

St Dominic's School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC013937
Inspection date	22 March 2010
Inspector	Jill Marriott
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	3 October 2007

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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

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

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 -19 years) of average intelligence but with special needs. These may include some difficulties with physical health, learning, speech, language and communication. Pupils may also be emotionally vulnerable or have motor planning, 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.

Summary

The purpose of this announced inspection was to assess all of the key standards related to residential special schools. The school offers pupils good educational facilities. There are five separate boarding houses. Each of these settings is warm, comfortable and provides a range of appropriate furniture and equipment for pupil use.

Pupils receive good support in relation to their health needs. There are health professionals on site throughout each day including the school nurse, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists. The doctor from the local health centre visits each week and is on call to the school if required.

Pupils are protected by the policies and procedures in place and by the staff who receive a range of regular child protection and safe care training. The school has designated staff responsible for issues related to protection and safe care. The policies and procedures are in line with those of the local authority safeguarding board and positive links are maintained with professionals involved with the protection of children and young people.

The school offers places to children from a range of different backgrounds. Their needs in relation to their culture and family backgrounds are considered when developing their placement plans. Pupils and parents are consulted regularly about specific individual needs.

The staff ratios support pupils to engage in the full range of school and after school activities available. The good communication systems in place ensure that pupils can get their voice heard. Pupils are fully involved in school life and they are able to have their say at school council meetings.

The care and support that pupils receive meets their needs in accordance with the national minimum standards and in line with the Every Child Matters outcomes.

There were four recommendations made at the last inspection, three of these are now met. There is one recommendation that has been repeated related to fire call point testing and a further two recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. These are related to the school's complaints procedure and the Statement of Purpose.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the temporary manager was asked to ensure that any type of hold used in physical restraint is recorded in the restraint book; ensure that fire alarm call point tests occur on a weekly basis; ensure that pupil's pocket money accounts are kept more accurately and consider introducing a new pocket money holding system; ensure that the provider organisation undertakes Standard 33 visits on a half term basis, consistent with its duties and responsibilities in this area.

The restraints book shows that all restraints are now fully recorded and staff are trained to work in a responsible way to ensure pupils are properly supported when behaviour is an issue. Pocket money accounts are now fully recorded on individual files and these are kept up-to-date. Pupils can discuss finances with Link workers at any time and can see the financial records in place related to their pocket money. Standard 33 visits now take place and these help to ensure that the school and residential arrangements are monitored regularly. Further work is necessary to ensure fire call point tests are carried out each week.

Improvements made help to ensure records are up-to-date and that staff have full and factual information to help them to support individuals in an appropriate way.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school offers day pupils and weekly boarders a healthy living environment with health care and support to meet their individual needs.

The staff team have a sound knowledge and understanding of the individual needs of pupils. They actively promote the school's health education policies and procedures and carry these out in their daily contact with pupils. Information is available to pupils in age-appropriate formats. Staff are able to discuss personal, health and social matters with them in school during weekly personal, social, health and economic education lessons and in the residential setting.

Detailed health records are kept for all pupils and these contain information from parents and include any appointments attended. This ensures that staff, who need to be aware of a pupil's health and welfare needs or are required to attend to them, can keep themselves informed.

Good quality medical treatment and first aid are available. A registered nurse is available for the treatment of minor illnesses and all residential staff are trained in first aid. Weekly boarders are registered with the doctor from the local health centre. The doctor undertakes a surgery at the school each week and is on call if required. The school has a medication policy, procedure and practice guidance which specifically addresses the use of prescribed and non-prescribed medication. These documents are included in the guidance provided for staff. Residential staff have been trained in first aid and the administration of medication. Medication records are reviewed regularly by the house manager and the school nurse. The school undertakes a risk assessment before any pupil is given responsibility for their own medication and safe storage facilities are provided. There is separate good quality accommodation available for sick pupils. Pupils receive good support when they are taken ill and they are supervised throughout their time in the medical area. If a pupil is very unwell they are taken home.

The catering staff responsible for the provision and preparation of meals have regular training and a good understanding of what makes up a good balanced diet. They have an awareness of nutritional issues and work closely with the school nurse to incorporate healthy eating into everyday menus. There is information in the kitchen about dietary needs, for example, food allergies, health conditions and the needs of individual pupils related to their ethnic, cultural and religious needs. Pupils are invited to make up and include different foods and cultural dishes into the menu each week. The school has achieved 'Healthy Living' status. Pupils have access to drinking water and snacks at reasonable times and there are facilities available for older pupils to prepare drinks and snacks. The dining room, furnishings, cutlery and crockery are of a reasonable standard and are maintained in a clean condition at all times.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Information about weekly boarders is kept securely in order to protect privacy. Access is available only to those professionals and staff who need to know. There are private telephones for use by the pupils so that they can have confidential conversations with their family or with an advocate if they wish to do so. Throughout the boarding area there are posters displayed with phone numbers of ChildLine and other helping agencies that can be accessed in confidence. Pupil's privacy is further protected by the school's policies and procedures and by the awareness and understanding of staff. Staff have developed the supervision of pupils in a way which respects their privacy. Staff knock before entering bedrooms, and bathrooms and toilets are fitted with safe locking facilities.

The school has a clear complaints procedure and information for pupils and parents is available about this. The procedure for pupils does not include timescales for resolution. Complaints are recorded but not all show what action has been taken or the outcome and resolution. Pupils and parents said that the school does acknowledge complaints and they do receive a response. However, the lack of information about actions and outcomes to complaints is confusing and may delay further action being taken where it is necessary.

Pupils are protected from abuse by the clear policies and procedures for responding to child protection concerns. The school has close links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. There are designated trained staff who are responsible for the protection and safe care of all pupils. They maintain regular contact with safeguarding professionals working in health and social care. All staff receive regular training in child protection. They are aware of the procedures to follow if an allegation is made and of their responsibility to protect the pupils in their care. All significant events relating to the protection of pupils are notified to the school principal, the designated child protection staff and the relevant local authorities. Pupils said they feel safe in the school and in the residential facilities.

Pupils said that there is some bullying within the school and that staff act on any information that bullying is taking place. This ensures that pupils who experience bullying are supported and that bullies are given suitable guidance. Staff and pupils are clear what the school policy is. There are reminder posters all around the residential areas and pupils said they understand what to do if they believe they are being bullied. Feedback from parents' questionnaires confirmed that any issues raised are dealt with swiftly.

There is a school procedure to find children if they are absent without authority. Staff are aware of the procedure to follow if a pupil is missing. They understand who is to be informed and when. The head of care said that no pupils have absconded from the residential facilities and records available confirm this.

The policies on behaviour, discipline, punishment, rewards and restraint are clear and pupils know them. The school uses a non-violent crisis intervention method of behaviour management and restraint. This method is recognised and approved for use in children's residential settings. All staff receive training in this area. Entries in the restraint and sanctions books are clear and detailed and demonstrate the reason for the intervention and the type of restraint or sanction used. The management of behaviour is based on the encouragement of acceptable behaviour. Pupils confirmed that they receive rewards for achievement. They said that standards of acceptable behaviour are known and they are fair. The relationships between staff and pupils is very positive. Staff interact and engage pupils appropriately, providing a good level of stimulation and occupation in a calm and relaxed environment. Pupils said they are happy at school and in the boarding houses. They confirmed that they have a key work system in place but that all staff are easy to talk to in the houses. There are no significant issues evident regarding behaviour management.

The physical environment of the school provides a safe and secure environment for the pupils. The school has a health and safety poster prominently displayed. There are risk assessments in place for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds, and pupil's behaviour and activities. This ensures that all areas used by boarders are free from avoidable safety hazards. Risk assessments are taken into account in daily school activities. Health and safety certificates are available for electrical tests, gas appliances and water systems. Fire drills are carried out regularly at least four times each year. Fire call point checks are not recorded each week and this may have an adverse affect on the safety of pupils and staff.

Staff recruitment and checks on other adults are thorough and fully comply with the national minimum standards. The school maintains detailed records of the selection process. The school is selective, with the right person for the job being more important than filling a vacancy.

The school has a clear policy, followed by all staff, that ensures that all visitors sign in and out. Adults who have access to pupils and accommodation are supervised whilst on the premises. Staff themselves are not allowed to work unsupervised at the school until an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure is available and full and accurate information is obtained.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school has thought through its approach to providing residential pupils with a good range of support. Opportunities available encourage them to achieve educationally and socially and to reach their full potential. Pupils have a statement of special educational needs which is monitored and reviewed. Pupils have a personal education plan and an individual profile which contains key information related to all areas of development. Reports from health and education professionals are available on individual files. Parents and pupils attend reviews each year. Parents said they are pleased with the way in which the school encourages a holistic approach to education and social development.

There is a range of activities outside of school time. Staff encourage boarders to take part in these and to participate in sport and recreational activities. There is something for everyone and activities are available each day. Day pupils often join in and are able to stay overnight on special occasions if an activity is going to go on until late.

Pupils are clear which member of staff they can go to for personal support. They each have a Link worker who provides close support and meets with them on a regular basis. Link workers are also fully involved in producing individual care plans with pupils and for reviewing and monitoring these. Care plans cover areas, such as, routines, health, risk assessments, education, finance, behaviour management and cultural and religious development. Pupils sign their care plans. They said they are happy with the Link work support they receive.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The school has a range of forums that enable pupils to express their views and opinions and to exercise choice. Forums include Link work sessions, circle time each day after school and school council. Minutes of pupils' meetings are available and each includes agenda items and the outcome of the previous meeting. All pupils have the opportunity to attend all or part of their review and provide written or verbal contributions. Up-to-date review reports are available on individual files. Pupils said they are able to influence some areas of life in the residential provision, such as, rewards for good behaviour. Pupils said they are able to choose rewards such as an activity or outing they would like to do.

There are systems in place to listen to and obtain the views of pupils about the running of the school or when any changes and development in the boarding provision are being considered. Staff respond to pupils in a positive and supportive way and pupils are positive about their relationships with staff. Staff demonstrate a positive attitude to boarders' families and to parental contact. There is adequate provision for pupils to have private contact with parents in the school. All pupils have access to private telephones and email facilities to enable them to maintain contact with their families and friends.

All residential pupils have a statement of special educational needs and a comprehensive care plan which covers all relevant areas to ensure their needs in relation to health and well-being are fully supported. Care plans are reviewed, monitored and updated where required. This is done with the involvement of parents and pupils who also sign them.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Pupils wear school uniform and change into their own clothes after school. Toiletries and personal requisites are kept by each young person in their own room. Pocket money provided by parents is looked after by staff. This money is recorded on a pocket money sheet and adjusted according to usage. These records are available on individual files.

Children are able to learn independence skills throughout their time at the school. By their final year they have acquired skills in keeping their rooms clean and tidy, budgeting, shopping, preparing food and cooking. Parents commented on the confidence and positive attitudes their children have developed since residing as weekly boarders at the school.

All boarding houses provide adequate communal and private space for the pupils. At present the boarding facilities are warm and comfortable but they are in need of refurbishment and new beds and bedroom furniture, especially for the older pupils. Boarders said that the boarding provision is adequate and meets their needs. They said they can personalise their private space and they enjoy the facilities available to them. The toilet and bathing areas are private and have appropriate safe locking facilities on all doors. The head of school said that a programme of refurbishment which includes painting, decorating and new furniture has been developed for the coming year.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a Statement of Purpose which explains the services provided. It does not at present include the approved number of day and residential pupils or the age range. The document does not include a review date. The school policies and procedures are available in the residential area. All staff are given copies during the induction process. Policies and procedures are reviewed to incorporate changes and new legislation.

The school has gone through a number of staff changes in the past two years. A school principal was appointed and commenced work in January 2010. A head of care has been appointed and is expected to join the residential team in April 2010.

Staff vacancies and sickness have meant that the school have had to use some agency staff. The agency used has been able to offer the same staff consistently. This has helped to ensure that daily routines have remained in place and pupils have had time to get to know the people working with them. During this time the school and residential staff have worked together to maintain the focus on the pupils and provide safe and supportive care across the school and residential setting.

The management of the residential provision is fully involved in the overall management of the school. There are clear lines of accountability and staff understand their own individual roles and responsibilities. The residential setting is adequately staffed at all times. Where necessary, extra staff are available to offer one-to-one support for young people with more complex needs. All staff receive supervision each half term and an appraisal each year. The supervision and appraisal system are used to inform the training programme. Staff training and development is fully supported by the school. All staff either have, or are working towards, a National Vocational Qualification Level 3/4 in caring for children and young people. Child protection and safe care training and refresher courses are available each year. Residential staff are first aid trained and they receive training to administer medication. The knowledge and skills of the staff group helps to keep pupils safe at the school.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Each child has a comprehensive care plan. Each care plan fully considers the individual needs of pupils in terms of their ethnicity, race, culture, religion, gender, disability and language. There are positive images of different cultures and disabilities displayed in the school and in the residential setting.

The school ensures quality of care through continuous monitoring and evaluation. Records are reviewed by senior managers and Standard 33 visits are made each month by an independent

visitor. There is an annual development plan which reviews the work of the previous year and sets out a plan for the year ahead.

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):

- record all complaints properly with clear accurate decisions about actions taken and outcomes. (NMS 4)
- test all fire alarm call points weekly. (NMS 26)
- update the Statement of Purpose to include a date for review and the approved number of day and residential pupils. (NMS 1)