

St Dominic's School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

This residential special school was established in 1929. Pupils from all denominations and backgrounds are accepted. The school is a non-maintained weekly boarding and day school for boys and girls aged eight - nineteen years with special needs. These may include a range of ability levels and complex special needs . Pupils may also be emotionally vulnerable or have co-ordination and perceptual difficulties. 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 individual potential for achievement. The last inspection of the school was on March 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is good. The school provides a good boarding experience for residential pupils who thrive on the care and support they receive.
- Pupils' progress is excellent. Outstanding preparation is given to the pupils as part of their transition to further education or work experience. Residential pupils benefit from excellent relationships with members of staff who provide clear boundaries and a safe and stimulating environment.
- There are good procedures for safeguarding residential pupils which are robust, effective and ensure that their safety is promoted to a good level.
- Pupils' emotional well-being is promoted to an excellent standard. The school ensures that pupils receive swift access to psychological and psychiatric services and have access to therapies which further support their well-being.
- Healthcare provision at the school is excellent. Medication and medical assistance is excellent ensuring the pupils receive full support with health care issues. The meals provided are of a very good quality, feedback from pupils is very positive and mealtimes are sociable and well-organised events.
- Residential pupils engage in a good range of activities that they enjoy and which enhance their personal and social development and enrich their life experiences.
- The residential provision is robustly monitored. Residential staff provide stable and consistent care. Members of staff are well supported; they are trained and experienced to provide a good standard of care.
- The staff work hard to ensure that equality and diversity is addressed within daily

life both on an individual and community level within the school.

- The school has clear action plans in place to address any shortfalls identified through monitoring systems. Recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed thoroughly. These related to ensuring all staff are trained to level 3 National Vocational Qualification standard. Staff are now undertaking Diploma level 3. Contingency arrangements are now in place to continue to drive the strategy for the safeguarding of boarders in the event of a protracted absence by the head of care. Written individual plans and pupils' reviews of now include how their cultural and racial needs are to be met; the effectiveness of work done to achieve the targets set is monitored. The school was asked to review the provision of food to ensure that it reflects children's needs and wishes, that they are consulted over menu planning and have the opportunity to learn to prepare their own meals. The school has now introduced food committee meetings which include the chef. Meals cooked in the houses in the evenings give all pupils an opportunity to cook. Sixth form pupils now have independence plans which include life skills.
- The school meets all the national minimum standards. Four areas to improve are identified. These are to review the management behaviour policy and practice, to make sure restraint forms contain full information, to ensure that all boarding accommodation is equal in quality across all the houses and to ensure that all staff receive consistent supervision sessions.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils' boarding experience enables them to develop their social, life and independence skills to a significant standard. Residential pupils are encouraged and enabled, with excellent support, to develop constructive, tolerant relationships with their peers as well as the adults caring for them.

Residential pupils benefit from a supportive and nurturing environment where they develop their skills, independence and confidence. Their behaviour is of a very good standard and benefits from an environment with clear boundaries and where tolerance and respect is promoted and valued. Residential pupils give very positive feedback about their experience.

Residential pupils' opinions are valued. They have numerous members of staff and adults to whom they can voice their thoughts and feelings. Opportunities to do this are possible in house meetings, class meetings, council and food committee meetings, and during visits from the independent visitor. Residential pupils are able to speak out as individuals or as groups and feel they have a voice in the school.

Residential pupils' health is promoted to an excellent standard. They have access to doctors, dentists and opticians and the school will ensure that their needs are met in

these areas. Their emotional health is promoted to a particularly high standard; they have access to numerous therapists and CAHMS as well as psychologists or psychiatrists if needed. The school has also become 'autistic accredited' due to their understanding and skills in caring for pupils on the autistic spectrum.

Residential pupils benefit from particularly well-planned and structured transition plans. Each pupil has a plan aimed at developing their life skills at a pace and level appropriate to their understanding and ability. Support for the pupils during this time is excellent and ensures that they receive opportunities to become independent and confident members of society.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is good. Pastoral support offered to residential pupils is supportive and nurturing. Each boarder receives a thorough induction in order to prepare for life at the school. There are good links between educational staff and residential care staff. Good communication is achieved and it is clear that all members of staff are kept up-to-date with relevant information about each pupil.

Care plans are of a good standard. Pupil's needs are understood. Individual plans outline the strengths, vulnerabilities and strategies for support which is inclusive of cultural and spiritual needs. Close staff support is available and pupils have numerous individuals to who they can go to for help. Residential pupils are offered stimulating and enriching activities both on and off site. Trips to activity centres are routinely available, as are opportunities to go walking, swimming and horse riding. Great care is taken to ensure that the residential pupils have opportunities to experience positive and challenging activities which encourage their confidence and self-esteem.

The emotional health and well-being of the residential pupils is promoted to an excellent standard. There is a clear policy and procedure in place for the staff to follow with regards to the administration and storage of medication. The nurse ensures clear monitoring of all systems is undertaken so any problem or mistake can be dealt with.

Residential pupils are offered a healthy menu which meets their nutritional needs. Individual dietary needs in relation to health or cultural needs are met. The sixth form students also have opportunities to help in the preparation of meals in their boarding houses. Residential pupils have ready access to fruit and snacks. Meals are well ordered social occasions which are seen as an opportunity to develop social skills.

The quality of residential provision is satisfactory. There has been some refurbishment to a good quality however this is not consistent throughout the boarding houses. Residential pupils are able to personalise their own living areas with posters and pictures. There are opportunities for pupils to use facilities to keep their

possessions safe. All residential pupils have ready access to a telephone and are able to contact their home; this is supported by staff that ensures some contact takes place.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes good provision to safeguard residential pupils' safety. It operates a thorough and robust recruitment procedure which ensures that only adults, who have been checked as being appropriate to work with children, are employed.

The school has very clear policies and procedures in place with regards to child protection. All members of staff know what to do and who to speak to if they have concerns about a pupil's safety. Concerns are promptly passed on to the relevant agencies and records are clear and detailed on how each issue has been pursued and resolved.

The school operates a rigorous approach to bullying. Residential pupils are aware that bullying is not acceptable. Any incidents of bullying are closely monitored and action plans to prevent it are put in place. Residential pupils are aware of any issues with regards to cyber bullying. Residential pupils say they feel safe.

Positive behaviour is encouraged and celebrated. Residential pupils are seen to behave well and with tolerance of each other. There are very clear boundaries in place and residential pupils know what the behavioural expectations and rules are. Incidents of restraint are recorded and the majority of reports are clear and comprehensive although some reports would benefit from more detail. Reports are rigorously monitored by senior members of staff. In general, behaviour management strategies are appropriate including the use of physical intervention. However, on rare occasions pupils movements have been restricted to ensure their well-being. Sanctions are imposed and are relevant to the misdemeanour. These are also checked by senior members of staff.

No residential pupils have gone missing from the school since the last inspection. There is a clear protocol in place for the staff to follow if this occurs. On occasion a pupil may absent them self from lessons and boarding houses and leave the premises but members of staff know where they are and if necessary will follow them to ensure their safety.

The safety of the school and residential provision is scrutinised closely and very effectively. Fire precautions and fire equipment are checked on a regular basis. Fire drills are held regularly and all residential pupils receive an induction which includes fire safety and evacuation. Detailed risk assessments are regularly reviewed, updated and endorsed after auditing by senior members of staff. These risk assessments include environmental checks as well as on site and off site activities. Individual risk assessments address residential pupils' behavioural issues. These include strategies to manage risk and to support the residential pupils. The security of the site and

premises is good with provisions such as safety lighting and an alarm system.

Attention to detail underpinned by rigorous scrutiny ensures that the every effort is made to promote residential pupils' safety to a good standard.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The management and leadership of the school are good. The school's ethos and aspirations are contained in the prospectus and on the website. Each house has an induction handbook. The residential provision is effectively managed and ensures consistent care across the different residential areas. Residential pupils benefit from houses with clear routines and boundaries and are nurtured to develop tolerance and understanding of each other's behaviour. Diverse needs are catered for sensitively and this results in fair and equal treatment for all residential pupils.

The boarding areas are well run and daily routines flow smoothly. Residential pupils benefit from a consistent and committed staff team who have good opportunities for professional development and who are supported. Supervision and appraisals are undertaken. However, some supervision sessions have been missed. An induction program ensures new members of staff are very well prepared to work at the school. This means that staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Staff feel confident to undertake their roles and receive training which enables them to keep up-to-date with current practice.

Staffing levels ensure the individual needs of residential pupils are able to be met effectively and policies and procedures in place support and promote excellent practice across the school. Parents report good communication with the school. A full complaints system is in place if there should be a need for parents to complain. The school receives positive feedback and one parent said: 'The school has greatly benefited my son he wouldn't have achieved so well and become the responsible adult without all the support he has received from the staff.'

Key records are monitored on a regular basis by the head of care. The head teacher reports on the running of the school and boarding provision on an annual basis. The head of care with the assistance of the feed back from young people and staff designs a development plan for residential boarding over a two yearly basis.

The school has a named independent visitor whose details are kept by the pupils' telephones. One of the trustees undertakes monitoring visits and produces a report about their findings which contributes to the yearly development plan.

All information is appropriately and safely stored to ensure that confidentiality of records is maintained. Records kept are thorough and give a good account of each residential pupil's time, experience and progress at the school.

The school has clear action plans in place to address any shortfalls identified.

Recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed thoroughly. The school now ensures that staff are able to gain qualifications to Diploma course level three. The deputy head of care now ensures that safeguarding procedures are promoted and used alongside any other procedures in the absence of the head of care.

Individual plans and reviews of children now include a section on how cultural and racial needs are to be met and the effectiveness of work done to achieve set targets. The last recommendation related to reviewing the provision of food and how pupils' opinions and choices are taken into consideration. Pupils are now on a food committee and have meetings with staff and the chef. Each young person is offered the chance of cooking and helping preparing meals in the houses and the sixth form; each have an independent skills plan which includes budgeting and producing meals for themselves.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- Ensure boarding accommodation is of equal quality and of the same standard.
- Make sure all staff are aware of the behaviour management policy.
- Ensure the consistency of all written restraint forms to include all the required information.
- Make sure all staff supervision is re-scheduled if missed.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



06/03/2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Dominic's School

As you will know Ofsted recently inspected the boarding houses at your school. The inspector visited the houses, spoke to many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records. Many of you sent in questionnaires. I also received questionnaires from some parents and most of the members of staff.

Your school provides a very caring and supportive place for you to live. It is good that you all have different members of staff who you can talk with. It was very good to see you all relaxing with members of staff and that you can laugh together.

The inspector was very impressed with the activities that you are offered, especially ones where you can try new and exciting experiences such as horse riding, swimming, new exercise classes and drama. We saw you all behaving very well and thought that you were very tolerant of each other. We are pleased that you can all telephone your home and speak to loved ones.

Your health is looked after at the school. Staff help you to learn how to eat healthily and take exercise. They also help you to remain calm and not become upset by issues that may happen. The staff work with you to help you to become independent and move on to college courses.

The boarding houses are comfortable but the inspector has asked the school to decorate and improve some of the houses so that every house is of the same quality.

The inspector has also asked the school to review the practices around working with you when you become distressed, upset and sometimes angry. The inspector found that the staff do keep you safe and secure whilst you spend time at the school

Overall, I was very impressed with your school and think that you all do very well there.

The inspector really enjoyed meeting you all and wishes you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Gaynor Moorey