

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.

As we approach Christmas and the New Year, I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who works tirelessly to support education, adult learning, and employment across Oldham. I also want to pay tribute to our children, young people, adult learners, and all those striving to start or advance their careers. Your efforts and achievements are truly inspiring, and I'm sure the entire Council joins me in celebrating all that you've accomplished in 2024.

2024 has been an outstanding year for our schools. To those working in our primary schools, thank you for your dedication and hard work. We now have more Good and Outstanding primary schools than ever before. Attendance has improved faster here than nationally and regionally, and our inclusive approach means children stay engaged. Remarkably, Oldham has the lowest primary school exclusion rate of any Greater Manchester borough. This is a testament to your commitment to every child's success.

To everyone in our secondary schools, I also pay tribute to your remarkable achievements. Over 70% of our secondary schools are now rated Good or Outstanding—a position Oldham hasn't enjoyed for many years. Our attendance rates continue to set the highest standard across Greater Manchester, with steady improvement, and our joint efforts recognised by the Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel D'Souza. Your work to make secondary schools inclusive environments are evident, as we maintain the lowest exclusion rates in Greater Manchester.

For those working in our colleges, I extend my deepest appreciation. The support you provide to young people as they transition from school and pursue their career goals is extraordinary. I'm particularly grateful for your collaboration in making the Young Person's Careers event earlier this year such a resounding success.

2024 has also been a year of progress for our SEND partnership. Our statutory performance for issuing Education, Health, and Care Plans remains among the strongest in the country. Additionally, the waiting list for Speech and Language Therapy has more than halved in the past year, and access to community paediatric services has significantly improved.

However, I want to acknowledge the ongoing challenges faced by children and young people with special educational needs and their families. Despite these local advancements, I understand that the national SEND system remains complex and often difficult to navigate. I'm encouraged by the government's recent commitment to addressing these issues, including the additional £1 billion in SEND funding announced in the budget. It's also worth noting that our own SEND Improvement Board chair, Dame Christine Lenehan, has been appointed as the government's advisor on SEND reform—a promising step toward meaningful change, and a chance that Oldham will be central in leading and influencing.

Our Lifelong Learning continues to transform the lives of residents. The service supported 2264 residents into formal learning with an exceptional 99.4% pass rate delivered from 25 venues across the borough. The Get Oldham Working Team have been a top performer across Greater

Manchester, helping our residents to achieve their ambitions with over a thousand residents supported into employment.

It's important we celebrate the remarkable progress we've made together in 2024. Our collective dedication continues to shape a brighter future for our community, and I look forward to building on this success in the year ahead. I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.