

Joint area review

Report for children and young people in Oldham

Report for children and young people about the services they receive in Oldham

Why should I read this?

The law says that inspectors must look at and then report on how well local services serve children and young people in an area. This is called a "review". Inspectors visited your area recently. You might like to read this, or the full report which you can find on Ofsted's website, to find out what they had to say.

What did the inspectors do?

Nine inspectors visited Oldham in September 2008 so that they could get a feel of what life is like for children and young people in the area. They:

- ❖ talked and listened to a number of children and young people and, in particular, worked closely with members of the Youth Council
- ❖ talked with adults working with children and young people (such as social workers, headteachers and school staff, youth workers, nurses, doctors and councillors)
- ❖ spoke to parents and other people caring for children
- ❖ heard from the council and other agencies about what they think about the services they provide for children
- ❖ looked at a lot of information and read many documents; and
- ❖ visited a number of neighbourhoods and projects in the area.

The inspectors looked at how well services make sure that children and young people are properly cared for. They looked at specific services for children who are being looked after by the local authority and those for children and young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability. They also looked at the quality of education and training provision for young people aged 14-19.

How well are children and young people safeguarded in Oldham?

Services have improved and are well led, managed and checked overall. Local agencies work well together to make sure children and young people are safe. Those whose safety is at particular risk are given good support, for example if there is a possibility of being bullied. Young people get good advice on keeping themselves safe and there is also a lot of effective work in identifying family problems early and stopping them getting worse. However, progress has been relatively slow in introducing arrangements for new ways of services working together at a local level and in using new ways of assessing individual and family needs.

How good are local services for children who are being looked after by the council in Oldham?

Support for looked after children and young people is good. First of all, there is good work done to avoid children and young people coming into care. Many family problems are identified early and dealt with before they become too serious. If it does become necessary for children and young people to become looked after, the support they get is well-coordinated and helps to make a real difference to their lives. This is partly because they themselves have very good involvement in the planning and evaluation of the services provided. The quality of care, which is mainly in foster placements, is usually good. However, the role of those checking child protection cases and making sure that services are of a high quality needs developing.

How good are local services for children and young people who have a learning difficulty and/or a disability in Oldham?

Provision for children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate overall. Agencies work well together to identify and assess needs at an early stage. Health services generally are good, as are the facilities in special schools. However, there has only been limited progress in increasing the number of children and young people educated in mainstream and too many young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties spend long periods in the Pupil Referral Unit. Measures to assess educational progress and to set challenging targets are also not rigorous enough. The position is better for post-16 education and training provision, where the range and quality of what is provided is good. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have outstanding opportunities to participate in sporting activities.

How good is education and training provision for young people aged 14-19?

Planning in this area of provision is effective, with good co-operation between the various agencies involved. There is good information, advice and guidance for learners and a broad educational offer overall. The proportion of young people at age 16 achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C has improved well as has the quality of most school sixth forms and colleges, with particularly high success rates in the local further education colleges. There are also clear progression routes for young people from one stage of learning to another. Other particular strengths are the work being done to raise young people's aspirations generally and to improve the participation of vulnerable young people in education, employment and training. However, there is much

still to be done to bring both exam results and involvement in education, employment and training post-16 up to national levels.

How well are local services led and managed?

The council and its partners are working satisfactorily together to plan and deliver services for children and young people. Assessing needs and setting development priorities are relative strengths and consultation with children and young people is particularly strong. There is a good grasp of how different activities link, for example getting better exam results, making our communities look better, and making sure everyone lives and works together in peace. However, taking steps to improve performance is a weakness and systems to deliver value-for-money are not in place. The council is facing financial difficulties and the impact of potential cuts is currently unclear. There is also a lack of pace in implementing some important strategies. In the light of this, the chances of making things better for children and young people in Oldham in the future look adequate.

What should services do to improve services further?

Things that need doing straight away

Find ways of telling all children and young people in the area about this report.

Things that need doing over the next six months

Increase the pace of developments such as new ways of working with our partners in local areas and assessing individual and family needs.

Develop new and stronger ways of assessing the effectiveness of provision in terms of outcomes for children and young people.

Improve financial planning and develop better processes to ensure good value-for-money.

Strengthen the way progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream schools is tracked and what the council does when there are concerns.

Speed up the improvements to services for children with special educational needs.

Monitor more closely and report more regularly on the exclusion from school of looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

For action in the longer term

Improve the results of vulnerable groups aged 14-19 and, in particular, the proportion achieving five A*-C GCSE's including English and mathematics at age 16.