

4 February 2025

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter on Hillside School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and proprietor. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in August 2024. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we worked closely with the head of education and staff. We heard about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection and other areas as proposed by the head of education. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found. The Care Inspectorate inspected the residential care homes at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Safeguarding and child protection.

Staff have an increased confidence in identifying and reporting any concerns about a young person. Child and wellbeing concern forms are now embedded in practice and used consistently by staff across the school. Reported concerns are followed up timeously by either senior leaders, the principal teacher or shift managers in the care homes. Senior leaders have further embedded and strengthened the complaints procedures. As a result, staff and young people are clear on how to raise a complaint. Senior leaders continue to respond to any complaints received in an efficient and timely manner, providing appropriate support and contacting external agencies as necessary.

Senior leaders and staff have revised and streamlined Individual Crisis Support Plans (ICSP). All young people have ICSPs that make clear those holds that staff can use safely and those holds that should not be used under any circumstances. Staff routinely use de-escalation and preventative strategies outlined in ICSPs to support young people effectively. This has reduced the need for physical intervention significantly. As a result, young people feel safe and well supported.

Staff are trained appropriately in conducting adapted life space interviews (LSI) following an incident. LSI are being used more consistently to support young people to express their views, recall events and discuss their feelings. Young people are increasingly able to work with staff to reflect on their actions. Staff would benefit from further training to support them to carry out LSIs for reluctant young people and neurodivergent learners effectively.

Governance arrangements.

Overall, the school has made some further progress in strengthening governance arrangements. They have embedded formal, systematic arrangements to monitor school performance, with increased emphasis on safeguarding, complaints and care and welfare concerns. Senior leaders have a greater understanding of their role in relation to governance. They have successfully identified a range of appropriate key performance indicators to help monitor school performance.

Two external partners with valuable experience in leadership and governance in education and in care have been recruited to support school governance arrangements. They have started to examine school performance through the scrutiny of processes and paperwork and engaging with young people and staff. Senior leaders now need to work closely with these external partners to embed their contribution into the school's overall governance arrangements. Collectively, they need to ensure that this newly-established external governance has a clear focus on regular, systematic scrutiny and analysis of the school's performance in relation to safeguarding and child protection, and the wellbeing of young people and staff.

Wellbeing and behaviour, including the use of physical intervention.

Led by senior leaders, the school has made strong progress in promoting positive relationships and behaviour and reducing the use of physical intervention. All staff have received comprehensive training on de-escalation and proactive strategies to support young people effectively. As a result, staff are more confident helping young people without the need to use physical intervention. Young people feel that de-escalation strategies are used effectively to support them when they become anxious, distressed and dysregulated. There continue to be no instances of the use of prone restraint since December 2023, and the number of incidents of physical intervention continues to decrease.

Most education and care staff continue to work well in partnership across the school, contributing positively to the wellbeing and learning needs of young people. Senior leaders should now aim to strengthen their partnership working further. They should provide greater clarity of the roles all staff play when supporting young people in education.

What happens next?

The school has made progress in most areas for improvement. We will visit Hillside School within four months of the publication of this letter to review areas for improvement requiring further progress, and specifically in relation to governance arrangements. We will discuss with the proprietor the details of this visit. Following the visit, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress Hillside School has made.

Steven McPherson
HM Inspector