

St Dominic's School

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Inspector | John Chivers |
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| Date of last inspection | 15 June 2006 |

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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| Outstanding: | this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality |
| Good: | this aspect of the provision is strong |
| Satisfactory: | this aspect of the provision is sound |
| Inadequate: | this aspect of the provision is not good enough |

Service information

Brief description of the service

St Dominic's was established in 1929 and was founded by the 'Order of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, who are currently trustees and governors. The Christian ethos has been maintained to the present day. The school accepts pupils from all denominations and backgrounds.

St Dominic's is a non-maintained weekly boarding and day school for boys and girls (aged eight -16 years) of average intelligence but with special needs. These may include impaired physical health, learning difficulties, speech and language and communication difficulties. Pupils may also be emotionally vulnerable or have motor planning, co-ordination and perceptual difficulties.

The boarding pupils are accommodated in five separate boarding houses separated by gender and age range. The range of therapeutic support available to pupils enables them to access a curriculum at an appropriate level and maximise each pupil's potential for achievement.

The school has recently undergone major changes regarding its care, staffing structure and boarding arrangements and further changes and developments regarding its policies and procedures are planned.

Summary

The findings at this inspection are positive and, despite the difficulties experienced by the school's recent reorganisation, the pastoral section continues to afford a good standard of care to the children.

There is a clear regard for health and medical matters concerning the children and staff ensure these areas are monitored and reviewed as appropriate. Staff are adequately trained in the administration of medication.

Whilst a shortfall is identified in the school's vetting procedures, the pastoral section takes the safeguarding and wellbeing of children seriously and provides a well ordered, homely and supportive environment where children respond favourably to staff inputs, routines and standards of discipline. Relationships between staff and children are positive with staff being proactive at interacting, engaging and communicating with children.

Cleanliness and hygiene are of a good standard in the boarding houses and no safety hazards are evident.

The pastoral section has a range of forums where children can express their views, opinions and make choices regarding aspects of their daily living.

There is a link worker system in place and children confirm in discussion their appreciation of staff support and inputs. Staff also support children in their education and learning activities. The pastoral section is adequately staffed and has recently appointed staff in preparation for the abolition of the 'split shift' duty system. The staff team have the necessary skills, experience and competences to meet the needs of the children, however care plans do not contain all details required by Standard 17.5 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools.

Staff training occurs and new individual staff supervision arrangements are currently being developed; however at this stage there are no supervision arrangements in place for the head of care and deputy head of care. The conduct of the pastoral service is monitored by the head of care and deputy head of care who sign and countersign records and have a regular presence in the boarding houses.

All of the school's policies and procedures are in the process of being reviewed and updated and, as this action is in progress, actions and recommendations regarding any expansion and updating to the procedures will not be made.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Most of the requirements set at the last inspection have been addressed and a number are currently in progress.

The school's recent reorganisation was not wholly successful and this set back has arrested the implementation and development of certain areas. However, the pastoral section of the school now has a new management structure and additional staff who intend to promote and develop all aspects of the service further.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school has good regard for health and medical matters concerning the children and monitors and reviews these areas appropriately. Medication is securely held and staff receive training in the administration of medication.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding children's health and medical arrangements. The policy was reviewed and updated in 2006/7. Written guidance from the local pharmacy is also held. Children's individual health and medical care is overseen by the school nurse, who holds State Registered Nurse and Registered General Nurse status. The nurse has a current 'pin' registration which is due for renewal in December 2007.

Children's health and medical histories are available in the sample of children's files inspected. The records were comprehensive and include details such as: emotional and psychological development, nutrition, skin, posture and height and weight and other medical information. The health care files also held records of surgery visits, treatment plans and risk assessments, accident records, growth and weight charts (with evidence of regular monitoring), annual reviews, psychologists reports and visits, audiologist reports and hospital correspondence. The children's health care files are organised and maintained to a very good standard and evidence monitoring and review. Children are registered with a local general practice.

Parental consent forms regarding medical treatment are available in the sample of children's files inspected. The children's medication administered records evidence clear and consistent recording.

The school has a health and sex education policy and programme, which includes attitudes of various religions and faiths and also has an emphasis on the moral aspects of life and sexual activity.

Medication is securely held in a locked cabinet and separate secure storage arrangements are held for controlled medication. The school has a controlled drug book, which evidences two staff signatures when such medication is dispensed. A stock balance of medication is held and a record of old or discarded medication being disposed via the pharmacy is in evidence.

Most of the care staff received medication administration training in June 2007. The training is organised and undertaken by the local pharmacy. The nurse said that the school is meeting the health and medical needs of the current group of children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The pastoral section and health and safety section of the school demonstrate a clear regard for the safety and wellbeing of children. Relationships between staff and children are positive and the behaviour management of children is sound; however there is a shortfall in the school's recruitment and vetting procedures which has the potential to compromise the good work and achievements attained in this section.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding privacy and confidentiality. Pay phones are available for children's use without reference to staff, though most children have cell phones which they can use at certain times. Toilet and bathing facilities afford sufficient privacy. Children have adequate degrees of autonomy and privacy consistent with their individual level of ability and agreed risk assessments. The supervision of children is close without being intrusive and children confirm their satisfaction of these arrangements in discussion.

The school has a written complaints procedure and a simplified version and booklet is available for the children. The children's complaint book showed that no complaints have been made by children since December 2005. The parents' complaints book evidenced that seven complaints have been received since the last inspection. However, some of these were regarding curriculum and education matters and were not connected to the pastoral care of children. The outcome of the complaints was not always clear, but most were satisfactory. Ofsted have received several complaints from a parent which have been investigated subject to standard procedures. Ofsted are satisfied with the school's response and action taken regarding the complaints.

The school's child protection policy and procedure are available. The procedure was revised and updated in January 2006. The head of care stated that there were no current child protection issues at the school and that matters referred to the Surrey County Council Child Protection and Safeguarding team in the past have been investigated and are now closed. The school's child protection file also evidences this information. The school has four child protection liaison officers who are indenting to attend updated Surrey Council Multi-Agency Safeguarding training in the near future. All boarding staff received child protection training provided by an external consultant in July 2007. Training in child protection is also provided as part of induction training for new staff.

Children said in discussion that they felt safe in the school and raised no concerns about staff or the way they are treated at the school.

The school has an anti-bullying policy and procedure. Several parents mentioned bullying among some children as becoming a problem in the school. A minority of children in discussion said that bullying does sometimes occur. However, most children were clear that most issues are minor and that this was mostly mutual name calling and certain individuals 'winding' each other up. Children are clear that staff are alert to such issues and are prompt to challenge any incidents. During day time and evening observations in the dining room, activities and boarding houses no incidents of bullying or intimidating behaviour among children are evident. Children interacted well with each other, were friendly and generally treated each other with respect.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding behaviour management. Children respond favourably to the school's routine and discipline. Relationships between staff and children are positive with staff being pro-active at engaging, communicating and interacting with children. Staff led or joined in activities with children and children responded happily to their involvement. Children in discussion said that sanctions are fairly administered and that only permitted sanctions are used. Children also said that physical intervention and restraint is very rarely used. There is evidence of mutual trust and respect in interaction between staff and children and no children proved to be a problem in terms of behaviour management and control at the time of the inspection. Staff are trained in non violent crises intervention and attended such training in 2006/7. New staff attend training in this area upon or soon after appointment. The boarding house's sanction books are available, which show clear and detailed accounts of behaviours displayed, sanctions administered and comments from the children following implementation of sanctions. Sanctions records are signed by staff and countersigned by senior staff. The school's restraint records are available and confirm that such methods of intervention are rarely used.

The school has a health and safety policy and procedure and the Health and Safety 'Law' poster is prominently displayed. It is evidenced that the school reviews its health and safety arrangements every six months and all areas are subject to on-going health and safety audits. The school has a current fire risk assessment and a fire policy is in place. Fire evacuation drills occur each half term and weekly fire alarm tests take place and are recorded. There is evidence of fire equipment and fire door guard checks. There are current utility safety test certificates available for gas, mains electricity, portable electrical appliances, legionella, pest control, asbestos and a range of hazardous substances risk assessments. In addition, the school has a wide range of risk assessments covering the premises, grounds, activity areas and equipment. Further risk assessments regarding school and recreational activities are held. No safety hazards are evident in the areas of the school accessed at this inspection.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding children who are absent without authority.

The head of care said that no children have absconded from the school. Children in discussion said no one 'runs away'.

The school has a staff recruitment policy. The sample of six of the most recently appointed staff files inspected shows hard copy evidence shortfalls in the school's vetting procedures in that three of the files held no written references, though verbal references had been obtained, one file has only one written reference and two files held no Criminal Record Bureau checks; however these had been applied for. The deputy head teacher and head of care said in discussion that the staff without returned Criminal Record Bureau checks and receipt of written references

would not have any unsupervised access to children until all checks have been returned. The files are satisfactorily organised and hold other relevant information.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Care staff support children in education and learning activities and link workers engage children in an enthusiastic, committed and professional manner, providing support, advice and guidance as appropriate.

Education is provided on site and is the subject of inspection by Ofsted simultaneous to this social care inspection. A separate inspection report is available regarding the educational provision and standard within the school.

The sample of children's individual files inspected hold Statements of Special Education Needs and Personal Education Plans. The head of care said that some of the personal education plans are currently being reviewed and updated and will be placed on children's files when completed.

Staff are observed to assist children in education and learning activities and in one of the boarding houses visited engage them in homework. Children respond attentively and cooperate with staff involvement in this area. Staff are committed, enthusiastic and patient in their dealings with the children's education and learning.

Care staff also have an involvement in school assemblies. The assembly attended during the inspection evidenced a talk given by senior pupils on the subject of 'DNA'. All children attending the assembly are attentive and well behaved.

All children are allocated link workers, who in addition to recording daily observations and events regarding children, also compile half term reports. Link workers are responsible for liaising with children's social workers, teachers, the school nurse and significant others. The majority of questionnaires received from parents were complimentary regarding the standard of communication and liaison with them, however a minority thought communication could be improved, particularly among some teaching staff. Some care staff also cite varying degrees of poor communication regarding some of the teaching staff. Link workers prepare target charts regarding their allocated children and also record any contact they have with them regarding meetings and individual involvement. Children said in discussion that their link workers provide them with close support and are helpful and friendly. Children also said they were appreciative of their link workers input. Staff are observed to work in a diligent and committed manner and support children in a professional and sensitive way. The school has a good range of therapists who provide specialist input and external professionals are used as appropriate.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The pastoral section of the school has regard for seeking children's views and opinions and consults children on a regular basis. Placement plans and care plans are in place and these are due to be expanded to cover more detail in the near future.

Children have an opportunity to make their views and opinions known via a range of forums including direct contact with staff or their link workers. Boarding house meetings also occur

and 'circle' time takes place once a week where children can make a contribution to the running of the boarding houses. The senior's boarding house has just introduced a 'moaning' morning where children can air any issues or discord they may have.

Written minutes of some meetings are available. The head of care said that the meetings will be developed further and minutes will be taken at all sessions. Children said in discussion that their views and opinions are sought and that they are consulted regarding aspects of their daily living and future care plans.

Placement plans and care plans are held and the head of care said the plans are due to be expanded to cover all areas required by Standard 17.5 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools, though some of these details are also contained in individual children's statements of special educational needs.

Children's assessments and review notes are also held.

Children's contact with parents and significant others is recorded and children confirm these arrangements in discussion.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

This section does not form part of the National Minimum 'Key' Standards for Residential Special Schools and was therefore not inspected on this occasion. However certain areas of the boarding houses were accessed for health and safety purposes. Cleanliness and hygiene are of a good standard in the areas accessed and no safety hazards are evident.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The pastoral section of the school is managed in a sound and professional manner and affords a good standard of care to the children. The boarding houses have adequate staff who have the necessary skills, experience and competence to meet the needs of the children and enable the service to achieve its aims and objectives. Whilst there is a current shortfall regarding the supervision arrangements for the head of care and deputy head of care, supervision for the boarding house staff is being developed and staff training is ongoing.

The school's Statement of Purpose is available and is subject to periodic review and updating. The school currently has 21 staff inclusive of the head of care and deputy head of care, who also have an active role in the boarding houses in addition to their managerial responsibilities. These arrangements ensure that the boarding management are aware at 'grass roots' level as to how the boarding houses are functioning. The staff team have a balance in terms of gender. Currently none of the staff team are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Four new staff have recently been appointed in preparation for the abolition of the 'split' shift working system.

The school is adequately staffed during the day and night time. Night time supervision arrangements include both sleeping in staff and waking night staff.

The head of care and deputy head of care have recently been appointed and are due to commence the National Vocational Training 'NVQ' level 4 course and the Registered Managers Award in April 2008. The head of care and deputy head of care both have substantial experience in working with children with learning disabilities as do the majority of the staff team. A total of eight care staff hold the NVQ level 3 qualification and four staff are currently undertaking the course. The remainder will commence NVQ level 3 training at some stage in the future. The school has an active training programme and staff in discussion confirm their attendance on courses such as: vulnerable children, child protection, fire awareness, restraint, NVQ level 3, medication, creative arts, food hygiene and first aid. Other staff have undertaken NVQ assessor and Duke of Edinburgh assessor training. Some staff said the school is supportive at enabling training for staff; however others thought this area could be improved. The head of care said the school will be looking to provide external training opportunities for staff rather than the current practice of providing most training 'in house'.

The head of care and deputy head of care are currently developing a new staff supervision system. Supervision records evidence that previously supervision was infrequent and staff also confirm this in discussion. The head of care said that currently she and the deputy head of care do not receive any formal supervision, this being due to their previous line manager being absent for some time prior to leaving the service. Staff personal development plans are to be implemented in the near future. Despite the above shortfall the care staff team are well managed by the head of care and deputy head of care and staff work in an enthusiastic and committed manner and provide a good standard of pastoral care to the children. Boarding house senior staff meetings are held weekly as are full staff team meetings. Minutes of staff team meetings are available. Good communication exists within the care staff team. The staff handover session attended was well facilitated by the head of care and deputy head of care, with staff being attentive to information and matters discussed. Staff self appraisals have recently been implemented.

There is evidence of the head of care and deputy head of care monitoring the pastoral care by signing and countersigning records and by their frequent presence in the boarding houses. The pastoral section has a current development plan, which is intended to address the current shortfalls in the service provided.

The school has a current insurance liability certificate.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

| Standard | Action | Due date |
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that staff do not commence duties until all recruitment and vetting checks have been completed (Standard 27.7)
- ensure that placement plans and care plans hold all details consistent with Standard 17.5 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (Standard 17)
- ensure that suitable supervision arrangements are implemented regarding the head of care and deputy head of care. (Standard 30)
- ensure that a check list is developed regarding the areas to be monitored consistent with Standard 32.2 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools. (Standard 32)