

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mohon Ali, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

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

SEND and Inclusion

The Oldham Local Area Partnership have had a monitoring inspection from 24 – 26 November, conducted jointly by Ofsted and CQC. The focus of the Area SEND monitoring visit assessed the extent to which the Local Area Partnership has taken effective action to address the areas for priority action, which we've been delivering to improve SEND provision in Oldham. The inspection team had discussions with leaders, children and young people, parents and carers and practitioners.

I am incredibly proud that inspectors recognised the progress and improvements made to services for children and young people with SEND and the ongoing work on our priorities across the Local Area Partnership. Full details of the findings will be provided when the report is published.

I want to give particular thanks to Julie Daniels, Mike Barker, Matt Bulmer and the whole partnership leadership team and workforce for their relentless drive and commitment to delivering better services and improved outcomes for children and young people SEND.

We are working with our partners at POINT to provide a SEND Hub at their Chadderton site. This will provide a rich source of support for all our families with children with additional needs in Oldham. I'm also pleased that we have received additional funding to extend our Early Language Support for Every Child programme. This means our professionals will continue to be able to support children with speech language and communication needs.

Our Quality, Educational Support and Training Team (QEST) service evaluation with 65 SENCOs last academic year highlighted strong relationships and practical support. SEND surgeries and Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) conversations are now embedded, helping schools respond quickly to children's needs. Transition work through the Delivering Better Value (DBV) project is improving information sharing as children move from Year 6 to Year 7.

We are investing over a million pounds into the Spring Brook Special School to increase the number of places the school provides. This will provide more specialist school places for our children with additional needs. Moreover, the Council will be investing £400k for the next two years into short breaks play and leisure activities for children with SEND, supporting families and young people to undertake activities to build confidence and independence.

Attendance and Inclusion

Secondary permanent exclusions are down 23%, suspensions down 28%, and children missing education have reduced significantly. Our proactive approach to prevent Elective Home Education (EHE) has seen 116 children return to school last academic year, with 19 already back this term. Oldham now has one of the lowest EHE rates in the North West, meaning more children are receiving a formal education.

Quality of Education

We continue to prepare schools for Ofsted's new inspection framework. Over 100 leaders attended our November briefing, and four schools have volunteered to trial the framework. Governance

remains strong, with 99% of governors registered on GovernorHub and 14 training sessions delivered this term.

November marked a major milestone for Oldham with the successful launch of the Employment & Skills Strategy at the Get Oldham Working Summit. Developed using insights from research, the strategy sets out an ambitious and practical roadmap to align learning, skills and progression pathways with Oldham's future economy and growth sectors. It strengthens our focus on unlocking talent, attracting investment, and ensuring that residents benefit directly from emerging opportunities.

The Virtual School continues to work closely with social workers, schools, and professionals to ensure the educational needs of children looked after are met. The Raising Aspirations and Participation (RAP) Programme has delivered impactful activities this term, including a cookery programme where young people gained food hygiene qualifications, cultural workshops for Black History Month, and a residential that built confidence, resilience, and friendships. These experiences are helping our young people develop life skills and broaden their horizons.

Post-16, Skills, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning

November saw the successful launch of Oldham's Employment & Skills Strategy at the Get Oldham Working Summit, shaped by findings from the Skills Commission. This strategy sets out a bold plan to align learning with Oldham's economic future.

We also delivered our Careers Event, connecting every school in Oldham with employers through the MBacc gateways. The event included a dedicated quiet session tailored specifically for SEND and NEET learners, ensuring equitable access and personalised conversations. Feedback from schools, providers and employers was excellent, and the day highlighted Oldham's commitment to inclusive progression routes and high-quality careers experiences for all young people.

Investment in skills continues. Oldham secured £437,000 from GMCA's capital fund, enabling Oldham College to expand capacity by 180 places. A further bid for £1.26 million is in progress, which could create hundreds more places in key sectors like construction, health, and early years.

Community learning is thriving. 18 projects are active under our grant programme, many exceeding targets and working closely with council services to support progression into work. Through the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network, Oldham is helping shape national approaches to NEET prevention, sharing best practice with councils across England.

Summary

Oldham is ambitious for its children and young people. From strong attendance and strengthened SEND support to bold investment in skills and inclusive careers pathways, we are delivering real impact. I want to thank every teacher, leader, governor, parent, carer, volunteer, and partner for their dedication. Together, we are building a future where every child can thrive.

Recommendation: Council is requested to note the report.