

# Summarised inspection findings

**Hillside School**

Independent

5 March 2024

## Key contextual information

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 restraint and governance. We also looked at how well children and young people are improving their wellbeing and behaviour.

Hillside School is an independent special school located in Aberdour, Fife. The school provides residential care and education for children and young people requiring significant support for learning. All children and young people require support with social and emotional needs and have experienced periods of interrupted learning before joining the school. At the time of inspection, the school roll was 21, with children and young people ranging from aged nine to 16. Children and young people are placed from ten local authorities from across Scotland.

A single proprietor is responsible for governance across both care and education. The education provision at the school is led by a headteacher who has been in post for over four years. He is supported by a principal teacher.

## 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

weak

This indicator focuses on the wide range of duties required of all staff and partners to ensure that all children and young people are safe, well cared for and enabled to flourish. This indicator looks to how the school takes account of statutory requirements in relation to child protection to ensure the needs of all learners are met. Safeguarding all children and young people requires strong partnerships to be established between the school and its local community. The themes are:

- arrangements for safeguarding, including child protection
- arrangements to ensure wellbeing
- national guidance and legislation

- The headteacher and head of care share child protection co-ordination duties across both the education provision and residential care. Both have received high quality training to support them to perform the role of child protection co-ordinator. Child protection training for education staff is initially delivered in person by the headteacher and supplemented by additional information provided about child protection arrangements in nearby local authorities. The school's child protection policy reflects current national advice but requires to be updated to remove reference to staff who no longer work in the school.
- 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.
- Staff undertake regular training and updates on important aspects related to safeguarding and child protection. Following relevant professional learning, staff provide colleagues with valuable training in fire regulations, moving and handling, and the use of a defibrillator. This training helps to ensure a common understanding amongst staff of procedures and practice in each of these areas.
- 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 up a good relationship with most members of staff. Most children and young people believe that their needs are met better in Hillside School than in the school which they came from.
- Most children and young people understand why physical intervention is sometimes used and confirm that they receive a debrief afterwards. A minority feel that physical intervention is inappropriate and report that they find it a distressing experience. A few report that debriefing sessions were not held after a physical restraint.
- Within the education provision, staff regularly use physical intervention to avert physical danger and to protect children and young people from harm. Staff recognise that 'prone', face down holds are not appropriate to keep children and young people safe, despite being used frequently as part of the school's chosen approach to physical intervention. Alternatives to this type of hold are being explored by staff but have yet to be agreed. Led by the headteacher,

staff need to agree and adopt alternative approaches to the use of 'prone' holds as a matter of urgency.

- Every child and young person has an individual crisis support plan (ICSP) which includes information about the approaches to restraint which should be avoided when interacting with them. However, for half of the children and young people who have been restrained since August 2023 using a 'prone' hold this intervention should not have been used. This is a significant cause for concern which could result in increased risk for individual children and young people. The proprietor and headteacher need to ensure that all staff are aware of the contents of each ICSP and that the individual needs of children and young people as described are met. This includes not using specific approaches to restraint. They must also, as a matter of course, review each time physical intervention is used and ensure that the approach taken aligns with what is outlined in the relevant ICSP.
- Staff take account of the presenting behaviours of each learner when considering how they will be best supported in Hillside School, responding to any emerging needs. They also identify which class group each child or young person would be best placed in to work well with others. This matching approach is dynamic and used flexibly throughout each child and young person's time at the school to help ensure individual needs are met.
- The current system of record keeping for safeguarding requires improvement. Presently, complaints are recorded by staff and then passed to the headteacher for central collation. This method is also used for documenting incidents of bullying behaviour and maintaining child and adult protection logs. However, the headteacher recognises that the current arrangements are neither efficient nor appropriate. He acknowledges that staff directly involved should input the initial information. Responses from senior leaders to complaints or issues are not sufficiently prompt or consistent. Senior leaders need to ensure that all complaints are investigated both promptly and thoroughly and recorded appropriately. The proprietor needs to ensure appropriate oversight and scrutiny of the decisions and actions of senior leaders in relation to complaints and incidents, offering support and challenge where needed.

## 1.4 Leadership and management of staff: theme 1: Governance framework

- The school's governance structures and arrangements need to be strengthened significantly. Currently, the governance structures and arrangements in place at Hillside School do not support analysis of school performance. The proprietor meets regularly with the headteacher to discuss school performance across the education provision. However, discussions regarding school performance are informal. In line with national guidance, the proprietor needs to introduce more robust and systematic arrangements to monitor and evaluate school performance. The proprietor and senior leaders also need to record 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.
- The proprietor recognises the need to re-establish a closer partnership with the school community. Previously, she routinely visited the school to meet with staff and talk to children and young people. This practice was paused during the pandemic. She should now resume routine, direct interaction with non-promoted staff and children and young people, gathering their views about school performance and identifying any concerns or areas requiring attention. This approach will allow the proprietor to understand better the strengths and needs of individuals, cohorts and the school as a whole.
- The headteacher and principal teacher need to dedicate more time to monitoring and evaluating school performance in the education provision. Currently, the headteacher spends too much time on operational and administrative matters. Although there is an extensive improvement plan in place for the education provision, this is based on limited evidence. The headteacher and principal teacher should undertake more systematic quality assurance activities to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the education provision. For example, observations of learning and teaching, and examination of data and information on children and young people's attainment, progress and wellbeing. This will help the headteacher to identify any areas of practice in the education provision that require immediate attention.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

**satisfactory**

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Almost all children and young people benefit from positive relationships with staff in the education provision. Staff have established well organised structures and routines to help children and young people understand their daily timetable and manage key transitions. A minority of children and young people need further support with timekeeping. Most children and young people feel that the school provides them with valuable opportunities to learn and that they are safe and happy within the education provision.
- Almost all children and young people start their placement at Hillside School following an extended period of interrupted learning. 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. Most children and young people are attaining well. They are making significant progress with learning compared to their previous educational placements. Parents and partners speak very positively about the positive impact this has on children and young people's wellbeing and self-worth.
- A minority of children and young people are not sufficiently engaged in learning. Staff should continue to identify and create personalised approaches to support all children and young people to attend school regularly and to engage in learning activities suited to their needs and interests.
- Almost all children and young people experience challenges in regulating their behaviour. Staff have participated in professional learning in de-escalation techniques. As a result, there are examples of staff supporting children and young people to manage their emotions and overcome episodes of anxiety or distress effectively. However, overall, approaches to promoting positive behaviour need to be improved.
- Care staff supporting the education provision spend too much time monitoring school corridors and interrupting learning in classes as part of current approaches to promoting positive behaviour. 'Chill out' zones are used frequently, resulting in children and young people spending extended periods of time out of class. Although staff ensure children and young people are never secluded in these areas, children and young people do not like being in these spaces and feel they are overused. Additionally, the 'chill out' zones are not attractive environments to support children and young people. As planned, a refurbishment of the 'chill out' zones should take priority. The headteacher 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. The headteacher's newly-established policy and guidance to support education staff and care staff's approach to collaborative working in the education provision is a useful first step. However, it is too early to evaluate its impact.

- Parental engagement is a strength of the school. 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. Parents and carers are encouraged to play an active role in review meetings and in the identification of next steps in children and young people's education and care. Senior leaders should continue to involve parents and carers in the wider life of the school.
- Most children and young people are improving their physical fitness. They participate enthusiastically in activities such as football, cycling and golf. Children and young people enjoy these experiences and are building skills in working with others, communication and resilience. Staff now need to ensure that all children and young people receive their entitlement to two hours of planned, quality physical education each week.
- The Individualised Work Coordinator (IWC) meets all children and young people on a weekly basis. She uses the language of the wellbeing indicators effectively to support children and young people to reflect on their strengths, needs and aspirations. Children and young people enjoy these sessions and are successfully identifying and achieving individualised goals and targets linked to their wellbeing. However, across the school, staff do not yet routinely use the language of the wellbeing indicators to inform learning. In collaboration with the IWC, staff should continue to consider how the wellbeing indicators could support further children and young people to reflect upon about their own health and wellbeing.
- The headteacher has detailed knowledge of the strengths and needs of children and young people. They provide staff with a range of documents containing useful information in relation to children and young people's strengths, interests and learning needs. However, staff are not consistently using this information to support children and young people effectively. As a result, children and young people can become agitated or distressed, often leading to them being disruptive in classes. Senior leaders should now streamline the information provided to staff. They should focus on providing a targeted number of strategies to help staff support individual children and young people to engage with learning and manage their emotions and behaviour.
- Senior leaders and staff have an awareness of statutory duties. They have built strong relationships with parents and partner agencies. Senior leaders ensure that children, young people, parents and partners are fully involved in reviewing children and young people's progress. Children, young people and parents consistently contribute to review meetings and are encouraged to identify next steps. Senior leaders involve other agencies as appropriate in order to refer and seek support for children and young people.
- Children and young people are developing their understanding of equality and diversity. They are building an understanding of children's rights and protected characteristics such as sexual orientation. Teachers provide a range of learning experiences across curriculum areas which reflect protected characteristics well. They should continue to challenge any preconceived prejudice and discrimination.
- Through the personal and social education (PSE) curriculum, children and young people have an emerging awareness of their own emotions, and the importance of healthy food and physical health. As they continue to develop the PSE curriculum, teachers should ensure that programmes and courses are relevant, meaningful and meeting the individual wellbeing needs of all learners.

## Other relevant evidence

- Senior leaders and staff are developing the curriculum well, particularly at the senior phase. Young people are able to access a wide range of National Qualifications and awards. Senior leaders now need to revisit the length of the school week. They should ensure that children and young people are able to access the same amount of learning experiences as their peers in other schools.



## Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.