



**Hillside School
Independent
24 August 2010**

Care Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspect schools in order to let parents¹ and young people know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with staff how they can improve the quality of care and education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the senior managers and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities which young people are involved in. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of care and education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of care and education at the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the service is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Hillside School is an independent, non-denominational school situated in Aberdour, Fife. The school provides residential care and education for boys aged 10-16 years with significant social, emotional and behavioural needs from local authorities across Scotland. At the time of the inspection, 33 boys received full-time care and education at the school. Three boys have coordinated support plans. Care is provided on a 52-week basis. Attendance was above the national average when the inspection was carried out in May 2010.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Very positive relationships between staff and young people.
- Young people's attainment in a broad range of National Qualifications.
- Approaches which meet the care and learning needs of young people.
- Planned throughcare and aftercare experiences for young people leaving school.
- The contribution of the community to young people's learning experiences.
- Monitoring and tracking of young people's care and education through regular reviews and the school's communications system.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

In most classes, young people are motivated and participate well in their lessons. They are involved actively in their learning and have good opportunities to work individually and with others. Young people respond well to the high quality support which care and education staff provide. They are confident using information and communications technology (ICT). Young people in the school have won national awards for their art work. On some occasions, a few young people opt out of lessons and teachers need to ensure that they engage these young people effectively in their learning. The school provides young people with good

opportunities for developing their confidence by enabling them to participate in making decisions which affect the life and work of the school.

Young people benefit from out-of-class learning experiences in the school and in the community. The high quality school facilities enable young people to participate enthusiastically in a wide range of school clubs such as, for example, those involving music, fitness and general leisure activities. They attend a range of youth organisations in the local community such as Scouts and Boys' Brigade. The school and local community work well together with the *Village in Bloom* organisation. Young people's social skills and self esteem have improved as a result of these opportunities to be responsible. Young people would benefit further through greater recognition of their achievements in out-of-class activities. Staff make very good use of photographs, videos and displays of certificates and work to celebrate and record young people's achievements. Young people work hard to gain pocket money bonuses linked to effort and behaviour. The school has a well organised ICT system for tracking young people's progress across care and education.

All young people are making progress across a range of subjects. Most are making good progress from their previous levels of attainment. Most gained Standard Grade qualifications in English, mathematics, science and social and vocational skills. They also gained Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) awards in areas such as art and design, craft subjects, geography, history, ICT, physical education and religious, moral and philosophical studies. Young people are developing independent living skills through preparing meals and being responsible for their own laundry. Care staff have developed an effective throughcare and aftercare service for young people to enable them to move on to successful destinations after school. As part of this service, care staff follow up all young people throughout their first year after they have left school and young people are invited to reflect on their experiences in school.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school is making good progress with *Curriculum for Excellence* and it has provided all staff with appropriate training. Staff provide young people with a very good range of learning experiences across care and education. These experiences are developed further by contributions from other partners. These partners include NHS Fife, the local police, voluntary organisations and Skills Development Scotland which supports young people in making career choices. However, the length of the school week is notably shorter than that of mainstream schools. The school provides young people with one and a half hours of good quality physical education which is supplemented in many cases by those involved in physical activities at the evenings and weekends. Young people receive good opportunities for work experience related to their interests. Staff work hard to promote the health and wellbeing of the young people.

Staff assess and identify young people's care and education needs when they join the school. Young people are involved in setting individualised targets in care and education. They review their progress in these areas jointly with their key care worker and key teacher on a termly basis. Teachers and care staff have a good understanding of young people's needs. The school has effective arrangements in place to support young people when they experience difficulties in learning or behaviour. Most education staff adapt their teaching well to meet the learning needs of the young people. A few young people need greater challenge in their learning. Care staff provide young people with regular support to enable them to complete their homework. Only three young people have coordinated support plans. However, given the complex nature of the young people's needs and the nature of the support they require more should have coordinated support plans. This is for education authorities to consider.

4. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?

Parents value the work the school does. They have effective communication with the school and feel that staff take good account of their views. The school has a flat which parents can stay in when visiting. Care staff support families well. Parents attend review meetings and visit the school for the Christmas concert and attend the leavers' celebration. A clinical psychology service is available to staff and young people. The school works effectively with a range of external agencies including NHS Fife, the local police, Fairbridge and a range of local businesses which provide work experience placements for the young people. Staff and young people would benefit from more links with local secondary schools. The school has appropriate procedures for dealing with complaints.

5. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?

Staff and young people are involved in making suggestions for improving the school. Young people are able to personalise their rooms and to choose furnishings for the houses. A number have been trained on recruitment and selection and are involved in interviewing and appointing new staff. They have well-considered opportunities to express their views through the school council and house meetings. The school takes full account of these views. There is a system of staff review and supervision in the school and staff have good opportunities to undertake further training. Staff are generally reflective about their practice and what they need to do to improve. A number of specific initiatives such as the homework club have been reviewed thoroughly by taking account of the views of staff and young people. However, the school needs to have clearer arrangements for monitoring the quality of learning and teaching.

6. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?

Staff encourage young people to do the best they can and young people feel generally secure, happy and valued. The school has high expectations of young people's behaviour and achievement. It has appropriate procedures in place to help young people improve their behaviour. Staff discuss young people's behaviour with them and encourage them to reflect on what they need to do improve it. Overall, the relationships between staff and young people are very good. All staff have a good understanding of the action they should take when an incident arises. The school has an effective health and wellbeing programme and encourages young people to make healthy lifestyle choices.

7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The head of care and head of education work well together and have a strong sense of what they expect the school to achieve. They are well supported by the principal and by staff across the school. There is a recently appointed External Board whose members have good experience of the school. However, the roles and responsibilities of the members are not yet fully understood by all staff in the school.

8. What happens next?

We are confident that with the support of the External Board the school will be able to implement the necessary improvement in the light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The school and the External Board will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and External Board.

- Adopt a more systematic approach to self-evaluation across the school involving care and education staff jointly.
- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence* and increase the length of the school week.
- Continue to ensure that young people's out-of-class achievements are recognised.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Hillside School.

Improvements in performance	good
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	very good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

Mike Gibson
HM Inspector
24 August 2010

Marion Neil
Care Commission Officer

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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