

Standards and Quality Report 2025-26

August 2025 – July 2026

This report shares our school's progress over the last year. All of the key information is included. We hope it helps you see the progress our young people are making and the steps we are taking together.

Key Highlights of 2025–26

- **Inspection Success** - Hillside School, achieved enhanced inspection outcomes, with positive evaluations from both the Care Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Education, confirming sustained improvements across the school and successful completion of the improvement journey.
- HMIE report states that:
- "The school has made good progress since the original inspection."
- "[Senior leaders] have put in place a robust framework to examine the quality of school performance and ensure the wellbeing of young people and staff."
- "We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve."
- Notably there were also positive gradings by the Care Inspectorate
 - - **How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing? – Grade 5 (Very Good)**
 - **Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people's needs and rights – Grade 5 (Very Good)**
- **Positive Destinations for Every Learner**

Young people successfully progressed to college, employment, apprenticeships and personalised pathways, supported through bespoke transition planning and strong partnership working. We are really pleased to see young people going into employment fields that are relevant to the bespoke delivery of education that we have been able to offer at Hillside.

- **Young People Leading in the Community**

Learners planned and delivered charity fundraising and community initiatives, developing leadership, teamwork and citizenship while making a positive contribution beyond the school. Most notably, including a skydive to raise money for Barnardos.

- **Building for the Future**

Plans for our new school will move into their next important phase in September, with the appointment of the professional team who will take the development forward. Following amendments to further enhance accessibility, this represents continued progress towards a purpose-built environment designed around the needs of our young people and the future of specialist care and education at Hillside.

Context of Hillside School

Profile of the Centre

Hillside School is set in extensive rural grounds in the coastal village of Aberdour. The service comprises residential houses and a fully resourced school for young people aged 8–19 with continuing care packages available.

We support children and young people with complex additional support needs arising from social, emotional and mental health challenges, adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and neurodiversity.

Our ethos is compassionate, nurturing, child-centred, rights-based and trauma-informed. Staff are trained and experienced in supporting learners who have faced a range of barriers to accessing learning.

We provide the services of a Wellbeing Co-ordinator, offering therapeutic work and tailored learning opportunities. Young people work closely with their key worker and key teacher around their personal plan and individualised education programme.

Our care service is based on a relational model, with staff and young people learning together in the life-space, through everyday activities, hobbies and interests.

Family and community relationships are promoted within personal planning, with support for family time both on-site (including use of a two-bedroom family resource) and in the community, supported by Hillside School's transport.

School operates from 9.15/9.30am to 3.00pm, Monday to Friday. Learners study across the main Curriculum for Excellence (Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)) areas: English and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, Sciences, Technologies (including ICT and Design & Technology), Health and Wellbeing (including PSE and PE), Religious and Moral Education, Expressive Arts (including Media), and Social Studies. Additional opportunities include NPA Horticulture, SCQF Level 4 Practical Tenancy, German, Bicycle Mechanics, Interdisciplinary Learning and therapeutic music space. A curriculum-linked activity afternoon takes place every Friday.

Learning groups are typically two to four young people. Learning is planned and delivered by subject specialist teachers (who are supported by an experienced learning support assistant team). Hillside School offers a Broad General Education and opportunities to achieve QS qualifications in National 1-5 across a range of subjects and Highers.

The National Context

Alignment with the National Improvement Framework

As an independent school, Hillside School remains fully committed to the national vision for Scottish education and actively aligns its improvement planning, self-evaluation and practice with the priorities of the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework (NIF) 2026.

Our approach reflects the NIF commitment to achieving excellence and equity for all learners, with particular emphasis on placing the rights and individual needs of every young person at the centre of education, improving health and wellbeing, raising achievement and attainment, developing skills for learning, life and work, and supporting every young person towards a sustained and positive destination.

Given the complex additional support needs of our learners, we place particular importance on ensuring that barriers to participation, engagement and achievement are identified and addressed. Through personalised curriculum pathways, GIRFEC-informed planning, strong partnership working and robust tracking of attainment, attendance, wellbeing and destinations, Hillside seeks to translate the national priorities into meaningful and measurable improvements for each young person.

NATIONAL CONTEXT – NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK 2026

Driving improvement and equity for all children and young people

The National Improvement Framework sets out our shared vision for a world-class education system that supports every child and young person to reach their full potential.

OUR PURPOSE

To improve outcomes and experiences for all children and young people, closing the poverty-related attainment gap.



OUR KEY PRIORITIES

1



Improving wellbeing

Supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people, parents/carers and staff.

2



Raising attainment and achievement

Improving learning, raising attainment and achievement, ensuring equity for all.

3



Closing the poverty-related attainment gap

Focused action to close the gap and improve outcomes for our most disadvantaged children and young people.

4



Improving employability and skills

Developing skills for learning, life and work to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

5



Improving sustainability

Empowering children and young people to build knowledge, skills and values for a sustainable future.

OUR PRINCIPLES



Child rights and inclusion

Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre.



Equity

Tackling inequalities and supporting every child and young person to thrive.



Empowerment

Using power well with children, young people, parents/carers, communities and staff.



Evidence and impact

Using evidence and data to drive improvement and measure impact.

NATIONAL DRIVERS FOR IMPROVEMENT



School and ELC improvement



Workforce empowerment



Family and community engagement



Data, evidence and intelligence



Digital enablement



Sustainable resources



Partnership working

NATIONAL OUTCOMES – BY 2030 WE WANT SCOTLAND TO BE...



A place where children and young people are healthy and happy.



A place where children and young people are safe and respected.



A place where all children and young people achieve their full potential.



A place where children and young people have skills for life, learning and work.



A place where children and young people care for and enjoy their world.

Working together, we will secure continuous improvement and better outcomes for every child and young person.

GUIDING QUESTIONS



How are we improving outcomes and experiences for children and young people?



How are we tackling inequalities?



How do we know our improvements are making a difference?

Our Vision and Aim

Hillside's vision is "Unleashing potential through care and education".

Aim: Hillside is an inclusive learning and care community with high expectations of its young people and staff. We provide a high-quality environment that is stimulating and supportive for all. Each individual is valued and supported to achieve their full potential; to be a successful, responsible, confident and effective contributor to society.

Our Shared Values (built alongside the young people)

We ensure everyone enjoys their Rights and has their privacy respected

We believe that positive relationships are important

We challenge discrimination

We are fair and reasonable

We make healthy choices

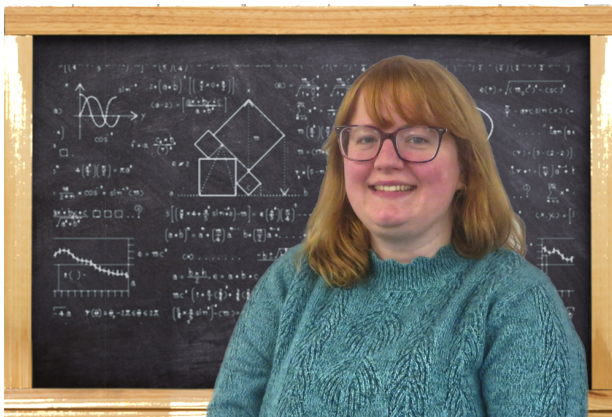
Recognised Excellence (*HMIE and Care Inspectorate outcomes and beyond*)

The positive outcomes from both HM Inspectorate of Education and the Care Inspectorate marked a welcomed conclusion to Hillside's recent improvement journey. We introduced a more dynamic Service Improvement Plan in autumn 2025, strengthened our approach to quality assurance, and developed clearer systems for measuring impact across education and care. These developments are underpinned by robust internal and external governance arrangements, supporting continued scrutiny, accountability and improvement.

This recognition reflects the commitment of staff, young people and partners, while also providing a strong foundation for the next stage of development. Further improvement priorities are already being planned with the support and challenge of our Critical Friends, who provide an important external perspective on the school's progress.

The year also included a number of wider achievements. One of our young people won the CELCIS Christmas Card Competition, the school successfully introduced the NPA in Horticulture, all staff completed Continuing Care training, and new partnership opportunities were developed, including work with Venture Trust. Together, these developments demonstrate a school that is continuing to grow, widen opportunities and build confidently on its recent success.

Meet Sarah MacDonald our new Head of Education:



**Winner of the 2025
CELCIS Christmas
card design
competition**

This image was created by
Ryan
aged 13 from Aberdour



Learning Without Limits (*curriculum, attainment, qualifications and destinations*)

At Hillside, we believe that learning should extend beyond the classroom. Throughout the year, we have continued to make the most of our school building, extensive grounds and local community to create engaging, meaningful learning experiences that reflect young people's interests and aspirations.

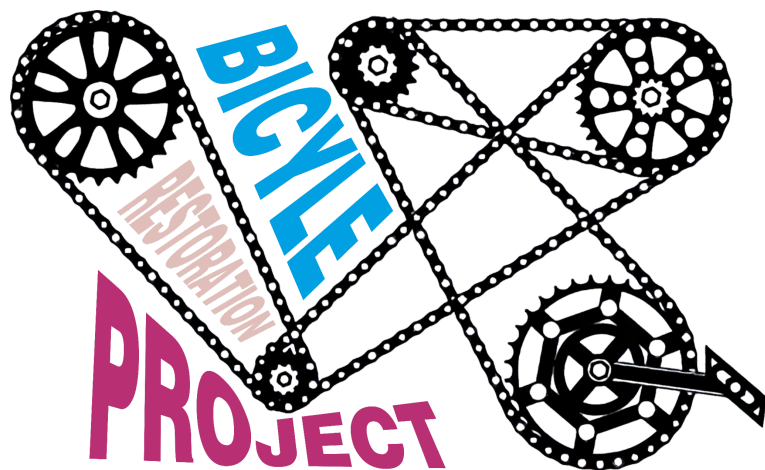
This year saw the successful introduction of our National Progression Award (NPA) in Horticulture, accredited by Qualifications Scotland. The qualification has proven particularly popular with several of our young people, providing practical, hands-on learning while developing skills for employment, wellbeing and lifelong learning. This compliments our existing capacity to deliver a full gamut of National qualifications across the curriculum and provide subject specialist teaching from GTCS registered staff across all subjects with dual Additional Support Need registration.

Alongside curriculum development, attainment has remained in line with the national picture. Every young person of qualification age achieved a minimum of four National qualifications or equivalent, demonstrating that personalised pathways and targeted support enable learners to achieve meaningful success.

Notably, one young person who remains with us, has continued to build on his achievements at Hillside by progressing to study for a Higher National Certificate (HNC) through our Hillside Hub partners at Fife College. His journey reflects our ambition not only to support young people to achieve qualifications, but to develop the confidence, resilience and aspirations needed to succeed in further education and beyond. We have also had a learner this year achieve eight National 4s and draw to a close their two year volunteering job with Barnardos as they move on. This is to say not all success in learning looks the same but what is important is our bespoke planning sets our young people up with the best opportunities.

By providing flexible pathways, accredited learning and opportunities beyond the traditional classroom, we continue to ensure that every young person can learn without limits and achieve success in ways that are meaningful to them.

We have included the statistic that our results improved by 9.8% per candidate in the previous year, showing an improvement in attainment.



Qualifications Scotland
National qualification
achievement per candidate
increased by **9.8%** compared
with the previous academic year.

NPA Horticulture
— at SCQF Level 4 —
DELIVERED FOR THE FIRST YEAR
after Qualification Scotland "sign off".

Qualification Scotland

From **NATIONAL 1** UP TO **HIGHER**

A BROAD CURRICULUM. REAL IMPACT.

SUPPORTING EVERY LEARNER TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

WE OFFER A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS

ENGLISH N1 – Higher	MATHS N1 – Higher	ART N1 – Higher	DRAMA N1 – Higher	RMPS N1 – Higher	CHEMISTRY N1 – Higher
PHYSICS N1 – Higher	PRACTICAL CRAFT N1 – Higher	WOODWORK N1 – Higher	PE N1 – Higher	AND ALL THE USUAL STUFF including Modern Languages, Biology, Geography, History and more.	

A curriculum that's flexible, relevant and tailored to our learners.

ADDITIONAL COURSES
These additional courses have been particularly impactful for our young people this year:

- SCQF LEVEL 4 TENANCY AWARD**
Building the skills and confidence for independent living.
- SCQF LEVEL 4/5 MENTAL HEALTH AWARD**
Promoting understanding, resilience and wellbeing for life.

Young People Leading Change (*voice, charity, community, leadership*)

Trust us when we say we only let our young people jump out of planes with extensive planning, robust risk assessment and ambitious charity fundraising goals in mind.



This year has been one of our strongest yet for participation, leadership and pupil voice. Young people have continued to demonstrate that they are not simply involved in school life—they help shape it.

Learners made a significant contribution to the development of our new Service Improvement Plan, ensuring that the priorities for the coming years reflect what matters most to them. They also worked alongside staff to create a pupil-led video tour of Hillside, providing prospective young people and their families with an authentic insight into life at the school from a learner's perspective.

Our young people have shown real commitment to supporting their wider community through charity fundraising and volunteering initiatives, selecting causes that are meaningful to them and taking ownership of planning and delivering fundraising activities. These opportunities have enabled learners to develop confidence, teamwork, communication and leadership skills while making a positive difference beyond the school. Most of note was the young person featured above completing a sky dive in aid of Barnardos.

Every learner now contributes to the development of their own My Learner Pathway, ensuring their interests, aspirations and future goals directly influence curriculum planning. This work has already informed subject allocation and learning pathways for the 2026–27 academic year.

Alongside this, Pupil Voice continues to play a central role in school improvement. Throughout the year, all learners have contributed ideas and feedback which have directly influenced activities, learning opportunities and wider developments across Hillside.

When young people know they are listened to, they become active partners in shaping their own futures. **At Hillside, pupil voice is not an event—it is part of who we are.**

Safe, Therapeutic Care (*wellbeing, relationships, restrictive practice, attendance*)

At Hillside, we recognise that young people learn best when they feel safe, understood and valued. Our trauma-informed, relationship-based approach continues to underpin every aspect of school life, ensuring education and care work seamlessly together to provide consistent, nurturing support.

Throughout the year, we have continued to strengthen our therapeutic practice by investing in our workforce and embedding a shared understanding of trauma, attachment and child development. All staff successfully completed Continuing Care training, providing a common language and evidence-based framework that further strengthens the support available to our young people across the 52-week service. This was in addition to the trauma-informed programme (TCI7) which we continue to use and have embedded in our practice. We were also fortunate to have Dr Sharon Brown provide bespoke training with regards to autism and pathological demand avoidance traits bespoke to our service.

Our commitment to building positive relationships is reflected in the exceptionally low use of restrictive practices. During the year there were no incidents requiring seclusion and only a small number of TCI-guided physical interventions. Where interventions were required, these were subject to reflective review to identify learning, celebrate effective practice and continually improve our responses to young people's needs. Our focus remains on prevention, co-regulation and understanding the reasons behind behaviour, rather than responding only to the behaviour itself. This was reflected in the Care Inspectorate Report that we received in June grading our services rights and wellbeing practice at a 5.

Personal planning continues to place young people at the centre of decision-making. Each learner's plan reflects their individual strengths, aspirations and interests, recognising that meaningful outcomes are often achieved through the small experiences that matter most to them. Whether preparing for independence, developing emotional regulation or simply achieving a personal goal, our planning is designed around the individual rather than expecting the individual to fit the service.

Strong partnership working remains central to this approach. We continue to work closely with families, local authorities, health professionals and specialist partners to ensure young people receive coordinated support that promotes wellbeing, educational engagement and positive long-term outcomes.

Above all, our aim is to create an environment where young people experience safety through trusting relationships, predictable routines and high aspirations. We believe that when young people feel secure and understood, they are better able to engage in learning, build resilience and realise their potential.

Building the Future (*new school, workforce development, partnerships and sustainability*)

This year has marked a significant milestone in Hillside's future development with the completion of planning and logistical arrangements for our new purpose-built school. Designed around the needs of the young people we support, the new campus will provide fully accessible education and residential environments—something that is simply not possible within our current listed building. The new facilities will create flexible learning spaces, enhance opportunities for independence and therapeutic support, and enable us to continue delivering specialist education and care in an environment designed for the future. As we look ahead, our strategic development will increasingly reflect the distinct strengths of both education and care. Within education, our focus will be on further strengthening curriculum innovation, governance and learner attainment. Within care, our improvement journey will be guided by the Care Inspectorate's revised Quality Framework, with particular emphasis on **Key Question 6**, which challenges services to evaluate their capacity to *Keep the Promise* and ensure children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential, while **Key Question 7** provides the framework through which these outcomes are independently evaluated during inspection.

Looking beyond our own service, we remain committed to strengthening the partnerships that enrich the experiences of our young people. Our Hillside Hub continues to bring together organisations that provide specialist expertise, opportunities and community connections, and this year we were delighted to welcome Venture Trust as a new partner, expanding opportunities for outdoor learning, personal development and positive destinations. (*We also really need to update the Hub infographic!*) By continuing to invest in our people, our partnerships and our environment, we are ensuring that Hillside is not only meeting the needs of today's young people but is well placed to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the future.



Service Priorities

Review of the 2024–26 Service Improvement Plan

A key feature of this academic year has been the successful completion of the priorities identified within the 2024–26 Service Improvement Planning - across both documents. The improvements delivered across governance, education and care have been recognised through positive feedback from both HM Inspectorate of Education and the Care Inspectorate and, most importantly, through improved outcomes for young people. As we conclude this improvement cycle, our focus now shifts from embedding systems to building upon them through our next phase of strategic development.

Priority Area	2025–26 Goal	Outcome
Governance	Formalise governance framework and strengthen strategic oversight.	Achieved. Governance Framework implemented, Critical Friends model embedded and governance arrangements recognised during inspection as contributing to effective quality assurance and continuous improvement.
Performance Management	Embed consistent supervision, appraisal and induction.	Achieved. Supervision and appraisal processes are now embedded across the service, supporting professional development and greater consistency in practice.
Complaints Management	Develop and implement a formal complaints framework.	Achieved. Complaints processes have been formalised, staff trained and governance oversight strengthened through regular reporting and evaluation.

Matching and Admissions	Strengthen matching processes and placement stability.	Achieved. Robust matching and review processes are now embedded, contributing to positive placement experiences and improved outcomes for young people.
Education and Attainment	Improve curriculum, attainment and learner pathways.	Achieved. Positive learner outcomes, successful qualification attainment and expanded curriculum opportunities, including NPA Horticulture, demonstrate continued improvement.
Wellbeing and Therapeutic Care	Strengthen personal planning and therapeutic approaches.	Achieved. Personal planning has become increasingly individualised, restrictive practice remains exceptionally low and Continuing Care principles are embedded across the service.

Strategic Priorities 2027–2029

As Hillside enters the next stage of its development, our priorities move from establishing robust systems to driving excellence and innovation. These priorities have been developed collaboratively with our leadership team and Critical Friends and reflect both national priorities and the aspirations of our young people.

Strategic Theme	2027–2029 Priority	What Success Will Look Like
Education Excellence	Continue to strengthen curriculum design, attainment and learner pathways.	Improved attainment, wider curriculum pathways, increased accreditation and consistently positive destinations for young people.

Governance and Leadership	Further develop evaluative leadership and quality assurance.	Governance recognised as sector-leading, with evidence-based decision making informing continuous improvement.
The Promise	Embed the aspirations of <i>The Promise</i> , particularly ensuring children experience loving, nurturing relationships and are supported into adulthood.	Young people's experiences demonstrate relational practice, stability, participation and successful transitions to adulthood.
Learning Environment	Prepare for transition into the new purpose-built school.	Fully accessible learning and residential environments that enhance independence, wellbeing and educational outcomes.
Workforce Development	Develop leadership capacity and specialist expertise across education and care.	Highly skilled workforce with clear career pathways, coaching culture and sector-leading professional learning.
Partnerships	Expand the Hillside Hub and strengthen multi-agency collaboration.	Increased opportunities for learners through employers, colleges, therapeutic partners and community organisations, including further development of Venture Trust and other strategic partnerships.
Sustainability and Innovation	Ensure Hillside remains responsive to emerging needs and best practice.	Innovative curriculum, sustainable service delivery and continuous improvement informed by research,

inspection evidence and stakeholder voice.

This report reflects a year of progress, achievement and positive change at Hillside. Most importantly, it demonstrates the difference that high-quality, individualised care and education can make to the lives and futures of our young people.

We are proud of what has been achieved, while recognising that improvement is never finished. As we look ahead, we will continue to listen to our young people, learn from evidence and challenge ourselves.

Our focus remains simple: **to unleash the potential of every young person through care and education.**

Sarah MacDonald

Head of Education

Anne Harvey

Director

02.09.26