

# Oldham Best Start in Life Strategic Plan

## 1. Executive Summary

### Purpose of the Plan

This plan sets out Oldham's approach to delivering the Department for Education's Best Start in Life (BSiL) ambition. It brings together the work already underway across the borough to strengthen early childhood outcomes and sets a clear, systemwide strategy for improving the factors that contribute to a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age five.

Oldham has significant levels of poverty and inequality, but it also has a strong, committed workforce and a shared determination across partners to improve outcomes for all children. This plan outlines how we will build on these strengths to break cycles of disadvantage and ensure every child has the foundations for lifelong health, learning, and wellbeing.

### National Ambition and Local Responsibility

The national ambition for 75% of children to achieve a GLD by 2028 provides the framework within which local authorities must act. Achieving this ambition requires local systems to address the structural and social barriers that affect children's development, particularly in areas with high deprivation.

Local authorities are responsible for:

- Leading strategic planning across the early years system
- Ensuring access to high-quality education and childcare
- Commissioning and coordinating family support
- Driving improvements in early years practice and workforce capability
- Working collaboratively with health, education, and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector

In Oldham, this responsibility includes convening partners, aligning ambitions, and embedding BSiL as a boroughwide priority.

### Oldham's Statutory GLD Targets

This plan sets out Oldham's approach through to 2029, providing a clear, long-term framework for system improvement while working towards the statutory 2028 GLD targets set within the national ambition.

Oldham must meet two statutory targets by 2028:

- 72.6% of all children achieving a Good Level of Development
- 61.8% of children eligible for free school meals achieving a Good Level of Development

Meeting these targets will require coordinated action across the whole system. This plan outlines how Oldham will mobilise partners, align resources, and strengthen early years pathways to meet the 2028 targets while sustaining progress into 2029 and beyond.

## Key Priorities

Oldham's Best Start in Life plan is structured around three national priority areas:

1. Better support for families
2. More accessible early education and childcare
3. Improving quality in early years, including Reception

These priorities shape the actions, governance, and workforce development set out in this document.

## What Will Be Different for Families by 2029

By 2029, families in Oldham will experience:

- Earlier, more joined-up support from pregnancy to age five
- Improved access to high quality early education and childcare
- More consistent, confident early years practice across all settings
- Clearer pathways, stronger relationships, and reduced inequalities

Our ambition is that more children enter school ready to learn, ready to engage, and ready to succeed.

## 2. Introduction and National Context

### Overview of the BSIL Programme

The DfE BSIL programme sets a national direction for improving early childhood outcomes. It focuses on strengthening support for families, improving access to early education and childcare, and raising the quality of early years provision. The programme recognises that the first five years are critical for shaping lifelong outcomes and that reducing inequalities in these early experiences is essential for improving population-level health, learning, and wellbeing.

### Funding and System Alignment

Delivery of the BSIL ambition is underpinned by the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, which has received increased investment and a confirmed three-year funding

allocation. The programme is now being rebranded nationally as *Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies*, reflecting its strengthened focus on early childhood and infant wellbeing.

While this funding is a key enabler, BSiL is not a standalone programme. Its success depends on coordinated contributions from a range of partners (including early years providers and schools, health partners such as midwifery, health visitors and speech and language specialists and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector organisations) as well as alignment with other complementary national and regional programmes:

- Families First Partnership which is a national programme of reform of family help and children's safeguarding arrangements;
- Live Well which is a Greater Manchester programme aiming to deliver great everyday support in every neighbourhood, through a shift in how public services work with people and communities.

Viewing BSiL as a system-wide priority ensures that investment, workforce capability, and service transformation are aligned across the whole early years landscape, not confined to Family Hubs alone.

### **Oldham's Vision for BSiL**

'Every child in Oldham grows up healthy, happy and ready to learn, supported by services that give families the right help at the right time, so every child gets the best possible start in life'

## **Governance**

This plan will report into the Best Start in Life Board (formerly the Family Hubs Board) for oversight and accountability, with clear accountability to the Director of Education and the Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help, and will also feed into the relevant governance channels across education and early help.

## **3. Overview of the Delivery Approach**

Oldham's BSiL programme sets out a clear, phased roadmap to strengthen the early years system, improve access to early education, and enhance the quality of provision.

The delivery model is structured into three stages:

- Stage 1 – Foundations and Boroughwide Test-and Learn
- Stage 2 – Embedding and Expansion
- Stage 3 – Scale Up and Sustainability

Each stage builds on the previous one, ensuring that Oldham strengthens its system infrastructure, develops its workforce, and improves pathways before expanding delivery.

## 4. Stage 1 – Foundations and Boroughwide Test-and-Learn (April 2026 – January 2027)

Stage 1 establishes the essential building blocks of a coherent early years system. It focuses on shared principles, pathway mapping, early identification, communication, data foundations, alongside the introduction of a boroughwide test-and-learn model to trial and refine new approaches across all districts. This ensures that improvements are implemented at pace, learning is captured quickly, and effective practice is spread consistently across the system.

### 4.1 Strengthening Family Help and Early Identification

The first priority is to create a shared, consistent approach to Family Help across the early years system. This begins with defining 'The Oldham Way' - a set of shared principles, language and expectations that all partners will use when working with families.

Mapping Family Help pathways from pregnancy to age five will identify duplication, gaps and opportunities to streamline support. This work will shape Oldham's early years model with a clear focus on strengthening the universal offer of preventative family help. Working in partnership with the Families First programme will ensure that families can access appropriate support and intervention across the full spectrum of need, from universal to targeted and specialist.

Targeted information for families will be developed, particularly around parenting, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), speech delay, child development and early learning. This will help reduce anxiety, improve parental understanding and confidence, and support early help-seeking.

Strengthening the antenatal - health visiting - Family Hub pathway will ensure smooth transitions, continuity of support and earlier identification of emerging needs, complementing Greater Manchester Combined Authority's focus on prevention and early intervention.

### 4.2 Boroughwide Test-and-Learn Model

Oldham will adopt a boroughwide test-and-learn model to strengthen Family Help, improve access to early education, and enhance integrated working across the early years system. All districts will implement the same core components from the outset, with flexibility to adapt approaches based on local need. Learning will be captured through rapid review cycles and used to refine delivery across the system.

This approach enables Oldham to make progress at pace, ensure consistency for families, and spread effective practice quickly across the borough.

## What the test-and-learn model will focus on

1. Assertive outreach model (utilising Ages and Stages Questionnaire data and other existing datasets)
2. Integrated district meetings
3. Attendance monitoring in Private, Voluntary, and Independent settings
4. EYPP identification and use
5. Birth rate mapping
6. Early identification pathways

## How learning will be captured and used

- Engagement rates
- Attendance improvements
- EYPP take-up
- Family Hub engagement
- Family Hub interventions
- Early identification outcomes
- GLD trajectory data
- Qualitative feedback from families and practitioners

Insights from these reviews will inform continuous improvement across all districts, ensuring that Oldham's early years system evolves in real time and remains responsive to local need.

### 4.3 Improving Access to Early Education and Childcare

District-level sufficiency and demand profiling will identify gaps in provision. Multilingual, plain-English information will be developed to support families' understanding of entitlements.

A simple tracking system will compare eligibility with actual take-up, enabling targeted followup with families who are not engaging. Existing work with schools to improve Reception attendance will be scaled up, with a particular focus on children whose attendance falls below 90%. Options for more intensive, targeted interventions for pupils with attendance below 50% will be explored later in the programme. Alongside this, a new pilot will begin to capture and monitor attendance in PVI settings, strengthening our understanding of patterns across the whole early years sector.

Birth rate mapping will be used to identify children not accessing any early years provision, enabling targeted and assertive outreach.

## 4.4 Workforce and Quality Foundations

Work will begin to explore how potential initiatives on toilet training and school readiness could be developed, including assessing their feasibility, design and likely impact within target settings. This scoping activity will inform whether and how these initiatives should be taken forward as part of the wider early years offer.

This work will lay the foundations for an Oldham Early Years Workforce Strategy. Identified in stage 3 of this plan and building on the GMCA Competency Framework.

## 4.5 Data, Governance and System Leadership

Stage 1 will establish the foundations for a strong performance and governance framework. This includes agreeing shared outcomes and key performance indicators (KPI's)PI's, implementing data sharing agreements, developing district-level profiles of needs and assets, and embedding regular reporting cycles to the BSIL Board.

Work will begin on the BSIL Dashboard to support reporting and accountability, which will bring together data on GLD, attendance, mandated checks, Family Hub engagement and early identification and intervention.

## 5. Stage 2 – Embedding and Expansion (February 2027 – March 2029)

Stage 2 focuses on embedding consistent practice across Oldham, informed by learning from the boroughwide test-and-learn activity delivered in stage 1.

### 5.1 Family Help and Early Identification

The system will focus on strengthening universal early intervention across the early years pathway, ensuring families receive support at the earlier opportunity. This work will remain closely connected to the emerging 'One Plan, One Approach' developments within the Families First programme, maintaining alignment and awareness so that universal activity complements the wider model for targeted and specialist family help.

Family Hubs teams will be supported to meet mandated checks and link families to support earlier. A multilingual digital offer will be developed, including QR code pathways, social media content and online resources, with offline alternatives for families experiencing digital exclusion.

This stage will also begin working on a consistent approach to early identification, ensuring that SEND and developmental concerns around communication are picked up earlier and responded to through coordinated Family Help.

## 5.2 Access to Early Education and Childcare

A boroughwide strategy will be developed to close the gap between eligibility and take-up of entitlements. This will include targeted and assertive outreach, improved communication across partners, and closer working with PVI's and schools.

SEND navigation will be improved through closer working between Local Inclusion Support Officers SEND Practitioners and Oldham's Better Communication Team, supporting parents to understand and accept emerging needs. Work will also begin to address transport and access barriers, including exploring flexible hours and extended provision within Family Hubs.

## 5.3 Workforce and Quality

A coordinated training offer will be developed to build shared knowledge and understanding across Oldham's workforce. Its delivery and impact will be strengthened through the early years workforce strategies set out in stage 3 of this plan.

This stage will also develop and build on existing best practice forums and support settings to improve transitions into school.

## 5.4 Data and Governance

The BSiL Dashboard will be launched, enabling real-time monitoring of progress. Governance structures across Family Hubs, Early Years Boards and Section 75 arrangements will be aligned to reduce duplication and clarify decision-making.

This stage will also embed district-level performance reviews, ensuring that local intelligence informs boroughwide strategy.

# 6. Stage 3 – Boroughwide Scale Up and Sustainability (October 2027 – March 2029)

Stage 3 focuses on boroughwide implementation and long-term sustainability.

## 6.1 Family Help

The focus will be on strengthening universal early intervention across all districts, ensuring families receive support at the earliest opportunity. This work will remain closely connected to the emerging 'One Plan, One Approach' developments within the Families First partnership, maintaining alignment without duplicating activity. Assertive outreach will

continue to be a key feature, with targeted attention on neighbourhoods experiencing the highest levels of deprivation so that families who are least likely to engage receive proactive, timely support.

## 6.2 Access to Early Education and Childcare

Where sufficiency gaps are identified, work will begin to develop new nursery places in school-based and community settings in line with DfE guidance to be announced in 2026. Building on the earlier pilot attendance monitoring across PVI and schools will be scaled up with sustained outreach continuing to families not accessing provision.

## 6.3 Workforce and Quality

A full Early Years Workforce Strategy will be co-produced, setting out a shared vision for skills, training, recruitment and retention. A recommended suite of online training options will be developed, and a retention and recognition plan will be implemented to support workforce stability.

## 6.4 Data and Governance

Data will be used to drive continuous improvement, highlight areas that are off-track and inform where support is targeted. As richer data becomes available, and in line with DfE's test-and-learn approach, our targeting will adapt in real time to emerging needs and insights.

## 7. Programme Timeline

The diagram below brings the full delivery timeline together, showing how the phases connect, where they overlap, and how learning feeds forward into the next stage. It provides a clear view of the overall flow of the programme, the timing, duration and purpose of each phase, and supports a shared understanding of how the system will move from mobilisation to boroughwide impact. A more detailed breakdown of the timeline is available in the appendix.



## 8. Evidence-Based Interventions

Oldham will scale three core Evidence-Based Interventions (EBIs) with strong evidence of impact:

### Making it REAL

- The programme is currently delivered in Oldham schools, with 72% of participating children achieving GLD and 90% of parents reporting increased confidence, knowledge and ability to support early reading and writing at home.
- Delivery in schools will be expanded from the 2026/27 academic year, supported by a newly trained cohort of trainers working alongside school staff. Expansion will prioritise outreach to children most in need, particularly those in communities we have not yet reached or who face barriers to accessing early years provision.
- This approach ensures that expansion is not only about increasing numbers, but also about improving equity and directing support where it will have the greatest impact.
- A new cohort of Quality and Vulnerable Children Practitioners will be trained to deliver Making it REAL in PVI settings, strengthening early literacy and improving school readiness for transition into Reception.

### Togetherness (formerly Solihull)

- Togetherness provides an evidence-based framework that strengthens practitioners' understanding of children's emotional development, behaviour, and relationships,

supporting more consistent and trauma-informed practice across Oldham's early years system.

- Training PVI staff in Togetherness will build workforce confidence and capability, improve early identification and early intervention, and enhance the quality of relationships with families - directly supporting BSiL priorities around early help, quality improvement, workforce development, and improved outcomes from conception to age five.
- A system-wide process will identify colleagues best placed to train as Togetherness facilitators, ensuring representation from a range of teams so that BSiL principles are embedded consistently across services.
- Capacity will be scaled up from the current two trainers to a cohort of six to eight, achieved by freeing capacity within existing roles rather than creating new posts. Although capacity is a challenge, this approach demonstrates system commitment and enables sustainable delivery at scale.

## Triple P

- Triple P is an evidence-based parenting programme that supports families to build confidence, strengthen relationships, and develop positive strategies to manage children's behaviour and emotional development. It contributes directly to Best Start in Life priorities around early help, family support, and improving outcomes from conception to age five.
- Triple P is currently delivered across Oldham's early years system, providing consistent, strengths-based support for families and helping to reduce escalation of need through early intervention.
- During 2024/25, the programme supported around 190 parents and carers, with strong engagement and positive feedback on improved confidence, understanding and home routines.
- We are now looking to increase reach, with a focus on engaging families who may not currently access parenting support, including those in communities with lower take-up or who face barriers to early years provision. This ensures expansion is focused on equity, impact and strengthening early relationships.

## Strengthening Parental Confidence Through Play-Based Learning

In addition to these established evidence-based programmes, Oldham will also explore and agree a further intervention focused on strengthening the skills and confidence of parents in supporting their children's development through play. This work will build on existing strengths within the system and respond to feedback from families and practitioners about the importance of play-based learning in the early years. The intervention will be codesigned with partners to ensure it is accessible, culturally relevant and aligned with Oldham's wider BSiL priorities, with a particular focus on supporting families who may benefit most from additional guidance and encouragement.

## 9. Monitoring and Performance

A new BSiL Dashboard will track:

- GLD outcomes
- Free School Meals GLD differentials in relation to whether children receive free school meals, gender and ethnicity
- Take-up of entitlements
- Mandated checks
- Family Hub engagement
- Family Hub interventions
- Workforce training

Quarterly reporting will be provided to the BSiL Board, with district level reviews and an annual refresh of the plan.

## 10. Summary

This plan provides a clear, coherent and achievable roadmap for delivering Oldham's BSiL local plans. It strengthens system leadership, ensures families receive the right help at the right time, and aligns with wider reforms.

It is ambitious but grounded in evidence, and it reflects Oldham's commitment to giving every child the best possible start.