Minutes

Meeting of the Oldham Learning Board
Thursday 26 March 2026
Royton Town Hall
at 1:30pm

Present:	**Chair**	**Jane Acklam**		
	Vice-Chair	**Gillian Kay**		
	Primary Districts	**Hilary Henderson** **Zaira Cook** **Vicki Oldham** **Helen Woodward**	**Council**	**Paul Tinsley** **Cllr. Mohon Ali** **Katie Charlton**
	DFE	**Daniel Cox** **Vicky Beer**	**Independent**	**Marc Hornby**
	Teaching School	**Katie Dallender**	**PVI Rep**	**Kimberley Woodward**
In Attendance	**Oldham Cecil**	**Ryan Rothery**	**Laura Williams**	
	Advisor	**Tony Shepherd**	**Administrator**	**Chantelle Fraser**
Not Present:	**Secondary**	**Tariq Mahmood**	**Specialist**	**Sue Caine**
	Council	**Cllr. Ali** **Bruce Penhale**	**MAT**	**Sarah North**
	Post 16	**Alan Benvie**		

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

JA welcomed Board members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Sue Caine, Tariq Mahmood, Alan Benvie, Sarah North and Cllr Ali. Introductions were made and the meeting commenced.

2. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record. Matters arising were reviewed and it was confirmed that Actions 2 and 3 remain ongoing. Updates were provided on the LISO Navigators, with feedback being sought via the QR code in the SEND Matters newsletter. An update was also given on Cllr Ali's visit to Hulme, which focused on exploring partnership opportunities to strengthen links between education and industry.

3. Northwest Regional Director for Oldham

VB provided an overview of the role and structure of the Regional Director's team, covering oversight of schools, MATs, CSC and SEND. She noted that the Northwest remains one of the most challenging regions, often operating reactively rather than strategically. However, Oldham's strong relationships and collaborative culture were highlighted as significant strengths.

VB referenced Oldham's "theory of change" and noted improvements in school performance, with outcomes rising from 75% to 84% after moving away from the old Ofsted framework. Despite this, Oldham continues to rank among the lowest nationally, with no single cause identified. She emphasised the scale of the upcoming White Paper reforms, describing them as the most significant in a decade. VB confirmed her retirement in April and the Board thanked her for her service and dedication.

DC confirmed that the DfE briefing pack could be shared widely and summarised the seven chapters of the White Paper. Key elements included SEND reforms to 2029, national inclusion standards, updated SEND Code of Practice, strengthened Early Years practice and the introduction of a dedicated SEND officer within Best Start Family Hubs. RISE Intervention access will be based on academic results. Post-16 reforms will introduce new pathways for learners with the weakest English and maths outcomes. Attendance ambitions aim for 90% meeting expected standards, with Attainment 8 rising from 46 to 50. Governance reforms will introduce annual parent forums and strengthen trust accountability. Regional RISE plans will be published in spring.

During questions, JA queried Post-16 English and maths resits and DC confirmed lower-level pathways would be introduced, with dates to be confirmed (**Action**: DC). JA also asked about maternity/paternity leave reforms, which DC explained were driven by the equalities minister, with rollout expected in September 2027. TS raised concerns about disadvantaged schools missing out under current benchmarks; consultation may address this. TS also asked about maths teacher recruitment, with VB and DC confirming no new initiatives beyond expanding Maths Hubs.

KD asked whether the universal RISE inclusion audit would feed into the updated Code of Practice; VB confirmed the two processes are parallel but will align. KC asked about independent pricing schools and VB noted that SEND local area plans will bring forward further detail. KC also asked about Experts at Hand funding and VB confirmed that funding will come to local authorities, with schools able to pool resources. This funding equates to 40 days of expertise for an average primary school and 160 days for a secondary school, cannot be diverted for other purposes and will arrive straight after Easter.

PT raised concerns about suspensions in relation to the National Inclusion Standard. He also asked about the LA's role in school improvement, particularly at KS4 given the number of trusts in Oldham. VB noted that the White Paper emphasises collective working across trusts, with accountability mechanisms in place. JA asked whether Experts at Hand funding includes EP/SPL specialists, VB confirmed it is intended to support early identification. HW raised concerns about mainstream inclusivity and rising GLD expectations, VB referenced Best Start Family Hubs and ongoing consultations. GK highlighted the pressure on mainstream schools supporting complex needs without specialist staff; VB noted £200m will be invested in teacher CPD from September 2027 and that schools will be expected to collaborate to provide complementary provision. JA asked whether workload impact assessments had been undertaken, VB acknowledged this must be managed carefully.

TS thanked VB and DC for their contributions.

LA – Early Years Pupil Premium link Early Years Pupil Premium | EEF

4. School and Academy Places

TS summarised the paper, noting a significant shift driven by Catholic MAT conversions over the last two years. Although the borough's population is growing, this growth is concentrated in older age groups, with fewer families entering the system. Primary capacity is projected to reach 8% spare capacity, requiring more radical approaches due to budget pressures. Discussions are ongoing with maintained schools and trusts. Nursery applications have declined and wraparound support is being explored. LW reported that around 400 children are not accessing any nursery provision. TS advised paper not to be shared due to the sensitive nature of data included.

5. **Updates from Sector Representatives, including on new Ofsted Framework**

- GK raised concerns about the White Paper and inspection uncertainty.
- ZC discussed LA trusts and the lack of school improvement funding for LAs, noting that partnership approaches will be essential.
- VO raised issues relating to school readiness.
- HW highlighted the increasing complexity of SEND in mainstream settings.
- HH provided an update on the Year of Reading, noting pressures on staffing and budgets due to high levels of need. The PVI sector reported significant challenges, with the number of nurseries reducing from eight to four post-COVID and SEND becoming increasingly unmanageable.

Specialist – SC: Kingfisher
• Halcyon Way School: 24 new places
• New Kingfisher satellites at Medlock Primary and Blackshaw Lane (12 places each)
Kingfisher Special School who will be creating new spaces (in a portacabin) and it will be for 20 places and not 24 as stated, for a September start (finance pending).
The Kingfisher satellite will be at Medlock initially – space for 12 – hopefully to open in September. If this is successful then we will look at opening a satellite provision at Blackshaw Lane.

The independent sector reported concerns about school closures, with schools exploring diversification options such as Year 10 intake pilots, resits and international recruitment. Reliance on legacy gifts continues and redundancies and pay freezes are expected.

6. **CPD Offer**

KD/LA shared updates on the CPD programme and asked members to disseminate information within their districts. Costs have been reviewed and reduced where possible.

7. **Priorities**

We will prioritise getting the basics right for all children and young people by supporting them to:

- Be school ready - Work continues to strengthen early childhood development through a range of evidence-based approaches. The Make it REAL project is being expanded, with Family Hub practitioners delivering REAL home visits to increase reach and impact. The PLG will focus on children accessing 15 hours of childcare, ensuring they receive additional support where needed. The REAL programme is being upscaled, supported by the Tailor's Toolkit.

  The Best Start in Life (BSIL) Strategic Plan now published: Giving every child the best start in life Oldham Best Start in Life Strategic Plan | Oldham Council

  Members were encouraged to review the plan, noting that some areas are prioritised more heavily than others. A wide range of interventions are used across the borough; those referenced in the paper are the ones formally submitted to the DfE. The intention is to streamline and make the intervention landscape more manageable for schools and partners.

- Have good attendance - Improving attendance across all settings, recognising its strong correlation with attainment, wellbeing and long-term outcomes.

- Be Literate & Numerate - Members were encouraged to read the accompanying paper, which includes detailed data analysis. One notable finding is that pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) form a strand of learners who perform particularly well in literacy and numeracy when the right support is in place.
- Have their Special Educational Needs met - the focus remains on improving timeliness and strengthening the quality of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) annual reviews. Current performance stands at 66%, with a short-term target of 70%. Outcomes data shows that 18.7% of pupils at KS2 are achieving combined outcomes below national and statistical neighbours. Following the Ofsted inspection, 95% of actions in the Post-Ofsted Plan were achieved by November and new priorities have now been set.
  A paper will be presented on 15 April, focusing on improving quality assurance and strengthening communication with parents and schools. The SEND White Paper and consultation will involve individual schools and the SEND Reform Plan will be co-produced, requiring active participation from all sectors. The draft plan is expected in May 2026, with the final version due in June 2026. Further updates will be provided at the next meeting.

8. AOB and Date of next meeting;

PT thanked all members for the continued work and partnership approach.

Oldham Learning Boards meeting dates 2025/26

- Thursday 25th June 2026 – Royton Town Hall

8.1 Summary of actions

	Action	**Responsibility**
1.	Continued, BP will review the current communication processes between Family Hubs and primary schools and explore ways to strengthen these links.	**BP**
2.	Districts will share the information with schools to gather their feedback using the provided QR code, enabling staff to comment on what is working well and what may require further improvement.	**Districts**
3.	Confirm the dates for the introduction of the new lower-level Post-16 English and Maths pathways.	**DC**

Meeting finished: **15:30pm**