

27 August 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter on Hillside School detailing our findings from the inspection that took place during week commencing 22 January 2024. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and proprietor. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people, and worked closely with the head of education and staff. We heard from the head of education and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection. 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.

Safeguarding and child protection.

Senior leaders have improved arrangements for staff to raise concerns about a young person. The school's complaints procedures have been strengthened and updated with clear guidance provided for staff and young people on how to raise a concern. Staff now confidently report issues using the new wellbeing concerns form and senior leaders are responding to reported concerns appropriately and swiftly. As a next step, senior leaders should regularly review how well safeguarding concerns are consistently being responded to in the correct manner.

Senior leaders have formalised and strengthened the school's complaints procedures. They have produced updated guidance for staff and young people on how to raise a complaint. Helpful information has been produced in child-friendly language for young people which details how they can raise a complaint. Senior leaders are now responding to any complaints received quickly and efficiently, providing appropriate support to all parties involved in any complaint.

Senior leaders and staff have made good progress in revising young people's individual crisis support plans (ICSPs). There is now consistency in staff approaches, including in the use of physical intervention when it is deemed necessary. Staff are clear about the new arrangements and feel they are working well. They are now using the approaches and strategies outlined in ICSPs increasingly well to support young people.

Governance arrangements.

Overall, the school has made some progress in strengthening governance arrangements. Senior leaders now more formally monitor school performance in relation to safeguarding incidents, complaints, and the use of physical restraint. However, there are important areas of improvement that the proprietor needs to address to improve their scrutiny of school performance and provide support and challenge to senior leaders. The proprietor and senior leaders do not yet have sufficient understanding of their respective roles in relation to school governance.

Governance arrangements remain at an early stage of implementation and need to be strengthened further.

Wellbeing and behaviour, including the use of physical intervention.

Overall, the school has made appropriate progress in promoting positive behaviour and reducing the use of physical intervention. Senior leaders have reviewed the use of physical intervention and provided staff with appropriate professional learning. Staff have greater clarity regarding the appropriate use of physical intervention. A detailed restraint reduction policy is now in place, aligning with national guidance, which is positively impacting on staff and young people. As a result, there have been no instances of the use of prone restraint since the initial inspection in January 2024, and the number of incidents of physical intervention has decreased significantly. There is now a clearer understanding across the school about when the use of physical intervention is appropriate. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that regular, consistently high-quality professional learning is provided for all staff.

Education staff and care staff are working more effectively together in the education provision, with care staff supporting learning activities. This has been very well received by both staff and young people and is having a positive impact on young people's learning and behaviour. All staff should continue to build on this positive development by regularly reflecting on their partnership working, reviewing what is working well and identifying what could be improved further.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. However, there remain important aspects where further progress is required. We will liaise with the proprietor regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within four months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with the proprietor the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Steven McPherson
HM Inspector