



## **Portfolio Report**

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Mohon Ali, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

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

### **SEND and Inclusion**

Oldham continues to show determination to put children and families at the heart of everything we do. Since the 2023 SEND inspection, confidence in our local offer has grown significantly with four out of five families now telling us they believe in the improvements being made. That's a 13% increase, and more than 80% of families say their child is making real progress.

We are also working closely with schools to prepare for Ofsted's new inspection framework, which has a sharper focus on inclusion. In early November, we brought schools and leaders together for a borough-wide Inclusion Conference — reinforcing our message that in Oldham, every child should be visible, supported, and given the chance to succeed.

Our Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) has now gone out to schools and early years providers. This is a practical guide to services and support, with a team of navigators on hand to help schools get children and families the right help at the right time.

Our work on transitions continues at pace. From Year 6 into 7, from early years into primary, and now looking ahead into post-16 pathways, we are making sure that no child slips through the net. 140 home visits were completed to support the move into Year 7, breaking down barriers to attendance and ensuring children feel welcome and ready for the next stage of their journey.

In terms of provision, our capital strategy is further expanding. Phase 3 expressions of interest are out to schools, meaning more new specialist places and improved facilities for children with SEND across Oldham. This builds on our commitment to deliver more local places in inclusive schools, with specialist support available when it is needed.

### **Attendance and Inclusion**

Attendance in Oldham continues to improve. This September, Year 7 attendance hit a record 98.2%, with both primary and secondary attendance climbing compared with last year. We are now outperforming statistical neighbours, and our targeted summer outreach is paying off — helping families with uniform, school readiness, and those crucial first steps into new schools.

Permanent exclusions have reduced by 23%, suspensions are down 28%, and children missing education have fallen by a third, from 269 last year to 185 this year. Behind every one of those numbers is a child who is now in school, learning, and building their future.

This is Oldham at its best: practical support for families, joined-up work across schools and partners, and a relentless focus on keeping children in education.

### **Quality of Education**

Oldham Learning partners came together in September to set out a clear vision for 2025/26: getting the basics right for all children. That means being school ready, attending well, literate and numerate, and having their special needs met.

We are already seeing progress:

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- KS2 results this year are up 2.2 percentage points in Reading, Writing and Maths combined.
  - Writing outcomes in particular have strengthened thanks to targeted improvement work.
  - Ofsted inspections continue to highlight good and improving practice across both primary and secondary schools.

We know there is more to do, especially where schools are below national averages, but our new focus on tracking progress from early years to Year 6 will help identify and address issues earlier.

And we continue to celebrate the achievements of our young people beyond the classroom. Over the summer, Oldham Music Service reached nearly 5,000 pupils across 75% of our schools, delivered a successful tour to Heidelberg, and hosted BBC Philharmonic musicians in local schools. This cultural richness is part of what makes Oldham such a special place for young people to grow up.

### **Post-16, Skills, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning**

Oldham's post-16 and skills work continues to deliver real impact. The Empower Oldham programme is changing lives, with nearly 60% of young people supported into Education, Employment or Training (EET) destinations.

Investment is also flowing into Oldham. We secured £437,000 from GMCA's capital fund, enabling Oldham College to expand capacity by 180 places. A further £1.26 million bid is in progress, which could create an additional 700 places in key sectors like construction, health and early years.

This November will be a big moment for skills in Oldham. We've hosted a revamped Careers Event on 6th November, connecting every school to employers through the MBacc gateways, and providing a quiet session for SEND and NEET learners. On the same day, we launched Oldham's new Employment & Skills Strategy at the Get Oldham Working Summit. This strategy, shaped by the findings of our Skills Commission, sets out a bold plan to align learning and opportunity with Oldham's economic future.

Meanwhile, our Community Grant programme is supporting 17 local projects, many already exceeding their targets, showcasing the strength of Oldham's voluntary and community sector in supporting learning.

And through national partnerships like the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network, Oldham is helping to shape new approaches to NEET prevention that will benefit councils across the country.

### **Summary**

Oldham is once again showing that when it comes to education and skills, we can lead the way. From the confidence families now have in our SEND services, to record-breaking attendance, strong inspection outcomes, and the energy in our skills system — Oldham is ambitious for its children and young people.

I want to thank every teacher, leader, governor, parent, carer, volunteer, and partner for their dedication. Together, we are giving every child the best start in life, and every learner the skills they need to thrive.

**Recommendations:** Council is requested to note the report.