

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mohon 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.

Attendance and Inclusion

Earlier this month I was again delighted to see that the Children's Commissioner visited Oldham. The purpose of her visit this time was to chair the Greater Manchester Attendance Action Alliance. This is an alliance of all 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester. I'm pleased to say that Oldham is now leading the way across Greater Manchester on school attendance data analysis. Our innovative methods bring insight that enable schools to intervene to change outcomes. As a consequence, the Children's Commissioner called us 'trailblazing' in September.

Work conducted during the summer with children due to transition into a new phase of education (early years to primary school, and primary school to secondary school) has ensured a great start to term for school attendance. Compared to the same point last year:

- Secondary attendance is 0.9% higher.
- Primary attendance 0.2% higher.
- There are 750 fewer secondary persistently absent children.
- There are 1360 fewer primary persistently absent children.

Since the pandemic there has been a sharp increase in exclusions from schools across the country. Oldham schools are seeing the same pressures, but I'm proud to say that our school leaders are bucking this trend and continue to work hard to include pupils. Primary rates of exclusion remain very low and are much better than average; secondary rates have improved significantly and are now amongst the very best in Greater Manchester.

Quality of Education

From 2 September 2024, schools no longer received Ofsted single word judgements. At the point of this policy change, the primary inspection rate for Good and Outstanding schools in Oldham was at 93% and the secondary rate was 62%. School and academy inspections resumed at the end of September and the first reports on Oldham establishments are due to be published in the coming weeks. School Report Cards will be introduced from September 2025

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) continues to increase with now over 3500 children with such a plan. Despite this demand, performance levels within the Council SEND team remain excellent. The timeliness for the issue of an initial EHCP within 20 weeks remains significantly above national average of 20 weeks at 83%. This is despite requests for education, health and care needs assessments increasing from 639 to 730 over the last 12 months. The team are also working hard to provide families with the earliest possible support. Since the start of this term, Early Language Support for Every Children (ELSEC) has been in operation in 10 primary schools in Oldham. In addition to the focussed support in these schools, the team is also providing a more 'universal' level of support across all primary schools in Oldham.

Moreover, there are now Family Liaison Officers and Transitions officers in place across Oldham to ensure that families of children with SEND are supported well in Oldham.

Music

Music Service tuition has re-commenced in schools with the start of the new academic year. Each week during the school term Music Service teachers are delivering 445 hours of tuition across small group/whole class instrumental teaching, vocal lessons, curriculum class music and school band/choir delivery. This is unchanged from the total at the same stage last year. Music Centre attendance has also been maintained and certain sectors are rapidly developing. Noticeable increases have been recorded in the number of pupils attending first access level groups – Starter Strings and Junior Wind Band being particularly well subscribed.

Post-16/Skills/Apprenticeships and Adult Education Young Person Careers Event

The second annual Young Person Careers Event took place on 24th September 2024. The event held at the Queen Elizabeth Hall was a success with around 300 young people attending the event and over 60 organisations exhibited to promote a wide range of engagement, skills development, careers and employment opportunities available in Oldham. Additionally, in May 2023, the Greater Manchester Mayor and GMCA committed to developing an education, skills and work system that that not only supports productivity and inclusive economic growth but prepares young people for the future and builds hope and aspirations. The Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) intends to offer a clearer route via technical education into high quality skilled jobs with qualifications (T-Levels, Apprenticeships and other technical qualifications) respected by GM Employers, as a high value alternative to the EBacc. Oldham Council is working closely with the Mayor on this important initiative.

NEET and Unknown %'s

Due to summer holiday/break in learning there is no update on NEET figures. The first scheduled update will be available for the next report.

Sufficiency

The sufficiency of places for Y12 and Y13 continues to be an issue that needs oversight. We are currently undertaking a technical calculation across the partnership of the potential sufficiency gap. This will inform a decision to be made on whether we need to declare an official sufficiency gap to the DfE. Our planned additional provision for September 2024 to address some of our sufficiency challenges has been delayed due to recruitment problems. Recruitment in FE is a nationally recognised issue. Oldham College have been unable to recruit appropriate staff to deliver the new provision over at Positive Steps, and now YMCA are unable to recruit a tutor to deliver at The Hive. Therefore, the planned new provision has yet to commence delivery.

We have put in place a project with Oldham College (named “Connect Me”), which is using AI and their data intelligence to identify young people that are at risk of “dropping out”. Once identified, the College puts a support plan in place, and works with the young person, to either support them to retain their place at College, or transition to more appropriate provision for them, either within the College or an other provision.

Care Leavers Summer School and Apprenticeship programme

Work is progressing jointly with the After Care service, Get Oldham Working, HR and Organisational Development to secure better outcomes for Care leavers. Following the ILACS inspection, the Council committed to create a summer school that will support 15 care leavers to gain valuable work experience with 5 progressing in apprenticeships in the Council and the remainder to access employment and apprenticeship opportunities externally.

Lifelong Learning Performance

The R14 return has now been submitted which provides final performance outturn for Lifelong Learning Service for 2023/24 academic year. During this period, Lifelong Learning enrolled 2,304 residents engaged in learning studying 7,611 learning aims, with a 99% pass rate which means that the service achieved 110% of Adult Education Budget.

The latest data for 2024/25 shows that 1530 learners have enrolled (increased from 1330 in 2023/24), and are studying 2660 learning aims (increased from (2440) which is approximately a 15% increase in learners compared to this time last year.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.