

# St Dominic's School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Gaynor Moorey

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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.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

The school is a non-maintained weekly boarding and day school for boys and girls aged between 8 and 19 years with special needs. Pupils can also be emotionally vulnerable or have coordination and perceptual difficulties. There are currently 26 residential pupils. The majority of the residential accommodation is provided within the main school building with 6th formers living in a separate house in the school grounds. The residential provision was last inspected in March 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the school's residential provision is outstanding. Residential pupils and students enjoy the experience of boarding and parents report positively on how the school cares for their children. There is a very stable and experienced staff team who provide a consistently high quality of care. Pupils and students thrive on the very positive and constructive relationships with staff. Equality and diversity is very well promoted throughout the school's residential provision.
- There is excellent overall provision for safeguarding the welfare of residential pupils and students. Pupils feel safe within the residential provision and there are clear and effective arrangements for ensuring their safety. Safeguarding in the school has progressed and developed since the last inspection with a new protocol and policy, with all staff having received updated training. Staff are acutely aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and know each pupil's and students vulnerabilities.
- Boarding is organised in an extremely effective manner and for the benefit of pupils and students. The school strives to maintain and improve on already high standards of care, with the needs of pupils and students at the heart of planning and implementation. A number of significant improvements have been made since the last inspection. These include upgrades to the living environment, a review of the behaviour management system and a professionalised system of supervision, appraisal and training for staff.
- Pupils and students spoke most positively about life at the school and feel it is like being in a family. Parents and carers speak positively about the improved outcomes achieved by pupils and students since they had been at the school.

The atmosphere is calm and relaxed and pupils and students benefit greatly from the positive and inclusive environment.

- Residential pupils and students engage in an extensive range of activities that they enjoy and which enhance their personal and social development and enrich their life experiences. There are excellent links with the local and wider community which benefit pupils and students.
- Healthcare provision at the school is excellent. Medication and medical assistance is excellent ensuring the pupils and students receive full support with health care issues. Pupil's well-being is promoted to an excellent standard. The school ensures that they receive access to health services and have access to therapies which further support their well-being. The meals provided are of a very good quality and feedback from pupils and students is very positive. Mealtimes are sociable and well-organised events.
- The residential accommodation is of a high standard. All living areas are well maintained and comfortable. Provision to support pupils in developing their independence is detailed and of an excellent quality.
- The school has successfully addressed the recommendations from the previous report. The residential provision has significant strengths and no weaknesses which have a direct impact on the outcomes for residential pupils and students.
- The national minimum standards are met and the school has continued to progress, putting the development of the pupils and students first to enable them to move on successfully.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils and students are outstanding. Their experience of boarding enables them to develop their relationships and independence skills to a significant standard. Residential pupils and students are encouraged and enabled, with excellent support, to develop constructive relationships with their peers as well as with the staff caring for them. Pupils and students are enabled to recognise the need for equality and diversity and are able to recognise this with the school and local community. Residential pupils and students develop tolerance and understanding of each other and develop friendships that enable them to care and support each other. Residential pupils and students say they enjoy boarding at the school, making friends and having new experiences.

Residential pupils and students thrive in an environment where tolerance and understanding of each other is embedded in the culture. They have positive, caring relationships with the staff, which in turn helps them to enjoy and learn from their residential experience. Residential pupils and students are enabled to develop their life and social skills to their own individual level. They experience success and have positive acknowledgment, which helps them to develop their self-esteem and sense of worth.

Residential pupils, on the whole, enjoy their boarding experience. They are offered an excellent range of enriching activities including experiences that teach them about the wider community. Pupils are able to access local colleges for full-time courses and work experience.

Residential pupils' behaviour is overall of an outstanding standard and they benefit from having clear boundaries and staff who know them as individuals and understand their needs. Individual placement plans ensure that members of staff know what strategies and approaches to use for each individual. Implementation of these plans enables residential pupils to have the opportunity to maintain positive behaviour.

Residential pupils' views are central to the running of the residential houses. They are able to influence the range of activities provided and the content of menus. They have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and feelings to various members of staff. Residential pupils have ready access to link workers and other residential and teaching staff, as well as being able to voice their views via the school council. Additionally, the school has an independent visitor and listener.

Residential pupils' health is promoted to an excellent standard. They have ready access to health services such as a doctor or dentist. They particularly benefit from a setting where their health and emotional well-being is promoted to a very high standard, with on site speech, occupational therapy services. One parent said, 'Any concerns my son has are dealt with promptly in a supportive, sympathetic manner and health concerns are quickly dealt with by the school nurse.'

Residential pupils benefit from particularly well-planned and structured independence programmes. Each pupil has a plan aimed at developing their life skills at a pace and level appropriate to their understanding and ability. They experience excellent support and this ensures that they receive opportunities to become independent and confident members of their communities. One parent said, 'In addition to the care my son receives he is supported with his daily routines with which he needs structuring and reinforcing, this has been hugely successful, to the point he will now shower and brush his teeth without prompting.'

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Pastoral support offered to residential pupils is supportive and nurturing. One parent said, 'My son regards the school as his second home. He did suffer slight homesickness in the first few weeks, but having someone he could discuss this with, and understanding that he was not alone, helped him quickly adjust to his new routine.' There are efficient 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 and student.

Admission to the school is carefully considered to ensure the individual needs of the pupils and students can be met. Referrals to the school are assessed jointly with input from the school's care, education and therapy departments. Pupils, students and their parents and carers are able to visit the school with moves being planned sensitively and with the young person in mind. Residential pupils and students are offered excellent opportunities to develop their academic abilities as a result of detailed education and care plans. The plans contain achievable targets and the effectiveness of the plans are assessed at regular reviews.

Placement and care plans are of an excellent standard. These enable members of staff to have an excellent knowledge of what approach is needed to ensure residential pupils' specific needs are supported and developed. Additionally, a very experienced and stable staff group work closely together to provide consistent care underpinned by excellent relationships.

Care staff ensure that the residential pupils and students have access to a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities, for example, horse riding, attending activities with other schools, drama and sporting activities. These enable residential pupils to develop self-esteem and confidence and show them that leisure time can be spent productively and positively.

Care staff ensure that residential pupils have access to excellent health services and information. Routine health care needs are met with the staff facilitating appointments and ensure residential pupils and students are supported to attend them. This approach ensures that the residential pupils and students have their emotional well-being and health promoted to a particularly high standard. Robust systems ensure that medication is recorded and administered appropriately. Healthy living is encouraged and this is provided not only by ensuring residential pupils and students have access to health care, but by encouraging exercise and a healthy diet. All individual dietary needs are catered for with specialised menus and meals, following plans provided by parents and carers.

Residential accommodation is of an excellent standard. The houses are comfortable and maintained to a very high standard. Residential pupils and students are able to personalise their own rooms. The internet is available in the residential accommodation with very good safety advice provided.

Residential pupils and students are able to contact families and carers by using their own mobile telephones, house telephones or email. Contact is supported and encouraged by the staff to ensure residential pupils and students are happy and able to speak to parents and carers about any needs or issues they may have while away from home. A parent said, 'The lines of communication with a weekly update from staff, help me as a parent to work closely with the school in supporting my son.'

## **Residential pupils' safety**

There is excellent provision at the school for ensuring residential pupils and students are safe and protected from harm. Recruitment procedures are effectively implemented. The thorough and robust safer recruitment procedure ensures that only adults who have been checked as being appropriate to work with children are employed.

The safeguarding of pupils is a priority within the school. There are five trained staff both within residential and education who are the designated persons with responsibility for child protection. All staff have received updated training this year in line with the new child protection policy and protocol. Staff are proactive in promoting and protecting the welfare of pupils and students, and effectively implement the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. Residential pupils and students say they feel safe and cared about at the school. A non-bullying approach is highlighted throughout the school with pupils and students taking part in projects and activities to promote the issues around bullying and how this affects other people. Residential pupils confirm that bullying is not a problem in the school. Any incidents between pupils and students are dealt with fairly.

A rigorous approach ensures situations where young people leave the school without permission are responded to appropriately. Staff are mindful of what to do in such situations with clear protocols in place. On the extremely rare occasion that young people leave the premises without permission they are provided with excellent opportunities to learn from their actions and to minimise the risk of this happening again.

Staff work with pupils and students individually and in groups to promote good behaviour and encourage thinking about how their behaviour could affect other people. Over the last year the school has introduced a new behaviour management policy and protocol. Staff have been given up to date training and receive restraint refresher training every three weeks. Any incidents in the school are recorded and reviewed appropriately. Residential pupils and students who have more difficult behaviour have comprehensive management plans and risk assessments in place which guide staff in how to keep them safe. These are devised by all key staff working with the young person. Such plans have been extremely successful in reducing behaviours linked to anger and frustration.

Residential pupils and students say sanctions are fair and they understand why they are given. Residential pupils and students are seen to behave with tolerance others and to show insight into each other's challenges and problems. The pupils and students develop good friendships and enjoy each other's company. Excellent relationships between pupils, students and staff enable the sensitive and nurturing support to be very effective.

The safety of the school and residential provision is monitored effectively. Fire



precautions and fire equipment are checked on a regular basis. Fire drills are held regularly and all residential pupils and students receive an induction which includes fire safety and evacuation. 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. Strategies to manage risk and how to support the individual pupils are written into placement plans. The premises are secure and the school has comprehensive systems in place to ensure the safety of all pupils and students.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

The management and leadership of the school is outstanding. The school's ethos and aspirations are contained on their website and within the Statement of Purpose; although not all up-to-date information is recorded in the paper document. The pupils and students have a guide which contains the full information for when they start at the school. The residential provision is effectively managed and ensures consistent care across the residential houses. Residential pupils and students benefit from living in houses with clear routines and boundaries and are nurtured to develop tolerance and understanding of other's behaviour. Diverse needs are catered for sensitively and this results in fair and equal treatment for all residential pupils and students.

The boarding units are excellently run and daily routines run smoothly. Residential pupils and students benefit from a consistent and committed staff team who have excellent opportunities for professional development and who are well supported and supervised. A thorough induction programme ensures new members of staff are very well prepared to work at the school. Residential pupils and students benefit from a well trained and supported staff team which ensures they are well cared for and have their needs met as they progress through the school.

Staffing levels ensure the individual needs of residential pupils and students are met effectively. Policies and procedures are in place to support and promote excellent practice across the school. Parents report very good communication with the school. One parent said, 'As a parent sending their child away to school for the first time, I was understandably nervous about the care and support he would receive outside of school hours, but it has been outstanding.'

Residential pupils, students and parents are aware of how to complain if they are dissatisfied with any part of the service they are receiving. A full complaints system is in place if there should be a need for parents to complain. One complaint has been made in the last year which has been fully addressed. General issues are dealt with before they become an official complaint. Residential pupils feel they can talk to the staff if they have any issues.

Residential pupils and students benefit from well monitored records as any issues or patterns of behaviour can be raised and addressed by the senior management team.

The principal reports on the running of the school and boarding provision on an annual basis. This allows the governors to assess how well the school is running and what developments and changes need to happen in the coming year. The head of pastoral support, safeguarding and residential care with the assistance of the feedback from residential pupils, students and care staff has designed a two year development plan for residential boarding. This identifies areas to improve and to expand the pupils' and students experience of boarding.

The school has an independent visitor. Residential pupils and students talk to the visitor about their experience of boarding for example about activities, food and relationships with staff. This information is given to the head of pastoral support, safeguarding and residential care and it is used to look at current issues and for future development. Monitoring visits take place half-termly and the subsequent report helps to assess the progress of development in boarding and what new developments are required for the coming year.

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

All recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Regular supervision is now provided for care staff, the behaviour management policy has been reviewed by care staff who now record incidents of restraint in a consistent manner. Finally, the accommodation has been upgraded to a high standard.

## **National minimum standards**

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

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- ensure that all new information is transferred from the website to the statement of purpose.

**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.**



11/12/2012

Dear Pupils and Students

### **Inspection of St Dominic's School**

Thank you very much for helping me when I visited the school to inspect the boarding facilities. I visited the boarding units, had meals with you, spoke with many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records.

Your school provides an excellent standard of care for you. You make brilliant progress when you come to the school. The staff work very hard to help you learn lots of new things that will help you when you move on.

Your school is a safe place to live. You have excellent relationships with members of staff and your link workers who support and care for you.

There is an impressive amount of activities which you can do in the school as well as the local community, such as St John's Ambulance, swimming and horse riding.

You all behave very well, are very understanding and supportive of each other and have made good friendships. It is very good that you are supported to have contact with home while you are boarding at the school.

Overall, your school is impressive and I think that it does an excellent job to try and get what is best for you.

I really enjoyed meeting you all and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Gaynor Moorey