

St Dominic's School

St. Dominics School, Hambledon, GODALMING, Surrey, GU8 4DX

Inspection dates	23/11/2015 to 25/11/2015	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Pupils and students are making exceptional progress. Significant improvements in their social skills, behaviour, independence, self-confidence and self-esteem is having a positive impact on their learning and improving their future life chances.
- Pupils and students flourish as a result of the tailored support they receive from skilled and committed staff. Through extremely respectful and responsive relationships they trust staff, enabling them to work together focussing on specific areas of difficulty to promote their development. They know and appreciate that staff value their unique qualities and listen to their views.
- Highly effective leadership and management ensures all pupils' and students' needs are met. The provision continues to develop to provide the best possible opportunities for them to achieve positive outcomes.
- Pupils and students thoroughly enjoy their residential experience and report they feel safe. Effective safeguarding arrangements protect them. All staff are confident and competent in their safeguarding role and implement appropriate action to protect pupils' and students' welfare. Staff know each pupil and student extremely well and protect them in relation to their specific vulnerabilities whilst ensuring they have opportunities to develop appropriate life skills.
- Parents and carers are highly complimentary, acknowledging the impact the residential experience is having on their child's progress and development.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils' and students' behaviour which could result in harm is robustly risk assessed with clear recording of the measures to reduce significant harm.
- Ensure that all recruitment checks are completed and recorded.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. The inspector met with the Principal, residential co-ordinator, residential staff, business manager, site manager, school nurse, behaviour management lead, pupils and students. Two meals were taken with pupils and students. The inspector observed evening activities and visited both residential areas. The inspector examined documents and records and considered information from surveys. Three parents were consulted by telephone for their views.

Inspection team

Jan Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

The school is a non-maintained weekly boarding and day school for boys and girls aged between 7 and 19 years with special needs. Pupils can also be emotionally vulnerable or have coordination and perceptual difficulties. There are currently 35 residential pupils and 26 were boarding at the time of the inspection. Residential accommodation is provided for sixth form students within the main school building with younger pupils living in a separate house in the school grounds. The residential provision was last inspected in June 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Pupils and students flourish and make excellent progress as a result of the care and support they receive. A student commented that the residential provision 'gives us good opportunities to be away from home, learn life skills and be independent'. They are positive about all aspects of residential life. Parents and carers acknowledge the immense progress their children have made. One parent commented 'I am really thrilled with how well he is doing; they have turned his life around'. Another remarked that in a short period, their child 'is making incredible progress'. Parents and carers note significant improvement in social skills, behaviour and understanding of the world.

Residential pupils and students thoroughly enjoy their experience. Within a calm, nurturing and very supportive environment they respond to the warmth and respect from staff who offer personalised and consistent support. Pupils and students who historically found school extremely difficult, are now learning, maximising their future life chances and are happy at school. Consequently, they are less anxious with improved behaviour at home. A parent remarked that the difference the school and residential provision is making is 'amazing' and commented how great it is as a parent 'to see your child happy and smiling' rather than troubled and depressed. Staff across the school and residential provision all work consistently to implement strategies resulting in such progress.

Developing life skills and independence is fundamental to the ethos of the residential provision. Staff provide support at a pace and level appropriate to pupils' and student's abilities and vulnerabilities. Routines include everyday chores that pupils and students carry out as integral to the structure of the residential provision. Older students engage in independence programmes preparing them for the transition to adulthood and taking greater responsibility for themselves.

The welfare of pupils and students is at the heart of practice. Staff protect them, promote their well-being and implement strategies to advance their development. Strong, effective leadership and management and the commitment of the experienced staff team ensure pupils' and students' needs are met.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Staff know each pupil and student extremely well and consistently implement supportive, nurturing strategies to promote positive outcomes. Individualised care plans identify their needs with specific targets to promote their development. Staff review these targets regularly with pupils and students to ensure they are appropriate to their developing needs. Parents are also involved in this process enabling them to provide consistent support at home. Each pupil and student has a link worker who provides support and liaises with families. This system supports pupils and students effectively to

make progress. A parent has noted a marked improvement and positive change in the short time since their child has been a residential pupil in areas such as interaction with peers, self-confidence and anxiety.

A parent commented that 'staff know what they're doing and are very skilled. They are helping him and the difference is amazing'. Through patient, tolerant and caring relationships, pupils' and students' anxiety levels reduce and they benefit from staff support in managing their day-to-day lives. Another parent remarked that 'staff have the right way of dealing with my child'. Collaborative working throughout the school ensures all staff implement a consistent approach in supporting pupils and students throughout their day.

The school nurse oversees their health and well-being. They all have an individual health plan compiled in consultation with parents and carers with arrangements for identified health needs. The emotional needs of pupils and students have a very high priority and are monitored effectively with input from the team of therapists with all staff implementing strategies to reduce levels of anxiety. Liaison with external health professionals, such as the child and adolescent mental health service, ensures pupils and students receive the specialist support they require.

Staff organise structured evening activities with the aim of providing opportunities for pupils and students to relax and enjoy their leisure time whilst at the same time promoting their independence and social skills. Community experiences are an important aspect of helping them develop appropriate social skills and become more confident in managing social situations. Pupils and students thoroughly enjoy their activities.

Pupils and students thrive knowing their views and opinions are important and that staff listen. In an environment of mutual respect, staff value them as individuals. They develop self-esteem and confidence. Staff are calm and responsive to pupils' and students' individual needs, supporting the work done in formal sessions with their link worker. A parent commented that staff 'don't just do the job but really care about him and are always looking after his best interest'. Pupil and student representatives are involved in 'student voice' and food committee meetings where they and staff have meaningful debate and dialogue on issues affecting their school and residential experience. Their suggestions have resulted in improvements such as the provision of a common room, outdoor gym equipment and changes to the menu demonstrating that they have a strong voice within the school.

Accommodation for pupils and students is comfortable and homely with new high quality furniture in the common areas. Pupils and students enjoy healthy and nutritious meals.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

The management and staff are effective in promoting pupils' and students' safety and protecting them from harm. A group of pupils and students all confirmed they feel safe within the residential provision commenting that 'staff make us feel safe' and 'there are no strange people and random strangers wandering around'. Parents and carers report

they have no concerns regarding the safety of their children in the residential provision. A parent remarked that they are 'very comfortable knowing he is safe'.

Staff are knowledgeable and well-trained in safeguarding issues. They are confident in their role of protecting pupils and students, alert to any concerns and conscientious in reporting and referring any relevant issues to the safeguarding team. There is a robust procedure for considering welfare issues. The head is the designated safeguarding officer and leads a safeguarding team of five designated safeguarding officers. Pupils and students are aware of this team and their role. One pupil remarked that the team 'has an open door policy so whatever they are doing they will always take time to talk to you'. Managers take immediate action when necessary, with appropriate referrals being made to external safeguarding agencies. Weekly meetings of the safeguarding team consider all welfare issues referred to them. Staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training that includes child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation.

Extremely positive relationships between pupils, students and staff underpin successful behaviour strategies. Through thoughtful, sensitive and consistent support from staff, pupils and students develop a sense of safety, protection and trust enabling them to respond to the support staff offer. Staff have high expectations of polite, respectful behaviour with tolerance of each other's differences. Pupils and students respond to clear structure, routines and boundaries and develop an understanding of appropriate, mutually respectful behaviour. A parent commented that their child 'gets a lot of respect from staff and vice versa'.

Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are uncommon. Staff are highly skilled in responding to pupils' and students' emotional needs and receive training to manage difficult situations safely. Incidents involving physical intervention are extremely rare. All incidents are well-recorded and closely monitored by a behaviour management specialist who is part of a behaviour management team which includes therapists. This team meets daily to consider incidents and support strategies to ensure staff implement specific measures to meet needs. Although some risk assessments in relation to specific behaviour are in place, not all behaviour which could result in harm is robustly risk-assessed with clear recording of the measures required to reduce significant harm.

Pupils and students report that if there is any bullying 'we tell staff and they deal with it'. Staff recognise that the nature of pupils' and students' difficulties results in a lack of empathy towards others, leading to some incidents of bullying. However, they identify such issues immediately and focus on explaining and educating as to why such behaviour is unacceptable. Close monitoring by staff ensures pupils and students are protected. A pupil remarked that they can talk to any member of staff if they have worries or concerns and 'staff listen and take action'.

There have been no incidents of pupils or students leaving the residential provision without permission. An appropriate policy is in place to safeguard them if such an event occurs.

Comprehensive health and safety systems protect residential pupils and students.

Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied including regular fire drills. Recruitment processes safeguard pupils and students from unsuitable adults working with them. However, records sampled show some minor shortfalls in verifying references prior to employment commencing and recording that an applicant's employment history has been adequately considered.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Highly effective leadership and management of the residential provision enables staff to create a safe, caring environment where pupils and students develop independence and have opportunities to reach their potential. The residential co-ordinator works closely with the school's head and senior management team to ensure pupils and students receive consistent support to meet their specific needs.

Pupils and students benefit from experienced and highly competent staff who receive relevant training to keep them safe and promote their development. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal to improve their practice with new staff having appropriate support to work confidently with pupils and students with complex needs.

The residential provision is integral to the school and central in advancing pupils' and students' confidence, communication, social and independence skills. Consequently their progress in these areas has a positive impact on their learning. The head is fully involved in the management of the residential provision and staff report that she 'is on-call, very responsive and will come in during the evening if we need her support'.

Leaders and managers are continuously striving to improve the provision. Currently the focus is on working more collaboratively with families, school staff and therapists to assess pupils' and students' abilities. This will provide accurate and detailed information in order to target support precisely to their specific development needs. The input from parents and carers is fundamental in this innovative process.

Continuous oversight by managers of pupils' and students' progress, incidents, records and staff practice ensures high quality care and support. Managers have recently appointed a new independent visitor to strengthen the monitoring of the residential provision. Managers see this role as a 'critical friend' to assist in driving forward improvement and maintaining high standards. The point for improvement made at the previous inspection has been fully embraced and implemented in practice by the school.

Staff regularly communicate with parents and carers providing detailed information on pupils' and students' progress. Parents report they can easily contact staff with any concerns and staff are responsive. A parent commented that communication 'is amazing' and another remarked that 'staff have an open door policy and are always very helpful'. Consequently, there have been no complaints in relation to the residential provision.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	125455
Social care unique reference number	SC013937
DfE registration number	936/7010

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.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	35
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to 19
Headteacher	Angela Drayton
Date of previous boarding inspection	16/06/2014
Telephone number	01428 684693
Email address	office@stdominicsschool.org.uk

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