Minutes

Meeting of the Oldham Learning Board
Tuesday 30 September 2025
Royton Town Hall
at 1:30pm

Present:	**Chair**	**Jane Acklam**		
	Vice-Chair			
	Primary Districts	**Zaira Cook** **Vicki Oldham** **Hilary Henderson** **Helen Woodward**	**Council**	**Matt Bulmer** **Katie Charlton**
	Secondary	**Tariq Mahmood**	**Post 16**	**Alan Benvie**
	Specialist	**Sue Caine**	**Independent**	**Marc Hornby**
	MAT	**Sarah North**	**DFE**	**Daniel Cox**
	Post 16	**Alan Benvie**		

In Attendance	**Oldham Council**	**John Gilmore** **Andy Collinge**	**Ailsa Burton** **Jennie Davies**	
	Advisor	**Tony Shepherd**	**Administrator**	**Chantelle Fraser**

Not Present:	**Vice-Chair**	**Gillian Kay**	**Council**	**Cllr Ali**
	Research School	**Louise Astbury**	**Teaching school**	**Katie Dallender**

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

JA welcomed Board members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Cllr Ali, Gillian Kay, Louise Astbury and Katie Dallender. JA/TS welcomed new members to the Board.

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, Actions from the last meeting were discussed:

- Early years commissioning work has begun, with feedback being gathered.
- Engagement with multi-academy trusts has been generally productive.

2. Inclusion Outcomes

JG/TS shared slides with members. A discussion of attendance and exclusions data highlighted that Oldham continues to be one of the most inclusive areas in Greater Manchester, maintaining low rates of permanent exclusions. However, concerns remain around vulnerable groups, particularly children who are open to social care. While Year 7 attendance has shown improvement, there is a notable decline in Year 8, underscoring the importance of robust transition support between key stages. Local strategies around fines and enforcement were reviewed, with pilot initiatives exploring more supportive alternatives to traditional penalties. Overall, Oldham compares favourably with neighbouring authorities in terms of inclusion and attendance. Some challenges were noted especially among secondary pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

3. Key Stage Outcomes

Early Years

There has been a general upward trend in early years outcomes, reflecting positive progress across the sector. However, a slight decline was noted this year, indicating the need for continued focus. Improvements have been observed in literacy, communication, and physical development, though gaps persist for vulnerable groups, highlighting the importance of targeted early intervention.

Key Stage 1 & 2

Outcomes at Key Stages 1 and 2 have shown steady improvement, particularly in Maths. However, English performance has seen some decline, suggesting a need for renewed focus in this area. Ensuring consistency in moderation and assessment remains a priority to support accurate and fair evaluation of pupil progress.

Key Stage 4

Performance at Key Stage 4 has remained broadly stable, though declines were noted in English and Maths attainment. Some schools have responded with a range of interventions, including Saturday schools and additional support for targeted pupils, aimed at boosting outcomes and addressing specific learning gaps. Members note that exam boards have changed grade boundaries in some areas which could be a contributing factor to the results.

Key Stage 5

Key Stage 5 outcomes have shown positive improvement, with A-level performance now close to or exceeding national averages. Despite this success, challenges remain with post-16 resits in English and Maths, as many students continue to struggle to achieve the required grades, indicating a need for more effective support strategies in these areas.

Virtual School

JD provided updates from the Virtual School highlighted that outcomes for looked-after children remain below those of their peers, although improvements are being made in key subjects. Attendance continues to be a significant challenge, particularly for children who enter care during their secondary school years. In response, there is an increased focus on supporting transitions, especially from Year 5 into secondary education, to help improve stability and engagement.

MB invited members to reflect on and discuss results. Key points:

- Schools feel pressure to meet benchmarks, targets, and inspections, sometimes at the expense of children's wider development.
- Resits and Post 16 – impact on resources, young people becoming NEET, attendance.
- There's concern that the system purpose, with students not understanding reason for learning.
- Fundamental skills like literacy and numeracy remain crucial.
- Alignment of shared priorities difficult.

- Frustration about discussion without action.
- Key question - Do the people in the room feel empowered to shape change, or are they bound by government/DFE priorities?

ACTION: MB to invite Regional Director of Ofsted to CEO Board/OL Board to starts conversations.

ACTION: District leads to engage the districts on priorities and consequent challenges.

4. Best Start in Life

ABurton share slides with members and discussed in detail. A shared ambition was reaffirmed for 75% of children to achieve a good level of development by the end of reception, aligning with Department for Education (DfE) targets that call for a significant improvement, specifically a 9.5% rise over three years, and a 13% increase for disadvantaged and free school meal pupils. The expansion of early years provision, including funding for children from nine months and entitlements for disadvantaged two-year-olds, is expected to support this goal. Family Hubs are set to play a central role in delivering wraparound support for families, with stronger connections to health visitors, speech and language services, and parenting programmes. However, concerns were raised about falling early years enrolments, recruitment challenges within the sector, and issues around school readiness, particularly in areas such as speech development and toilet training.

5. School Places

AC shared papers outlining in primary schools, place pressure is beginning to ease due to falling birth rates, although challenges remain in ensuring that provision is well distributed across the borough. In secondary schools, 76% of parents received their first-choice school, which is slightly below the national average of 83%, while 93% secured a top-three preference, just under the national benchmark. Planning efforts continue to focus on ensuring the sufficiency of school places, particularly in areas experiencing population shifts

SEND Progress

KC shred inspection slides with members and discussed in detail highlighting SEND progress in Oldham since January 25, with a focus on accountability and impact. Data showed a sharp rise in children with complex needs resulting in higher EHCP rates which is creating significant pressure on schools and PVIs, making timely and high-quality provision essential. It is likely that the monitoring inspection will be completed this half term.

Key priorities remain governance and partnership working, especially with health services. The monitoring inspection will judge whether improvements have made a real difference for children and families. A major accountability issue is the timeliness of EHCP reviews, which must be held within statutory twelve-month deadlines. KC highlighted the importance of ensuring Annual Reviews are planned and completed within statutory timeframes and requested that this message be communicated consistently across all districts.

Stronger use of data is helping track performance, but progress must be measured not only through compliance but also through family experience and outcomes. Attention is also required on EHCP quality, transition planning, and preparing young people for adulthood.

The system is moving from an improvement phase into transformation, with accountability shared across schools, trusts, the local authority, and partners. Sustained ambition and clear evidence of impact will be critical to delivering better outcomes for children in Oldham.

ACTION: CF to share SEND Inspection slides with members.

6. **Priorities**

Priorities agreed by Board members for 2025/26

- **SEND – Inclusion and timeliness of EHCPs on Data and matrix.**
- **Attendance**
- **Recruitment and Retention**
- **Basics -** Literacy and numeracy (the "basics first") agreed as non-negotiable priorities across all phases.
- **Vulnerable Children**

7. **Board Remit and Membership**

All members agree for Katie Charlton to become a member of the Board.

Districts update to form an agenda at one Board meeting across the year rather than all four.

ACTION: MB to invite JBloor to Board and discuss the new skills strategy.

ACTION: TS to invite EY and FHub reps to join the Board.

8. **AOB and Date of next meeting;**

Oldham Learning Boards meeting dates 2025/26

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

8.1 Summary of actions

	Action	**Responsibility**
1.	MB to invite Regional Director of Ofsted to CEO Board/OL Board to starts conversations.	**MB**
2.	District leads to engage the districts on priorities and consequent challenges.	**All Reps**
3.	Share SEND Inspection slides with members.	**CF**
4.	Invite JBloor to Board and discuss the new skills strategy.	**MB**
5.	Invite EY and FHub reps to join the Board.	**TS**
6.	Share Teacher Development in Oldham Brochure with minutes	**CF**

Meeting finished: **15:45pm**