

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.

MegaHub & Digital Futures

Oldham is the first borough in Greater Manchester to invest in the pioneering MegaHub programme, powered by IN4 and supported by IBM, Microsoft, QinetiQ, and Roke. Together with the CyberFirst programme, we're giving local students access to high-quality training and direct links to digital and tech careers—one of the UK's fastest-growing sectors. This bold investment shows our commitment to nurturing the next generation of innovators right here in Oldham. At the programme launch, it was inspiring to see the ambition of our young people, supported by strong partnerships across education and industry.

LGC Award – Most Improved Council (2025)

Oldham Council has been named Most Improved Council at the 2025 LGC Awards. Our progress in education played a key role in this achievement, driven by record-breaking school outcomes and a relentless focus on raising standards. This is a collective success—thank you to everyone supporting education across our borough.

Universal Free School Meals & National Breakfast Club

From September 2026, all children with a parent on Universal Credit will be eligible for free school meals, easing pressure on families and ensuring every child gets a healthy start. Oldham is also among the first areas to adopt the new national breakfast club initiative. Seven local schools are now offering free breakfasts—boosting attendance, tackling hunger, and supporting working parents with up to £450 in savings per year. Cllr Arooj Shah and I recently highlighted this work during appearances on BBC North West Tonight and BBC Politics North West.

Early Years Transition Event

We recently hosted a successful event to support children moving from nursery to primary school—a key milestone in their educational journey. It was fantastic to see the dedication of early years staff, schools, and parents working together to support children's confidence and wellbeing.

SEND Capital Investment & Programme Expansion

I'm pleased to report progress on our SEND capital programme, which is delivering over 250 new specialist school places across the borough. Three major schemes—at Woodlands Primary, North Chadderton, and Werneth Primary—will create 55 new places at a cost of £2.08M. Three additional smaller projects have also been approved at Lyndhurst, St Thomas CE, and Coppice Primary. We've also secured an additional year of grant funding from the Department for Education to support SEND improvement, including the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme now running in 10 local primary schools.

Oldham Music Service Success

The Oldham Music Centre Youth Brass Band achieved outstanding results on Whit Friday, winning prizes at all 7 contests they entered—including five first-place awards. This is one of our best-ever results and a testament to the talent we're nurturing in Oldham.

Empower Oldham & NEET Support

The Empower Oldham programme continues to support 15–19-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), helping them overcome barriers and build brighter futures. Delivered in partnership with Positive Steps and GMCA, and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, this project is changing lives. Our Care Leaver Youth Hub is also making strong progress, with the Get Oldham Working team providing proactive support to NEET care leavers.

STEM Promotion with Professor Brian Cox

Thank you to Professor Brian Cox for his visit to Oldham on 1–2 July, where he engaged with students, teachers, and leaders to promote careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths). His visit aligns with Oldham's economic vision focused on green energy, innovation, and skills. We're excited to again host a jobs fair and careers event this year, helping connect young people with real opportunities.

Ofsted Inspections Update

This term has seen continued positive inspection outcomes across Oldham schools.

- **Oldham Academy North** showed strong progress during its recent ungraded inspection.
- **Whitegate End Primary** was praised for raising the bar in curriculum quality and pupil achievement.
- At **St Agnes Primary**, inspectors noted high expectations and strong outcomes, including for pupils with SEND.
- **Holy Cross Primary** was described as “an oasis of calm,” with a supportive and safe environment.
- At **Greenhill Primary**, inspectors celebrated the school's inclusive ethos and appreciation of diversity.
- **Lyndhurst Primary** was recognised for its effective support of new pupils with limited prior education in England.

Special mention to **Newbridge School**, which retained its **Outstanding** rating following an ungraded inspection. Inspectors highlighted the school's tailored curriculum and skilled staff who ensure pupils can access the world around them

Closing Reflections

As we end the academic year, I want to thank everyone working in education, early years, and skills development. Your efforts continue to transform lives and help learners of all ages reach their full potential.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.