlier cohort.

Implementation of the support was characterised by rich professional development, targeted subject support and leadership strengthening. Most autumn cohort schools reported continuous professional development, coaching, curriculum auditing and redesign, leadership development and opportunities for school-to-school learning.

Understanding of the RISE adviser termly reviews is developing as RISE advisers have started undertaking reviews. There was evidence of perceived early positive outcomes

described by summer cohort stakeholders, although most said that it is still too early for schools to demonstrate firm pupil-level outcomes linked to RISE. None of the summer or autumn cohorts of schools have yet had external exams since they began receiving support from RISE.

Where the positive ethos described above is present the RISE targeted intervention is well-placed to translate early practice improvements into durable gains in teaching quality, curriculum strength, inclusion and outcomes for pupils.

Challenges

Communications:

- A few headteachers felt excluded from seeing the AT1, which is shared with the RB, early enough or at all. There are clear reasons for this, however, it could be communicated more effectively with headteachers to avoid them feeling excluded or disempowered.
- Some schools and RBs were uncertain what would happen following the RISE adviser's initial diagnosis in terms of elapsed time relating to selection of a supporting organisation, permission to start development of the RISE school improvement plan and its sign-off. They felt that this represented a delay in the process, which suggests the need to manage expectations of schools and RBs.
- A few schools and RBs still wanted more explanation of how the matching process was undertaken to arrive at the recommended supporting organisation.
- Mixed understanding of the RISE adviser role in relation to termly reviews needs to be resolved to maximise the value of their role to monitor intervention delivery.

Monitoring:

- In a few cases, RISE advisers, headteachers and RBs raised concerns about supporting organisation capacity to support multiple schools simultaneously, citing delays in activities and changes in staff.

Timescales:

- The time for the supporting organisation to engage with the school and develop the action plan was reported to be about 2 weeks. Schools and other stakeholders felt this created undue pressure and risked the quality and depth of detail for the RISE school improvement plan.

Lessons for policy development and delivery

Communications:

- Further refinements on explaining why the AT1 is shared with RBs and not headteachers would help address headteacher concerns. Further encouragement for RBs to share this with headteachers would also help.
- Communicating to schools and RBs about what will happen following the RISE adviser's initial diagnosis in terms of elapsed time relating to selection of a supporting organisation, permission to start development of the school improvement plan and its sign-off, will help reduce uncertainty and manage expectations.
- Further clarity on how the matching process will to be undertaken to arrive at the recommended supporting organisation would help some schools and RBs understanding.
- Ensuring a common understanding of the RISE adviser role in termly reviews will help alleviate concerns and further promote positive engagement of all stakeholders.

Monitoring:

- Monitoring the number of RISE schools engaging with individual supporting organisations and their capacity to support each school effectively, will be important to the reputation of the RISE targeted intervention.

Timescales:

- Compressed timescales for developing the school improvement plan should be reviewed to see if they could be extended.

Appendices

Appendix A – research questions

Expectations and alignment of support received

What are the initial expectations of schools and responsible bodies regarding the role of the adviser, regional staff, and overall support package, and how has the RISE targeted support compared to initial expectations?

How clear are the expectations and responsibilities among stakeholders?

How are these expectations being communicated to key stakeholders over time?

What specific roles do schools and responsible bodies expect advisers and regional staff to fulfil in the set-up and implementation phases?

Is there a difference between the expectations of SLTs, regional advisers, RBs, RISE teams and support organisations?

How does RISE align with existing frameworks, LA/Trust improvement agenda and any other support the school is accessing?

Are schools aware of the Universal RISE offer and have they made use of any support through this?

Effectiveness of RISE implementation

How well are the initial processes and implementation of RISE targeted support functioning from the perspective of all stakeholders, and have they improved since the first cohort?

How satisfied are stakeholders with the diagnostic process, the bespoke support offer, the implementation plan and monitoring, and how does this compare between the two cohorts?

What challenges have there been for schools and the RBs in the onboarding process?

Have the challenges faced by the school changed since the previous wave?

How could processes and implementation be improved?

How effective are the processes for recruiting and matching advisers and supporting organisations to schools?

Quality of relationships

How good is the relationship between schools and advisers, and others involved in support (e.g. supporting organisations)? Have the relationships changed since the initial phase?

What factors contribute to strong partnerships between schools, advisers and supporting organisations?

Overall effectiveness/ success factors

How satisfied are stakeholders with the diagnostic processes, bespoke support offers, and implementation plans?

To what extent is RISE overall seen as a helpful and effective support offer and are there obstacles or barriers which limit that effectiveness?

What factors contribute to the successful implementation of RISE?

What specific changes have been achieved that would not have happened without RISE?

How do regional and local contexts influence the implementation and effectiveness of RISE?

How do the characteristics of MATs, LA partnerships, and dioceses affect the implementation of RISE?

How do school type, size, and pupil intake characteristics impact the effectiveness of RISE support?

To what extent have advisers and supporting organisations had capacity to deliver support?

Overall barriers

What barriers and challenges have been faced?

What specific challenges do rural, urban, and inner-city schools face in implementing RISE?

How have barriers been overcome? What strategies have been implemented on a national and a local level. How effective have these been?

What lessons can be learned to improve future implementation for new cohorts?

What challenges exist in sharing information within the RISE programme?



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