

8 October 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In January 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter on The Nicolson Institute. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher 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.

As a matter of urgency, senior leaders should work with staff, and the local authority to improve the quality of education for young people in the enhanced provision. Staff should focus on ensuring that all young people access relevant and well-planned educational experiences that engage them in their learning.

A principal teacher with responsibility for the enhanced provision was appointed in June 2024. Together with senior leaders, she is beginning to establish her role within the school. Staff are positive that this appointment will provide leadership and support ongoing improvement. Across the enhanced provision, there remains a number of areas that require further improvement such as deployment of staff, staff training, staff relationships and communication. Ongoing issues with staff absences are impacting on continuity of learning and support for young people. The three classes within the enhanced provision now each have a designated class teacher. This improved approach provides young people with a key contact who has an overview of their learning and progress. Staff and senior leaders should continue to develop the role of designated class teachers to ensure they have an increased role in planning, assessing and monitoring the progress young people are making.

Almost all young people engage appropriately in lessons and respond well to learning within the enhanced provision and mainstream classes. Staff use a range of communication approaches effectively to support young people to make choices and access their learning. Almost all staff have positive relationships with young people and understand their learning, medical and care needs. Staff have developed individual timetables for young people that reflect their specific learning and support needs. Timetables include learning in the enhanced provision and in mainstream classes with peers.

For a few young people at the senior stages, there is an improved focus on ensuring they attain national qualifications and develop skills for life beyond school. These young people have opportunities to participate in activities such as volunteering, cooking and work skills. Staff need to ensure that all young people at the senior stages have appropriate opportunities to gain skills and qualifications. Staff understand the importance of celebrating young people's achievements and ensuring they are included in the life and work of the school. Young people now participate in awards ceremonies with mainstream peers and in whole school events such as the school show. As planned, senior leaders and staff should continue to ensure that young people in the enhanced provision are included and involved as much as possible in the wider life of the school.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 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.

Monica Reilly
HM Inspector