

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD
12/03/2026 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor McLaren (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)
Councillors Adams, Z Ali, Ball, Bishop, Byrne, Cosgrove
(Substitute), S. Hussain and Shuttleworth

Also in Attendance:

Jodie Barber	Assistant Director for Youth and Communities
Katie Charlton	Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion
Anthony Decrop	Children's Services - Oldham Borough Council
Sheila Garara	Children's Services
Jack Grennan	Constitutional Services
Josie Mak	Graduate Placement
Tony Shepherd	Head of Schools and Learning
Paul Tinsley	Director of Education
Jake Womack	Adviser to SACRE

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hobin and Councillor Iqbal (Councillor Cosgrove substituting)

Apologies were also received from Councillors Shaid Mushtaq and Mohon Ali as Cabinet Members, and from Councillor Umar Nasheen as Deputy Cabinet Member.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received for the Board to consider.

5 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD MEETING**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

At this point, the meeting was adjourned until 6:30pm

6 **OLDHAM STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2025**

The Assistant Director of Education and Early Years introduced the report alongside an adviser to the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). The recommendations and background to the report were highlighted and it was noted that since the report had been released, a regular Muslim representative had joined the

Committee. It was noted that Oldham does a good job around religious education and SACRE, with a full complement of members. It was highlighted that there had been a new locally agreed syllabus and that the launch event had been well attended by teachers and faith figures alike. The syllabus was based on guidance and there would be schemes of work and presentations that teachers could use as part of their lessons. It was highlighted that Oldham funded both primary and secondary school networks for teachers, enabling them to be equipped.

Upcoming events were highlighted including interfaith events and a film project. A curriculum review was highlighted as coming in 2028. It was discussed that the GCSE pass rate for religious education in Oldham was around the same level as the national average, despite there being a general lack of resources for religious education.

Members noted that those who want to teach religious education don't have to do a theological subject at University. Members also queried how the review was taking in the views of both pupils and teachers, and it was highlighted that SACRE was working hard around feedback and checking the implementation of the syllabus. It was highlighted that students were leading SACRE meetings and there was a push for a Youth SACRE both locally and nationally.

Members also queried whether advice on sensitive issues had been prepared for teachers, and it was noted that it had been, working collaboratively with faith figures to produce the advice. It was noted that this advice would be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, and that a Frequently Asked Questions-style document would be created too. Staff would be supported through both contact through email or calls as well as the SACRE team going into schools.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board commended Oldham SACRE on its annual report, having considered the advice provided.

7

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSURANCE REPORT 2025/26 FOR Q3

Officers from the Directorate introduced their own sections of the report, noting that it was a positive outlook overall with stability in a few areas. It was highlighted that across the directorate, the position was much stronger with the areas for primary focus being Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests, which was due to the complexity of this work.

It was highlighted that much of the success in the directorate had come from the Council's investment in services, and the Grow Your Own campaign. It was highlighted that the service trying to sustain this work and putting in mitigations where statistics dipped.

The Director of Education noted that there were a lot of positives for the Education team, noting that for services where the council can primarily influence, the news was positive, although it was less so where the primary work was done by partners.

Members queried the drop off in the use of agency staff and costs. It was noted that this was due to a real focused effort, particularly around Grow Your Own and pathways such as apprenticeships.

Members queried whether exit interviews cover the reasons why people are leaving and whether there are any themes to those reasons. It was noted that exit interviews were encouraged to feed into the retention strategy, but that the themes were various. Members followed up with queries around whether staff were leaving for other authorities and whether we were effectively training for other authorities. It was noted that the Council identifies where people go but that regarding leaving for other authorities, this was unfortunately part of life but we hire from other authorities too. A discussion was held on apprenticeships, the Council's retention offers and agency staff.

Members queried whether there were common themes of requests for disclosure, and it was noted that generally these were police and live investigations and these were complex cases. It was highlighted that there had been an increase in requests for police investigations.

Members also queried whether statistics that were close to the targets were due to pressures and whether this was monitored, and it was confirmed that this was the case. Members also requested clarity on whether some of the increases in foster care were due to individual or family groups, and it was confirmed it was a mix of both.

Members asked for clarity on what is classified as 'Unsuitable accommodation' and it was noted that this was not approved accommodation chosen by the young person but could also refer to prison or custody. Members queried how this was being approached and it was noted that the service worked with young people around this, particularly in regard to the relationship.

Members asked for clarity around the life learning courses and what these were. It was noted that the courses related to adults enrolled at courses as part of lifelong learning, which could encompass NEET. It was highlighted that a breakdown could be provided at the next meeting.

Members queried what was being done to improve the figure for 'Annual EHCP (SEND) statutory reviews completed within legal timeframe', and it was noted that work was ongoing to rectify this, with the current focus being on key transitions (for example nursery to reception and Year 6 to Year 7). It was also highlighted that work was ongoing with schools to improve this figure and that an automated reminder had been set up

alongside communications going out to highlight the importance of these being completed in time.



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Members noted that there are three parts to EHCPs and queried where the holdups were. It was noted that it was spread evenly and that each area was monitored to ensure there were any major issues in the pipeline. Members also enquired as to whether EHCP timeframes were going in the right direction and it was confirmed that they were despite a significant increase in ECHP numbers.

Members also asked about Get Oldham Working and the number of engagements. It was confirmed that there had been a prioritisation in Q3 for those already on Get Oldham Working, and that new engagements had dropped because of this.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board note the directorate outcomes identified and endorsed the report.

8

OLDHAM PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL OUTCOMES 2025

The Director of Education and the Assistant Director of Education and Early Years presented the report, which was a holistic review of school settings. It was noted that there were more academies than Council maintained schools. It was highlighted that the inclusion data within the report was important, especially as there was a push nationally around inclusion.

It was noted that getting the basics right was a priority, and that currently Primary schools were in a strong position and Secondary schools were on the right trajectory. Attendance was noted as having been a focus of work over the last 3-4 years and a marked improvement had taken place. Suspension rates had improved, and this was due to a collective partnership approach.

Key areas for improvements were highlighted including OFSTED performance for Secondary schools, inclusion and exclusion rates in Secondary schools, and achievement outcomes especially in KS2 and KS4.

Members queried what the Council was doing to improve attendance for students with SEND in Secondary schools. It was noted that children with free school meals performed better and that improvements were being looked at, especially regarding mainstream schools. Members also noted that rates of persistent absence for Secondary schools was improving.

Members highlighted that section 1.4 of the report front sheet was effectively an action plan, and noted that there had been a Greater Manchester scrutiny report on something similar. It was noted that Oldham had presented evidence to GM for that report and that the Council would utilise the findings of the report. It was further highlighted that the Best Start in Life plan would be going to Council.

Members noted concerns around the gender and age variables around suspensions and attainment. It was noted that these would impact life chances but that these were national, as well as local, issues. It was highlighted that the figures were better than they had been ten years ago, and that it was predominantly boys who were suspended in primary schools. Members also queried how exclusions were down, and it was noted that a lot of work had been done by Kingsland school, rather than because children were all behaving. It was noted that the system was a cooperative one and that grants had been utilised well, being invested in the workforce, particularly a taskforce at the Pupil Referral Unit) and support mechanisms. It was highlighted that the approach at Kingsland was a strategic one.

RESOLVED that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board commends schools and academies on the impressive inclusion outcomes, concur with the Learning Partnership priorities and approve the report.

9 **WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

10 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Scrutiny Board considered the Key Decision Document, which records key decisions that the authority is due to take.

RESOLVED: That the Key Decision Document be noted.

11 **RULE 13 AND 14**

It was noted that two reports were allowed to be considered at the Cabinet on Monday 23rd March, without being included on the Key Decision Document, that was published 28 days before the meeting and also to exempt them from call-in under Rule 14 of the Constitution.

The reports, both in the name of the Director of Education, Early Years and Skills, were:

- a) High Needs Provision in Mainstream Settings Capital Works (Brian Clarke Academy & Blue Coat School)
- b) Tier 2 Provision for Vulnerable Children – Capital Works (Kingsland)

The reason for urgency was that the Cabinet needed to sign-off the reports on 23rd March to allow the necessary works to commence and be completed during the summer holiday period, when the school buildings are closed. This would not happen if the matter was deferred until the next Cabinet meeting on 15th June 2026.

The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 8.10 pm