

Summarised inspection findings

Spark of Genius Harbour Point School

22 June 2021

Key contextual information

In April 2021, Scottish Ministers requested that HM Inspectors conduct a special inspection of Spark of Genius Harbour Point School in accordance with section 66(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 ('the 1980 Act').

Furthermore - in accordance with section 66(1AA)(b) of the 1980 Act – Scottish Ministers have requested that HM Inspectors to report on the following:

- the school's safeguarding and promoting positive behaviour policies and the implementation of these policies;
- a determination as to how recent developments at the school have effected change in learner achievement;
- a consideration of how the school communicates and works with children and young people, parents, and placing authorities, to improve delivery for learners;
- an assessment of the school's plans to improve education at the school; and
- the school's capacity for continuous improvement.

Background

Spark of Genius Harbour Point School is an independent day special school based in Musselburgh within East Lothian Council. It caters for young people with social, emotional and mental health needs. At the time of the inspection, the school roll is 15. The school is part of the Spark of Genius group of schools. A new headteacher was recently appointed to the school and has been in post for nine weeks. The depute headteacher has been in post for seven months.

1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement

unsatisfactory

This indicator defines rigorous self-evaluation as a responsibility of all stakeholders. It highlights the importance of partnership approaches to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. It emphasizes the need for strong leadership and robust analysis of a range of intelligence and data as essential features of effective continuous self-improvement. A key factor in this indicator is demonstrating the impact of self-evaluation in relation to outcomes for all learners. Their active participation in self-evaluation is therefore essential.

- Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation
- Analysis and evaluation of intelligence and data
- Impact on learners' successes and achievements

- Overall, the school's arrangements for self-evaluation and continuous improvement are unsatisfactory. This is an area requiring immediate attention without delay. Senior leaders need to increase significantly the pace of improvement with a clear focus on improving outcomes for young people. Senior leaders need to provide a purposeful sense of direction for continuous improvement.
- The newly-appointed headteacher, supported by the depute headteacher, has made a promising start in improving the culture at the school. Most stakeholders speak positively about their appointments and are confident the new senior leaders will improve the school over time. Senior leaders have a developing understanding of the needs of young people. They have identified correctly that an immediate priority of the school is to improve relationships and wellbeing. Through the introduction of new policies and formal monitoring of practice, they are beginning to impact positively on the school's ability to improve its work.

- Senior leaders have introduced monitoring systems. These are not yet identifying areas of the school requiring improvement such as safeguarding and child protection. Senior leaders need to use a range of evidence to help them identify accurately key priorities. In particular, analysis of data and intelligence, quality improvement processes and views of stakeholders need to play a prominent role. This evidence should help senior leaders to identify areas requiring immediate attention.
- External managers carried out a recent audit. However, the resulting action plan has too many improvement priorities. It requires to be reviewed and streamlined to allow the school to focus its work on the many areas requiring immediate attention. It is important that improvement priorities and actions impact on young people's learning experiences and their long-term outcomes.
- Staff need to take more responsibility to reflect on the quality of their own performance and identify ways to improve their practice. In particular, staff should reflect on their approaches to promote positive behaviour, identify creative ways to engage all young people in their learning and use a wider variety of learning and teaching approaches to improve young people's attainment and progress.
- Young people, parents, partners and staff currently have very few opportunities to offer their views on the performance of the school and how it could improve. A minority of young people contribute to school life through student council meetings but these are yet to influence change and improvement in a meaningful way. Led by senior leaders, the school now needs to identify and develop effective ways to gather the views of young people, parents, staff and partner agencies to contribute meaningfully towards continuous improvement. In doing so, staff need to take a lead role in taking forward identified improvement priorities. Young people also need to be fully involved in school improvement.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

unsatisfactory

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. This includes well-planned progressive learning opportunities so that children and young people can become more resilient and develop a sound understanding of how they can keep themselves safe.

- Arrangements for safeguarding, including child protection
- Arrangements to ensure wellbeing
- National guidance and legislation

- There are major weaknesses in the school's policies and approaches to safeguarding and child protection which require urgent action. Senior leaders need to clarify arrangements for the coordination and leadership of child protection matters. They require to put in place coherent policies and practices in line with national legislation and guidance. Policies need to take account of risk factors and reflect the context of the school.
- Procedures for reporting and recording safeguarding, child protection and anti-bullying need to be improved. The school needs to ensure chronologies are in place that detail the actions taken following a significant event. Senior leaders need to ensure that all contacts with other agencies and outcomes are recorded. Until recently, safeguarding concerns were submitted to an off-site team within the Spark of Genius Group. This has the potential to reduce the ability of senior leaders to take immediate action should it be necessary.
- Senior leaders and staff do not yet have a consistent understanding of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and wellbeing. They have participated recently in professional learning to improve their understanding of safeguarding issues and how to respond appropriately, report and record issues but this is not yet embedded in their practice.
- As a matter of urgency, the proprietors need to install appropriate filters and monitoring systems to ensure that inappropriate content cannot be accessed via the school's information technology systems. In addition, there needs to be greater monitoring of the use of personal devices notably mobile phones, to ensure that young people are not accessing and sharing inappropriate content.
- Senior leaders need to take action to reduce the use of safe holds. They also need to ensure that whenever staff use safe holds they do so in an appropriate and consistent way. The school does not currently have adequate records of safe holds. In line with legislation, the proprietor needs to take all necessary actions to determine if correct safe holding procedures have been and continue to be followed. In doing so, the proprietors should ensure that they contact local child protection agencies if required.
- Following any incident involving restraint, senior leaders must ensure that they conduct a comprehensive review and debrief which involves all stakeholders. This includes reviewing the additional support needs and risk assessment for each individual young person involved in any incident. There is a need to develop the complaints policy and procedures, ensuring that this is well understood by all stakeholders. The school should also have in place a whistleblowing policy so that any concerns about safeguarding practices can be raised.

- Data provided by the school indicates that since 2018 there has been a high number of exclusions. This is significantly greater than the national average. Senior leaders recognise that the practice of excluding young people does not support their social, emotional and physical wellbeing. Senior leaders are planning to minimise the use of exclusion in line with national guidance. In order to achieve this goal, staff need to continue to develop better approaches to support young people.
- Staff across the school do not have up-to-date knowledge about the strengths and needs of young people or how to respond appropriately. Senior leaders recognise the need to concentrate on promoting positive relationships and meeting learning needs to continue to change the culture and practice at the school. Staff need to review systematically risk assessments and crisis management plans to ensure these are up-to-date and are used consistently. Whilst restraints have reduced this session, together with partners, staff should continually reappraise their approaches to meeting the social, emotional, physical and mental health needs of young people.
- In taking forward a change of culture at the school, staff need to address young people's frequent use of discriminatory language in general conversation. Senior leaders, together with staff, young people, parents and carers need to promote equality and robustly challenge discrimination.
- Whilst the majority of young people feel safe and say they have someone to speak to in school about worries or concerns, they need significant support to talk confidently about their emotions or what they need to help them. They have minimal involvement in planning meetings about their learning, progress or wellbeing. Young people do not demonstrate ownership of their learning and have few opportunities to develop leadership skills to contribute to improving the school. They need more opportunities to be involved in decision making that impact on their learning and wellbeing.

Targeted support

(taken from QI 2.4 Personalised support)

- Approaches to the assessment and identification of learners' needs are limited. Overall, support for young people is reactive and needs to be planned in a much more effective way. Senior leaders are beginning to use a small number of standardised baseline assessment measures to identify learners' additional support needs. These assessments are not yet informing learning and teaching approaches or targeted support for young people.
- Communication with parents, partners and placing authorities is poor. Senior leaders need to improve communication links and ensure that young people, parents and partners are included in systematic reviews of learners' progress. In doing so, young people need to be involved fully and informed about decisions affecting their future.
- Senior leaders have recently introduced a system for recording incidents of challenging behaviour that take place in the school and wider community. Staff often describe young people's behaviour in a judgemental way. They need to pay greater attention to young people's ongoing social and emotional needs in order to ensure more proportionate and timely interventions.
- Not all staff have a clear understanding of young people's additional support needs. Whilst almost all young people have learning plans with individualised targets, these targets are insufficiently clear. Together with young people, parents and partners, staff need to ensure learning targets are specific and relevant and support learners' progress. All plans need to be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure these take account of young people's changing needs and circumstances.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

(taken from QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement)

- Across the school, young people's attainment and achievement requires significant improvement. Remote learning has had an impact on the school's ability to offer young people ways to achieve. A number of planned initiatives have been cancelled or postponed. The pandemic has restricted opportunities for young people to access work placements and visit local colleges.
- A few young people are beginning to build their confidence and resilience. Learners can work independently in around half of lessons, exercise responsibility and contribute effectively to most tasks and activities. They are able to try new things and work as part of a team. Young people can discuss their rights; their appreciation of Children's Rights is not yet embedded into school life. There are a few other achievements taking place across the school but these are not planned, promoted or celebrated in any meaningful way. Young people are not gaining any accredited awards associated with achievement.
- The school has no previous data about the destinations of young people when they leave the school. A minority of young people in the senior phase are beginning to use 'My world of work' and can articulate plans for their future. Staff need to build on this approach to ensure that young people benefit from planned approaches which encompass skills for learning, life and work. This session, transition plans are beginning to be discussed for leavers. These need to ensure that young people benefit from planned approaches which encompass skills for learning, life and work. Young people need detailed transition arrangements to support them to move on successfully when they leave school.

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.