

5 March 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

Scottish Ministers requested that HM Inspectors conduct an unannounced special inspection of Hillside School, Aberdour in accordance with [section 66 \(1\) of the Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#). In January 2024, HM Inspectors visited Hillside School. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers, children and young people, partners and placing authorities, and worked closely with the school proprietor, headteacher and staff. We examined the school's provision in relation to safeguarding, child protection, the use of physical intervention and governance. We also looked at how well children and young people are improving their wellbeing and behaviour.

Safeguarding and child protection, including the use of physical intervention

All children and young people report that they feel safe in Hillside School. Most children and young people are happy at school and enjoy most of their classes. All children and young people know who to go to if they have a problem and have built strong relationships with most members of staff in the education provision.

In line with national guidance and legislation, all staff engage in safeguarding and child protection training annually. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities regarding safeguarding and child protection. However, at times, staff do not adhere fully to expected processes set out in the school policy in relation to the recording and monitoring of safeguarding and child protection incidents. Staff in the education provision need to ensure that they follow processes in line with the child protection policy at all times and make sure recording of incidents is completed within expected timescales.

Within the education provision, staff regularly use physical intervention to protect children and young people from injury or harm, including the use of 'prone' face-down holds. They recognise 'prone', face-down holds are not appropriate to keep children and young people safe. As an immediate priority, staff need to reconsider their use of physical intervention, including the use of 'prone', face-down holds. Led by the headteacher, alternatives to physical intervention need to be considered, agreed and implemented by all staff in the education provision.

Currently, all decisions regarding child protection and safeguarding issues and complaints in the education provision rest with the headteacher, as child protection co-ordinator. In line with national guidance, the proprietor needs to take a more prominent role in scrutinising the decisions and actions of the headteacher, offering support and challenge where appropriate.

Governance

The quality of governance across Hillside School needs to be improved as a priority. The proprietor and headteacher need to introduce structured arrangements for the systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of school performance. They also need to record formally the actions they take to ensure correct policies and procedures have been followed, and to show how they are responding to and resolving any issues or complaints.

Wellbeing and behaviour

Across the education provision, staff promote and value the importance of education in children and young people's lives. Staff work hard to motivate children and young people to access learning and to attain and achieve as much as possible. As a result, almost all children and young people improve their attendance over time and engage successfully with their learning. This is having a positive impact on children and young people's wellbeing.

Almost all children and young people benefit from positive relationships with staff in the education provision. Staff have put in place well organised structures and routines to help children and young people understand their daily timetable and manage key transitions. However, staff need to improve their approaches to supporting children and young people with their behaviour, taking full account of individualised support plans.

Care staff supporting the education provision spend too much time monitoring school corridors and interrupting learning in classes. Children and young people are spending too much time out of class, often in 'chill out' zones. Senior leaders and staff need to work with children and young people to revisit and adapt their approaches to promoting positive behaviour, in line with national guidance. In doing so, they should minimise the use of the 'chill out' zones.

Senior leaders and staff work closely with parents, carers and partner agencies. They communicate regularly with parents and carers to provide updates on children and young people's progress and to discuss any issues or concerns that may arise. Parents' and carers' views are valued and contribute well to individualised planning to meet children and young people's needs.

We gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the school's work using two quality indicators from [How good is our school? \(4th edition\)](#). Quality indicators help schools, local authorities and inspectors to judge what is working well and what needs to be improved. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers details of our evaluations to keep track of how well Scottish schools are doing.

Here are Education Scotland's evaluations for Hillside School

Quality indicators	Evaluation
Safeguarding and child protection	weak
Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion	satisfactory
Descriptions of the evaluations are available from: How good is our school? (4th edition) , Appendix 3: The six-point scale	

A more detailed document called Summarised Inspection Findings (SIF) will be available on the Education Scotland website at: [Details | Find an inspection report | Find an inspection report | Inspection and Review | Education Scotland](#)

What happens next?

As a result of our inspection findings, the school needs to make a number of improvements. We will maintain close contact with the proprietor and headteacher to monitor their progress towards meeting those priorities requiring immediate action. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within three months of the publication of this letter. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents/carers informing you of the progress the school has made.

Steven McPherson
HM Inspector