Minutes

Meeting of the Oldham Learning Board
Thursday 03 July 2025
Spindles, Boardroom
at 1:30pm

Present:	**Chair**	**Jane Acklam**		
	Vice-Chair	**Gillian Kay**		
	Primary Districts	**Zaira Cook** **Vicki Oldham** **Hilary Henderson**	**Council**	**Matt Bulmer**
	Teaching school	**Katie Dallender**	**Research School**	**Louise Astbury**
	Specialist	**Sue Caine**	**Independent**	**Marc Hornby**
	Post 16	**Alan Benvie**		
In Attendance	**Oldham Council**	**John Gilmore**	**Julie Stevens**	
	OCL	**Steve Ferris**	**Simon Blair**	
	Administrator	**Chantelle Fraser**		
Not Present:	**MAT**	**Jayne Clarke**	**Council**	**Cllr Ali**
	DFE	**Daniel Cox**	**MAT**	**Jessica Giraud**
	Advisor	**Tony Shepherd**	**Secondary**	**Sarah North** **Charlotte Evans**

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

JA welcomed Board members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Tony Shepherd, Cllr Ali, Jayne Clarke.

Minutes and matters arising

JA confirmed that all relevant papers had been circulated prior to the meeting and emphasised that the matters discussed are confidential. The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed upon, with all actions reviewed and all approved.

2. **OCL Membership**

SF/SB distributed leaflets to all members of the Board and discussed in length the offer that is available with regards to School swimming, PE and Sports Delivery. Memberships and incentives were discussed and the corporate gym

membership across the whole of Oldham school staff. Discounted gym memberships are available for schools contracting for sport, dance, or swimming programs:

• £199 annually for engaging in one program.

• £99 annually for engaging in both programs.

Corporate membership is available for any school in Oldham and Oldham Council employees for £252 a year, deducted from salary. Other staff well-being initiatives include staff training sessions, after-school clubs, and access to instructors for fitness classes. The Health Champions program includes workshops for young people and staff sessions with information to disseminate around schools. A pilot program with Les Mills will allow schools to access the Born to Move program, a health and fitness dance set of sessions. Working with the wraparound care program to provide health and well-being training to providers in those settings. Staff sessions can be arranged instead of children's after-school clubs, such as Zumba or circuit training.

MB provided positive feedback on the offer.

3. Priorities

Priorities 2024/25

SEND

MB provided an update on the SEND inspection and intervention by the Department for Education. Oldham is now just over two years since its inadequate SEND inspection. A monitoring inspection is expected soon, with a new format involving off-site discussions and an on-site week at the town hall. The DFE has been in informal intervention for the last two years, requiring reassurance on progress every three months. The latest letter from the DFE was included for transparency but should not be circulated widely. Under the new inspection framework, progress is classified as either effective or ineffective.

Pressure is mounting on the local authority's statutory SEN services. Although 85 percent of EHCPs are issued within 20 weeks, placing Oldham in the top 10 percent nationally, this rate is starting to decline. Due to limited capacity, annual reviews are now being triaged, prioritising students with changing needs or in key transition years. Additional funding has been secured for statutory teams, including SEN assessments and educational psychology. Improvements are expected over the next 12 months.

Transition support, especially for children with SEND, needs strengthening. More work is also needed for post-16 transitions into adulthood and adult services.

The overall education budget allocates a significant portion to the high needs block. Although Oldham has managed better than many areas due to strong local special schools, it now faces a projected financial shortfall. A statutory override extension allows this deficit to be quarantined separately.

Some placements outside Oldham are still required for children with complex needs. However, the main financial pressures stem from rising EHCP numbers and the cost of specialist provision, not out-of-borough placements. For comparison, other councils face larger deficits primarily due to such placements.

Very few children from outside Oldham are placed in local special schools, which are primarily for Oldham residents. However, New Bridge faces demand from nearby areas like Tameside and Rochdale.

Oldham is creating 270 additional resource places in mainstream schools over three years. The aim is to boost specialist capacity and collaborate with Kingfisher and New Bridge on outreach. Building another special school is not currently planned.

SC advised Kingfisher currently has over 150 children needing placement but lacks available space. Around 20 upcoming tribunals may force further placements, increasing staff pressure.

There is a need to ensure children in ARPs are appropriately placed and can access mainstream education. Conversations with special schools are ongoing about transitioning suitable students back into mainstream via ARPs. Placement decisions will go through a multidisciplinary panel.

A survey via the Parent Carer Forum showed that over half of families felt progress had been made in the past two years. Nearly 80 percent expressed confidence in continued improvement.

The transition hub has been well received. Primary and secondary schools are working closely, with both sides appreciating improved communication.

Attendance

Oldham continues to improve school attendance, especially in special schools, though progress is now aligning with national trends. Initiatives like early contact with families transitioning from nursery to reception have had a measurable positive impact. Sharing Year 6 attendance data with secondary schools, a practice started in Oldham, is now used nationally.

Attendance challenges persist, particularly among children coming from outside the borough. Transport issues and lower attendance rates among these pupils are contributing factors. Targeted communication strategies, especially around Friday absences, have improved attendance.

Concerns were raised about how special school attendance data is reported. There's a call to separate it into primary and secondary to better reflect trends. Upcoming policy changes may also affect attendance for younger children.
Early years attendance is a growing focus. Poor attendance in nursery often continues into reception and beyond. Local and regional efforts are prioritising preschool attendance to establish better habits early on.
Oldham's data driven approach and work on school transitions have gained national recognition. Continued collaboration with schools and attendance leads is key to informed action.

JA thanked all staff for their role in attendance.

Literacy

Universal training was offered to all schools, with most taking part and reporting increased confidence and positive outcomes. The training helped challenge assumptions that local pupils are underperforming. Targeted support was directed to schools identified through monitoring and reviews. This included addressing misconceptions around SEND and teaching expectations.

Bespoke support was provided to the lowest performing schools from the previous year. Moderators worked in small groups to challenge unhelpful narratives and support improvement, focusing particularly on Year 5 and Year 6. While five schools declined the program, 13 participated, and preparation activities such as curriculum reviews and in-school observations had the strongest impact.

Refer to slides for outcome changes, but several participating schools saw measurable improvements in writing attainment. Schools with external challenges also made progress, and moderators saw increases in their own schools. There was strong interest in repeating the project earlier next academic year with more schools involved.
Refer to slides for summary figures on Key Stage 2 writing outcomes. Notable improvements included better performance among pupils eligible for free school meals and a narrowing of the gender gap in writing. Some schools that did not engage fully saw less progress or declines. Persistent attendance issues below 94 percent remain a barrier to improved outcomes.

Staffing instability had a major impact on some schools, and external messaging around writing standards created confusion. There are concerns that conflicting guidance has influenced assessments.
JA thanked JS for all her support.

Recruitment and Retention

E-ACT work has been cancelled. A meeting with Oasis is planned to discuss teacher recruitment and retention. Oasis will be commissioned to consolidate current initiatives and future plans. This work will be specifically branded and adapted for Oldham.
KD and her team recently held a successful event for science teachers at Brian Clarke Academy.
JA thanked all attendees for their contributions throughout the year, noting it has been a strong and successful period for the group. Oldham has made notable progress in recruiting teachers for shortage subjects, outperforming previous years. The Oldham brochure is currently being updated and will be distributed as a hyperlinked digital version. It highlights professional development opportunities and the collaborative leadership culture in Oldham.
JA thanked KD and LA for all their support this year.

4. Priorities for 2025/26

Although the Oldham Learning has concluded for this academic year, the Board agreed it should continue. Its structure plays an important role in supporting and retaining school leaders. There is currently a gap in secondary school representation. While the secondary heads organisation is functioning well, identifying the right individual to represent the sector within this group remains a priority.

The group's ongoing priorities include special educational needs, recruitment and retention and attendance. Future discussions will also focus on the impact of training and literacy, with reference to recent outcomes.

5. AOB and Date of next meeting;

Oldham Learning Boards meeting dates 2025/26

- Thursday 25th September 2025
- Thursday 27th November 2025
- Thursday 26th March 2026
- Thursday 25th June 2026

AB informed member that the DfE has launched new resources aimed at supporting high-achieving learners. These included three national videos and guidance materials for parents, employers, and educational institutions on how to support high-performing SEND learners in achieving T Level qualifications.

Oldham was one of three national partners involved in a project to develop Industry Associates. Sponsored by Edge Hill University, the project offered a 12-week programme that allowed professionals from industry to take part in teaching, lecturing, and educational support.

The initiative was a national pilot, with potential for wider implementation if proven successful.

8.1 Summary of actions

	Action	**Responsibility**
1.	LA/JS to discuss the TA programme and incorporating an early year's module	**LA/JS**
2.	Provide data on the Multi-Academy Trusts engagement and performance.	**JS**

Meeting finished: **15:30pm**