Report to Chief Executive

Basic/ Higher Needs Provision in Mainstream Settings (Oldham College)

Portfolio Holder: (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Officer Contact: Paul Tinsley (Director of Education and Early Years)

Report Author: Victoria Caldwell (Schools Capital Project Manager)

2nd November 2026

Reason for Decision

This report seeks Cabinet approval for a capital project to establish additional specialist provision operated by Oldham College. The project will increase local specialist capacity for children and young people with SEND, helping to meet growing demand and reduce reliance on independent and out-of-borough placements.

The report also seeks approval for the allocation of capital funding from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA) and Basic Need Grant to support delivery of the scheme.

Executive Summary

This report relates to a proposal by Oldham College to develop additional specialist provision. The proposal has been developed sufficiently to enable Cabinet to consider the allocation of capital funding.

The project will create 12 additional specialist places for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), increasing local specialist capacity and supporting children to access education within their local community.

Currently the Local Authority has High Needs Capital Allocation Funding, which is released to schools and colleges upon application and consideration by panel. It is proposed that where projects will generate additional places these projects are funded from the HNPCA Grant provision

Project Outlines and Recommendation

Oldham College

Oldham College provides high-quality education and training that helps learners of all ages achieve their goals. it welcomes almost 10,000 students each year across its full-time and part-time courses. At the time of Ofsted's October 2025 monitoring visit, Oldham College had 442 students receiving Basic Needs funding.

The proposal will establish significant structural improvements including health and safety provision alongside additional classrooms and learning spaces for specialist learning on the Oldham College site. The provision will support children and young people whose needs require specialist intervention whilst maintaining links with a mainstream college environment where appropriate.

The project will create a minimum of 12 additional specialist places for children with EHCPs and contribute to increasing specialist capacity within the borough.

The total cost of this project is estimated to be **£849,192** which includes a 10% contingency. Any use of the 10% contingency funding would require approval from the Director of Education and Early Years. If not used, then the 10% contingency, along with any unspent grant funding would be returned to the High Needs provision budget. It is proposed that this project is funded by the HNPCA

1 Background

1.1 Demand for specialist provision for children and young people with SEND has increased significantly in recent years, resulting in growing pressure on local specialist capacity and an increased reliance on independent and out-of-borough placements. The recommended option will enable the Council to invest in additional specialist provision through the development of additional specialist provision at Oldham College, increasing local capacity and supporting children and young people to access appropriate provision closer to home.

1.2 Strategic alignment

The proposal aligns with Oldham's SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027 and the Local SEND Reform Plan 2026, which seeks to strengthen inclusion, improve local sufficiency and ensure children and young people can access the right support at the right time. The development of this specialist provision will contribute to a more coherent continuum of provision across the borough, supporting positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND while helping to create a more sustainable local system.

2 Procurement Implications

2.1 There are no procurement implications arising from the report

3 Risk Assessments

3.1 The Council will require confirmation from the trust that appropriate insurance in place before releasing funds for the works

4 Current Position

4.1 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to secure sufficient educational provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND),

including those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). In line with Oldham's SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027, the Local SEND Reform Plan and the government's Every Child Achieving and Thriving reforms, the Local Authority is committed to developing a more inclusive and sustainable continuum of provision that enables children and young people to access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

The demand for specialist provision has increased significantly in recent years, placing pressure on local capacity and resulting in a growing number of children and young people requiring independent and out-of-borough placements. The development of additional specialist provision within Oldham College will strengthen local sufficiency, expand local capacity and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It will also support the long-term sustainability of the High Needs Block by reducing reliance on higher-cost placements where needs can be effectively met within Oldham.

4.2 To ensure the effective operation and long-term sustainability of the provision, the Local Authority will enter into a formal commissioning contract with Oldham College. The service specification of the contract will set out the admissions arrangements, placement criteria, governance arrangements, performance expectations, financial responsibilities and reporting requirements. This will support ongoing oversight of quality, demand and outcomes, ensuring the provision contributes to the Local Authority's sufficiency, inclusion and SEND reform objectives whilst delivering value for money.

5 Options/Alternatives

5.1 Option 1: Approve the capital investment required to establish additional specialist provision at Oldham College, supporting the ambitions of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027 and the Local SEND Reform Plan 2026.

5.2 Option 2: Do not approve the project, resulting in a missed opportunity to increase local specialist capacity and support the delivery of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027 and the Local SEND Reform Plan 2026.

6 Preferred Option

6.1 Option 1

7 Consultation

7.1 Consultation has taken place with Oldham College and relevant Local Authority officers responsible for SEND sufficiency, capital programmes and educational place planning.

8 Financial Implications

8.1 Financial Implications (Capital)

The cost of the associated works including a contingency of 10% is **£850k** and will be a charge to the educational capital programme 2026/27 and 2027/28, which will be funded from the High Needs Grant (HNPCA). Any unspent budget will be returned to the High Need provision budget. Any use of the 10% contingency funding would require approval from the Director of Education and Early Years. If not used, then the 10% contingency would be returned to

the High Needs provision budget. The College is unable to reclaim their own VAT, therefore any repayments to the college will be paid gross of VAT

The works will be commissioned directly by the college and funding paid to the college as part of a Grant Funding Agreement, upon receipt of periodic claims and verification of capital expenditure and satisfactory works.

Paula Buckley – Finance Manager

8.2 Financial Implications – (Resources)

The revenue costs of opening a 12-place specialist base at Oldham College will be funded from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The High Needs Block covers funding to support provision for pupils and students with SEND who require additional resources to participate in education and learning, from their early years to age 25 in a range of provision including special schools, mainstream schools, alternative provision, and independent specialist provision. The funding also contributes towards council centrally retained expenditure for High Needs

The opening of the specialist base, creating 12 additional places would result in £203k of required revenue funding per annum from the High Needs Block, split between base and high needs top up. This would be offset, in part, by savings in other areas of the High Needs Block where the pupils may be currently accessing funding.

Vicky Gibbons – Senior Accountant

9 Legal Implications

9.1 The proposal will benefit the students at the college and further demonstrate the ongoing commitment by the Council to the education of the children of the Borough with particular emphasis upon the most vulnerable children in the borough

Alex Bougatef - Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

9.2 The proposal is to make a grant of capital investment to expand specialist provision at Oldham College, supporting the ambitions of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027 and the Local SEND Reform Plan

9.3 Making the grant is in scope of section 1 of the Localism Act 2021 which give Local Authorities a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do for the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in their area

9.4 Officers must work with legal colleagues to approve and formalise the terms of any grant agreement or MOU in conjunction with Finance and Audit colleagues

9.5 The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and Project Manager must ensure that Subsidy Control is considered in consultation with Legal Services and that all relevant assessments are made and recorded, all relevant notices are published, and all relevant regulations and legislation is complied with to the satisfaction of the Section 151 Officer and in compliance with the Financial Procedure Rules of the Council. External advice may be needed to support these activities which will be a cost to the Project. A grant can amount to a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Therefore, a subsidy control analysis of the grant

funding and what it will be used for is essential before payment of the grant. This process will be undertaken by the Project Team led by the SRO with support and input from Legal Services, Finance and other relevant officers

9.6 In the event that any grant is determined to be a subsidy, details regarding the same must be published within three months of award for all subsidies in excess of £100,000 and the Report Author and SRO will need to liaise with Finance and Audit colleagues in this regard

9.7 The Transparency obligations of the Council must be complied with

9.8 The terms of the Grant Agreement must be reviewed and agreed by the SRO along with legal and finance colleagues. Provisions of note and/or provisions with associated risk should be highlighted to officers for consideration

Bryan Boese –Solicitor

10 Equality Impact Assessment, including implications for Children and Young People

10.1 There are no negative implications for vulnerable groups or children and young people.

11 Key Decision

11.1 Yes

12 Key Decision Reference

12.1 KDD-26-09

13 Appendices & Background Papers

13.1 SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2027
13.2 Send Reform Plan 2026
13.3 HNCPA Capital Bid 1