
Report to COUNCIL 13 December 2023

Education and Skills Portfolio Update

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Ali, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

This report provides an update on the main activity since the last Council meeting relating to portfolio responsibilities.

School Leadership

As a member of the Oldham Learning Board, I am supporting the LeadHERship programme to unleash talent from our community. LeadHERship is a proven coaching and mentoring programme that has successfully provided women of colour from Greater Manchester with crucial skills for leadership. The Oldham Learning board is supporting a number of women of colour through the next cohort of the programme. Delegates met with the Council Leader as part of a Black History Month masterclass.

Ofsted Inspections

I can report that two Oldham schools have recently had reports published following Ofsted inspections. I would like to commend the Headteacher, staff and governors at St Matthew's Church of England Primary School for the work which resulted in an inspection grading of 'Good'. I was pleased to read the comment that *'parents and carers are exceptionally happy with the school'*. Furthermore, I also want to recognise the progress that Ofsted reported at St Luke's Church of England Primary School, where consistent work from the whole school community resulted in an improved inspection grading of 'Good'. My congratulations go to leaders, staff and governors, and I acknowledge the comments from Ofsted that, *'Pupils enjoy school. They, and their parents, appreciate the recent improvements made to all aspects of the school. Governors, leaders and staff are united in their ambition for pupils to benefit from a high-quality education'*.

Oldham Music Service

As we progress towards Christmas, I also want to recognise the exceptional work that Oldham Council's Music Service deliver. On Sunday 26 November, the Music Centre Youth Wind Band took part once again in the northwest regional heat of the National Concert Band Festival. Due to our connections with the national organisation, the festival was once again held in Oldham and hosted by Crompton House School, with bands from across the region participating. On the 6 and 10 of December respectively, the Junior and Senior Christmas Music Festivals took place in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. These events showcased the borough's finest young musicians as well as some of our excellent community talent.

Apprenticeships

Since the government's apprenticeship reforms were introduced in 2017, the council have created 191 apprenticeship opportunities for residents, with 95 of those having come in the last 2 years. These opportunities have covered a wide variety of services from supporting

the Parks Team to maintain our green areas, supporting residents to access the services they need via Access Oldham, to growing our own Social Workers of the future through the Social Work Academy. In addition to these opportunities, 335 council officers have undertaken apprenticeship qualifications to ensure they always have the most relevant knowledge, skills & behaviours to deliver services to the standard residents expect.

Through our apprenticeship levy we have also supported schools in Oldham to access apprenticeships and create pathways into a career in education for residents. For instance, 75 Teaching Assistant apprenticeships have been created in Oldham's schools since 2017, giving a platform for residents to gain the necessary skills and establish themselves with a recognised qualification, whilst earning a salary and gaining valuable experience in a school setting. Furthermore, we have supported a variety of businesses in Oldham to access apprenticeships, working closely with Oldham College, amongst others, to identify where the council's apprenticeship levy can have a positive impact on local businesses to support residents with quality employment opportunities.

Since 2017, when the public sector target for apprenticeships was introduced, we have performed in the top 25% of all councils in the country for new apprenticeship starts every year (barring 2021, in which Covid-19 halted nearly all new apprenticeships). This meant we were one of only two councils in Greater Manchester to achieve the governments public sector target on apprenticeships over the 5-year period.

I can report that there are plans to continue to increase the number of apprenticeships offered through the council and in areas where we have found there is demand from residents, such as the digital sector. We are also going to expand on our T-Level offer. In partnership with Oldham College and Oldham Sixth Form College, T Level's support 16–18 -year old's exploring college courses with work experience placement and we have offered a number of Digital T Level placements to date, with the view to expanding on the number and variety of T Levels offered to our young people.

Virtual School for Children Looked After

The Council's Virtual School Team advocates on behalf of all children in care and works alongside schools, social care professionals and wider partners to make sure that our most vulnerable children can access the education they deserve and identify the different areas of support needed for each child to stay engaged with their learning.

In addition to their statutory role, the team provide an enhanced offer to our children looked after through their 'Raising Aspirations and Participation' programme. The officers regularly engage our children and young people in activities linked to their interests and aspirations. Last year the Virtual School Team delivered 22 different activities, incorporating 309 of our children looked after.

I am delighted to say that the work of the Virtual School Team was identified as a strength during the recent area SEND partnership inspection by Ofsted. In the inspection report, it is stated that, *'Children and young people with SEND who are looked after have their needs identified and met effectively. A dedicated speech and language therapist and additional time for educational psychology input within the virtual school team have been successful. As a result, these children's and young people's outcomes improve'*.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.