

Report to CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD

Special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision (AP): Local area progress report.

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Mohon Ali, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Officer Contact: Matt Bulmer, Director Early Years, Education & Skills

Report Author: Katie Charlton, Assistant Director SEND and Inclusion

September 2025

Purpose of the report

This report provides an update to the previous submission to the board in January 2025.

It outlines the progress and impact of actions taken since January 2025 in response to the Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspection, June 2023. The report consolidates and reflects the delivery of the local area partnership's Priority Action and Improvement Plan to date and the progress and impact that this work is making to children, young people, and their families in Oldham.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the information in this report and the accompanying appendix.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Board

9th September 25

1 Background

- 1.1 This report to the board considers the progress made since January 2025.
- 1.2 A joint Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspection of the Oldham partnership took place between Monday 26 June 2023 to Friday 30 June 2023. The inspection report, determined.
There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently.
- 1.3 Post inspection in June 2023, Ofsted required the local area partnership to prepare and submit a Priority Action Plan (PAP) to address the two identified areas for priority action.

- Leaders at Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board should cooperate to urgently improve the shared strategic governance, oversight, support, challenge, and planning to deliver effective strategies to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in Oldham.
- Leaders at Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, including commissioners and providers, should act urgently to identify and address the delays and gaps in service provision to meet the full range of needs of children and young people with SEND, aged 0 to 25, in Oldham. This includes speech and language provision, neurodevelopmental pathways and community paediatrics.

1.4 In addition to the priority areas of action, the report stated three areas for improvement:

- Leaders across the partnership should improve transitions between children's and adult services in health, education, and social care, and improve them. strategy in relation to preparing children and young people with SEND for adulthood from the earliest years.
- Leaders across the partnership should embed and improve processes for the quality assurance of EHC plans and use this to further improve the quality and timeliness of outcomes and provision in new and existing EHC plans.
- Leaders across the partnership should improve annual review processes so that the finalised review documentation is completed and returned in a timely manner.

2 Current position in Oldham

2.1 The local authority reports annually on how we are implementing the special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) system in Oldham and how we are working with families and partner agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

2.2 We are awaiting the publication of the national SEND White Paper which is expected to set out a refreshed vision for SEND. A monitoring visit is anticipated this autumn, following the June 2023 Area SEND inspection. In preparation, we have reviewed the updated Ofsted and CQC Area SEND framework. From November 2025, the new Education Inspection Framework will introduce report cards in place of single-word judgements, offering a clearer picture of school performance, particularly for vulnerable learners.

2.3 Children and Young people in Oldham with SEND

SEND Overview in Oldham (2025)

Category	Details
Total SEND Population	8,916 children and young people
% of School-Age Population	19% of 46,177 pupils
EHCP Growth (2019–2024)	87% increase
EHCP Regional Comparison	Northwest: 73% increase England: 63% increase
Current EHCPs Oldham (July 2025)	3,871 children and young people
Change Since Jan 2025	+179 EHCPs
EHCP Primary Need	The most common type of need for children and young people with an

	EHCP is autism, although SLCN remains a significant area of need.
SEN Support in Oldham Schools	12.4% of pupils
EHCPs in Oldham Schools	6.7% of pupils National comparison: SEN Support: 13.9%, EHCPs: 4.7%

3. Key aspects of progress related to the Priority Actions

3.1 Governance and accountability

- 3.2 Oldham's local area partnership (PAP) was approved by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in October 2023 and has been in place for nearly 2 years.
- 3.3 Governance in Oldham continues to strengthen through the Local Inclusion Partnership and the Executive Board (LIPEB), which provides clear accountability, strategic oversight, and coordination of the Priority Action Plan and SEND Improvement Plan. Over the past six months, governance has matured with clearer roles, stronger cross-sector collaboration, and a shared commitment to sustained impact. Risk is regularly and systematically discussed at all levels.
- 3.4 Chair of the LIPEB since January 2025 is Dame Christine Lenehan, previously Director of the Council for Disabled Children and now the government advisor for SEND and inclusion. Dame Christine has provided external support and challenge to the partnership.
- 3.5 Both the LIPEB and the LIPPB are multi-agency, including parent/carer representation and school representation across primary, secondary, special, and alternative provision, as well as early years and further education settings.
- 3.6 There is a risk register which is actively managed and maintained. Emerging risks are identified at SEND & Inclusion Programme Board, which are then escalated to LIP Executive Board, in alignment with the current governance structure. Where necessary, risks are escalated independently to the SEND Escalation Meeting for timely resolution.
- 3.7 The governance role of the Oldham Integrated Care Partnership Committee has been strengthened, with clarified arrangements between local and Greater Manchester levels. Greater Manchester provides system-wide oversight and enables collaboration and quality assurance, while full accountability and decision-making responsibility rest with local areas. A Greater Manchester SEND Quality Assurance Framework supports this approach.
- 3.8 Since January 2025, the embedded partnership governance arrangements and programme structure continues to provide a strong foundation for effective joint working.
- 3.9 Of a total of 40 PAP actions: 37 actions (92.5%) have been marked as complete. within timescale, with intended outcomes and impact evident. 3 remain on track for completion:
 - **2.17** Develop proposal for sleep pathway.
 - **2.25** Review transition between children's and adults' neurodevelopmental services and, where gaps are identified report to LIP Executive Board

- **2.4:** Evaluate effectiveness of the DBV programme and report recommendations for future sustainability to the LIP Executive
- 3.10 The SEND data dashboard has evolved significantly, becoming a central tool for strategic oversight and performance monitoring. As of May 2025, it now includes a broader range of indicators such as EHCPs and performance commentary, annual reviews and amendments, EHCP completion statistics, tribunal volumes and outcomes, and data on attendance, suspensions, exclusions, and SEND-specific participation. Additional components include a CAMHS comparator grid, S< trajectory, and insights from POINT mediations and SENDIASS. The dashboard is a standing agenda item at the Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board (LIPEB), supporting informed decision-making and continuous improvement across the system.
- 3.11 The development of Oldham's SEND dashboard has had a significant impact across the system. It enables earlier identification of issues, supports proactive responses, and improves the timeliness of advice and decision-making. The integration of trajectory modelling and improved data presentation has enhanced data quality and provided deeper strategic insight into local management information systems and core SEND challenges. Additionally, the dashboard has fostered a whole-system approach to improvement, increasing Oldham's influence and visibility at regional and national levels through representation on key working groups.
- 3.12 The Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board (LIPEB) has played a key role in driving accountability, enabling challenge, and coordinating delivery across the partnership, with colleagues and representatives working collaboratively to progress actions at pace.

At the core of the structure are two key boards:

- **Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board (LIPEB)**
Provides strategic leadership, oversight, and challenge across the SEND system. It ensures alignment with national reforms and holds partners accountable for progress against the Priority Action Plan and SEND Improvement Plan.
 - **SEND & Inclusion Programme Board**
Oversees the operational delivery of SEND improvement programmes, ensuring that workstreams are progressing effectively and that resources are aligned to priorities. From September 2025, Matt Bulmer will begin shadowing the chair to support continuity and leadership development.
- 3.13. Beneath the SEND & Inclusion Programme Board are key workstream focus groups, each driving specific areas of the SEND improvement:

Early Identification & Intervention Strengthens early help pathways and ensures timely identification and support for children and young people with emerging needs.	Communication & Interaction Leads improvements in provision and outcomes for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, and autism.	Children & Young People's Engagement Ensures that the voices of children and young people inform service design, delivery, and evaluation.
--	---	--

Preparation for Adulthood Improves transition planning and outcomes for young people moving into adulthood, including education, employment, and independent living.	Quality Assurance & Performance Oversees monitoring of impact, performance metrics, and continuous improvement across the SEND system.	Data Maturity Drives improvements in data quality, integration, and intelligence to support strategic decision-making and service planning.
--	--	---

4 CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)

- 4.1 In Oldham, our treatment timeliness is 62.7% of children and young people in Oldham receiving treatment within 18 weeks of referral, ranking **2nd** across Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust (PCFT).
- 4.2 We have reduced waiting times. The average wait time in Oldham is **12.2 weeks**, ranking **2nd** overall for this metric.
- 4.3 Oldham's commitment to improving mental health support for children and young people is reflected in the development of services like *Take 5*, a Mental Health & Wellbeing Hub delivered by TGC Mind through the Youth in Mind programme. Aimed at 11–18-year-olds and their families, *Take 5* offers accessible support through drop-in sessions, counselling, peer support groups, and workshops.
- 4.4 The CAMHS Autism Acceptance Group promotes neurodiversity and provides a safe space for autistic young people to share experiences and navigate social challenges. These initiatives demonstrate a strong focus on early intervention, inclusion, and lived experience in shaping support services.
- 4.5 There is now a more appropriate and streamlined referral pathway for neurodevelopmental assessments for children under the age of 8. This has been achieved through improved coordination between CAMHS and Community Paediatrics, reducing duplication and service hand-offs. As a result, families experience a more coherent and timely journey through the assessment process, with fewer delays and a clearer understanding of next steps.
- 4.6 More people are now aware of emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Oldham, thanks to the co-production and sharing of the iTHRIVE directory. This is expected to lead to better referrals and quicker access to support, helping services work more efficiently and reach the right children and families sooner.
- 4.7 Fewer complex care packages have been funded by the Integrated Care Partnership. This is because more children are now being supported through existing mainstream services, which are better understood and more effectively used.
- 4.8 The Oldham Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board has sought clarification regarding potential changes to the CAMHS service pathway for children with neurodevelopmental needs. The Board has asked for further information on whether such changes are being considered, what oversight has informed them, and what alternative support might be available. While recognising the pressures on mental health services, the Board emphasises the importance of inclusive access and ensuring that any service developments are clearly communicated and aligned with local and regional improvement priorities.

5 Speech, Language and Communication

- 5.1 Despite significant progress in reducing the Speech and Language Therapy waiting list in Oldham, wait times remain too long for many children and families. The total number

of children on the waiting list has decreased from **1,766 in July 2023** to **547 by July 2025**, with a projected reduction to around **300 by January 2026**. This 68% reduction downward trend reflects the impact of revised referral pathways, updated training, and place-based delivery models. However, the current volume still represents a substantial number of children waiting for support, highlighting the need for continued investment and system-wide focus on reducing delays and improving access

- 5.2 The number of children waiting for over 18 weeks is now 362 children. The service continues to prioritise the longest waits while managing the increasing complexity of cases, many of which require multiple assessment appointments. Organisational policies are in place to support workforce resilience and maintain service delivery.
- 5.3 Since January 2025, Oldham has continued to deliver the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme, a nationally funded initiative aimed at improving speech, language, and communication outcomes for children in early years and primary education. The programme is designed to strengthen universal and targeted provision by embedding specialist support within local services.
- 5.4 As part of the Greater Manchester Balanced System work, Oldham has identified gaps in universal and targeted Speech and Language Therapy (S<) provision. To address this, an Invest to Save model has been proposed, centred on the creation of a new school-facing Speech and Language team. This team will sit alongside SEND and Inclusion services and work in close collaboration with the core SALT team. Its purpose is to deliver a graduated response to need, providing timely universal and targeted support within schools, so that children and young people receive the right help, in the right place, at the right time.
- 5.5 The new model builds on what is already working well in Oldham, including the Better Communication Team and the Early Language for Every Child (ELSEC) pilot, funded by the DFE and NHS England. By embedding support within education settings and reducing reliance on specialist referrals, this approach aims to improve outcomes, build workforce confidence, and create a more sustainable system of support for speech, language and communication needs.

6 Community Paediatrics

- 6.1 Referral data from Community Paediatrics shows increasing engagement across services, with a rise in referrals reflecting growing awareness of neurodevelopmental needs. While not all referrals meet criteria, strengthened partnership working, particularly with Health Visitors, SENCOs, and GPs, is already improving referral quality. Ongoing collaboration with ICB colleagues and targeted support for referrers are helping to embed shared understanding of service pathways, demonstrating Oldham's commitment to a more joined-up and responsive system for children and families.
- 6.2 Community Paediatrics in Oldham has made significant progress in reducing wait times for new referrals, with the longest waits decreasing from 26 weeks in May 2024 to 14 weeks by November 2024. This improvement reflects enhanced coordination and system responsiveness. The service continues to prioritise EHC medicals for children on the CPS wait list, streamlining processes and avoiding duplication.
- 6.3 Community Paediatric advice is consistently returned to the Local Authority within six weeks of EHCP requests, with compliance rates exceeding 95%, demonstrating strong partnership working and a shared commitment to timely, high-quality support for children and families.

7 Strategic Investment in Local SEND and Inclusion Improvement

-
- 7.1 Since the last report in January 2025, Oldham has continued to benefit from a number of targeted grant-funded programmes designed to accelerate local improvement across SEND and alternative provision. These include Delivering Better Value (DBV), Change Partnership Programme (CPP), Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC), the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA), and their core purpose is to strengthen local systems and drive sustainable change.
- 7.2 Each programme is underpinned by principles of joint commissioning and collaborative working, enabling Oldham to enhance frontline delivery, test statutory reforms, and improve outcomes for children and young people. These grants represent strategic investment in the borough's capacity to deliver inclusive services that reflect both national priorities and local needs.
- 7.3 **Delivering Better Value (DBV):** Since January 2025, Oldham has continued to use the DBV grant to strengthen multi-agency working and improve targeted support for children with SEND. Funding has supported successful models like the Pupil Intervention Project and enhanced capacity within specialist services, contributing to more consistent, needs-led provision across education, health, and care.
- 7.4 **Change Partnership Programme (CPP)** The CPP funding has supported the creation of several fixed-term posts, fully integrated into existing services, with a focus on improving processes around early identification, statutory assessments, annual reviews, and transition planning. These roles will be instrumental in embedding consistent practice across the local SEND system and ensuring that professionals are equipped to co-produce meaningful plans with children, young people, and their families. Following confirmation of an extension to the CPP grant beyond March 2025, Oldham has been able to sustain and expand this work. The extended funding has allowed for continued investment in frontline delivery, further development of Local Area Inclusion Plans, and deeper engagement with families and professionals to shape reforms that are both sustainable and responsive to local needs. Impact measures are being developed to evaluate the effectiveness of these roles and the wider system changes over the fixed-term period. This will ensure that learning from Oldham contributes to national policy development while delivering tangible improvements for children and young people with SEND.
- 7.5 **Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC)** Since January 2025, Oldham has continued to deliver the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme, a nationally funded initiative aimed at improving speech, language, and communication outcomes for children in early years and primary education. The programme is designed to strengthen universal and targeted provision by embedding specialist support within local services.
- 7.6 **High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA)** Since January 2025, Oldham has made substantial progress in delivering the strategic priorities set out under the High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA). Building on the initial investment of over £6 million, the local area has successfully developed additional specialist capacity within mainstream schools and settings, resulting in the creation of more than 100 new places for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This expansion has already begun to positively impact inclusion, reducing the need for out-of-borough placements and enabling more children to access high-quality support closer to home. The capital investment has supported the development of bespoke learning environments, enhanced accessibility, and improved facilities tailored to the needs of pupils with complex SEND. In response to ongoing demand and strategic priorities, a further £5 million has been allocated for the next phase of projects. Earlier this summer, Oldham invited schools, academies, and trusts to submit bids to develop new resource provision or enhance existing spaces. Priority areas include Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH),

and Hearing Impairment (HI). Emphasis has been placed on increasing secondary provision and addressing the current gap in local HI support, which has historically led to out-of-borough placements.

This next phase of investment will continue to focus on increasing the number of places available, while also improving the quality of learning environments for existing pupils. All proposals are being assessed in line with strategic priorities and the potential to deliver sustainable, inclusive education across the borough.

8. EHCP Annual Reviews, transitions, and timelines

- 8.1 76% of EHC needs assessments are completed within 20 weeks, well above the national average.
- 8.2 Annual Reviews for EHCPs continue to be prioritised at key transition points, with around 800 plans updated on time. While system pressures can affect some timelines, ongoing collaboration with settings is helping to improve scheduling. Outstanding amendments are being tracked using a RAG rating system to ensure timely and meaningful updates, especially ahead of transitions.
- 8.3 To support this process, the IDOX case management system has been introduced, streamlining the way annual reviews are managed. Since June 2024, 221 EHCPs have been quality assured, with over 70% rated as good or outstanding, reflecting a strong focus on improving the quality of plans.
- 8.4 SEND Officers play a key role in maintaining consistency and quality. A nominated officer attends every co-production meeting for children and young people undergoing an EHC needs assessment, as well as annual reviews where significant changes to provision or placement are being considered.
- 8.5 An audit of outstanding EHCP amendments has helped the team prioritise updates, particularly for children and young people approaching key transitions. Work is ongoing to complete these updates in a timely and meaningful way, with a clear plan in place to manage remaining amendments. The previous year's backlog has been cleared, and additional capacity is being used to support progress and maintain oversight of quality and timeliness.

9 Point Parent Carer Forum

- 9.1 In 2025, POINT, Oldham's Parent Carer Forum, has continued to play a vital role in supporting families of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Through co-production and partnership working, POINT has helped shape local services and ensure that the voices of parents and carers are central to decision-making. The forum has worked closely with the local authority and health partners to improve access to information, advice, and support.
- 9.2 To support ongoing quality assurance and continuous improvement, a dedicated Local Offer Coordinator is now in post. As a result of this strengthened oversight and the introduction of new feedback channels, the SEND Local Offer is now a dynamic and responsive resource that reflects the evolving needs of children, young people, and families in Oldham.
- 9.3 POINT has delivered a wide range of inclusive activities through the Short Breaks Play and Leisure programme. These have included creative, sensory, and physical sessions designed to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. A new early

-
- | | |
|-----|--|
| | year's music initiative was also launched in partnership with Oldham Music Centre, offering free sessions for families with children aged 0 to 4. |
| 9.4 | In addition to direct support, POINT has hosted regular workshops, listening events and drop-in sessions. These have provided opportunities for families to connect with professionals, share experiences and access guidance on SEND processes. This work has strengthened relationships between families and services and continues to contribute to a more inclusive and responsive local SEND system. |
| 9.5 | POINT has worked with the Speech and Language Therapy Service to co-produce the Support While Waiting project. A joint survey gathered feedback from families about their experiences while waiting for support, highlighting the need for clearer, more visual information and age-appropriate advice. In response, updated Support While Waiting documents have been developed and has been shared ahead of the new academic year. |
| 9.6 | Mediation and Dispute Resolution Service. Oldham LA commissions POINT to manage mediation and tribunal arrangements, ensuring that families have access to independent support when resolving disagreements. This strengthens the local offer and promotes a more inclusive and responsive SEND system. |

Conclusion

Since the Area SEND and Inclusion inspection in June 2023, Oldham has made strong progress. The Post-Inspection Accelerated Progress Plan (PAP), has now been in place for nearly 2 years. It has driven focused activity, with the Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board providing clear oversight and accountability. As a result, the majority of PAP actions have been completed. Following external stocktake visits by the DFE and NHS England, the Board has transitioned from monitoring the PAP to owning a broader action plan. This new plan incorporates remaining PAP actions and is embedded within the wider SEND and Inclusion Improvement Programme, which continues to deliver meaningful change. Evidence from the past six months shows clear improvements in quality, timeliness, and partnership working. Strengthened systems and co-produced resources are supporting better outcomes for children and young people. While some areas still require further development, our commitment remains clear: we want the very best for children and young people in Oldham. We will continue to review and improve our local SEND systems to ensure they are inclusive, responsive, and effective.