

Inspection of St Dominic's School

Mount Olivet, Hambledon, Godalming, Surrey GU8 4DX

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 May 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Parents, pupils and staff describe St Dominic's as a family. Every decision made by senior leaders is guided by the deep care they have for their pupils. There is a focus on ensuring everyone achieves highly. Academic learning is supported daily by therapeutic support. The 'needs-led' programme sits within the school's broad curriculum. These sessions help pupils develop the skills and independence they need in readiness for adulthood.

The school's six core values, 'I am me, I matter, I am unique, I belong, I am safe, and I am prepared', are known and understood by all. Staff use these statements to help pupils develop appropriate behaviours that ensure everyone can learn safely. Intelligent and individualised guidance is provided to pupils if they have any difficulties in behaving as expected.

Adults prioritise the identification of the significant support each pupil will need, as soon as they join the school. Central to this is working closely with families and appropriate external agencies. Prior to starting at St Dominic's, many pupils may have missed a significant amount of their schooling. Staff are relentless in remedying any negative feelings pupils may have about education by ensuring pupils feel safe, happy and keen to learn.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and staff are extremely ambitious for their pupils. Their vision of an engaging and empowering education is evident across the school. Central to this is their determination to help every pupil succeed. Each day, teaching and therapeutic staff plan collaboratively. Communication across all staff is strong. This means that each pupil's unique needs, as outlined in their education, health and care plan (EHC plan), are known, considered and met.

Leaders are continuing to embed the significant improvements made to the curriculum over recent years. The planned curriculum combines the expectations of the national curriculum with learning that helps pupils develop a sense of their place in the world. In Years 3 to 9, pupils study a wide variety of subjects. Regular opportunities to enhance this learning are provided through trips out to the local area as well as visitors to the school. In key stages 4 and 5, pupils can sit a variety of GCSE and vocational qualifications. Decisions regarding what subjects the sixth-form students will study are made on an individual basis. These reflect the views of pupils and their ambitions for when they leave school.

Reading and the development of vocabulary are prioritised. In the primary phase, daily phonics sessions help pupils learn how to read. The books and stories teachers read to their classes are carefully chosen. Through these, pupils strengthen their knowledge and use of subject vocabulary and everyday language. These texts also encourage pupils to question and debate challenging issues and themes about the world around them.

The wider personal development of pupils is a strength of the school. Opportunities are offered within subjects. For example, experiences such as an Anglo-Saxon re-enactment or a trip to Berlin help pupils develop their confidence in describing historical events. Specific provision is also planned around each pupil's aspirations for their future. This is particularly evident in the careers programme. Students in the sixth form benefit from individualised support that helps them understand the importance of contributing to their school and the wider community.

Pupils know the school's high expectations for their behaviour. At times, some pupils can find it challenging to meet these because of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff know this and provide immediate support and reassurance when required. Time is taken to help pupils learn from these experiences to consider how differently they might respond to a similar situation in the future.

Pupils told inspectors how they feel safe because they know staff will always be there to support them. As a result, pupils are highly positive about wanting to come to school. The high attendance of most pupils is particularly notable considering how many have missed a significant amount of their schooling prior to joining St Dominic's. Because of this, leaders put in place thoughtful support for pupils and their families prior to them starting school. Some parents explained how much they valued this help in their responses to Ofsted's parent survey.

Leaders, governors and the multi-academy trust recognise the dedication of their staff, particularly during the period of disruption caused by COVID-19. Staff are very positive about the support provided for their own well-being, as well as their professional development. Leaders know that the further development of the subject knowledge of staff will continue to support the ongoing achievement of their pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils, and the school's expected safeguarding processes, to identify anyone who may be at risk of harm. Recent training has had a particular focus on supporting the mental health of pupils. All staff prioritise this, identifying where their pupils need additional in-school support. This is provided by highly knowledgeable school staff or through further specialised external agencies.

Safeguarding record-keeping is meticulous. Leaders quickly take appropriate action whenever any concerns are reported. Records also reflect the daily dialogue staff have that focuses on the safety and well-being of each of their pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- As yet, the curriculum is not securely and consistently embedded across every

subject. In a small number of subjects, teachers need further support to develop both their subject and teaching knowledge. This will help them to ensure pupils consistently learn and remember more as they move through the school.

- Not all subject leaders have had the time and resources to work with staff to ensure they have the subject and teaching knowledge they need to fully embed the curriculum. Some of this work has been hampered by the additional pressures on the school caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Senior leaders need to ensure that the recently established faculty leaders have the required resources to provide teachers with the knowledge they need to fully embed the planned curriculum in every subject.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145384
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10237001
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	151
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jay Mercer
Principal	Vicky Perry
Website	www.stdominicsschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Dominic’s provides specialist support for pupils with a diagnosis of speech, language and communications needs and/or autism spectrum disorder. All pupils attending the school have EHC plans.
- The school joined the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust in 2018.
- There have been changes in the senior leadership of the school since the predecessor school’s last inspection.
- The school uses one registered and five unregistered alternative providers to provide education for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. They also spoke with representatives from those responsible for governance, including the chair of the local governing body. An inspector also spoke to the chief executive officer.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, physical education and history. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered 66 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including 46 free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff questionnaire and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding leads, spoke with pupils and staff, checked school records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school and spoke with governors.

Inspection team

Aimee Floyd, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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