

St Dominic's School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Rossella Volpi
Type of inspection	Key

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

NOTE - This is an integrated inspection, report is recorded under organisation.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

NOTE - This is an integrated inspection, report is recorded under organisation.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

NOTE - This is an integrated inspection, report is recorded under organisation.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

NOTE - This is an integrated inspection, report is recorded under organisation.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

NOTE - This is an integrated inspection, report is recorded under organisation.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The quality of the boarding provision is good.

Strong, supportive leadership and clear lines of accountability are now in place. Senior management is visible and focused on an agenda of improvement. The three recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Thus, health and safety checks are comprehensive; the Statement of Purpose is informative; the record of complaints includes the essential information to enable evaluation.

Staff benefit from thorough induction, supervision and appraisals. A performance management model is being introduced and there are plans to support all staff in achieving an appropriate work-related qualification, currently held by less than 50% of residential care staff. External monitoring on behalf of the responsible body is conducted, but it is not clear how it contributes towards the school's action plan.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is monitoring to prevent the risk of unlawful discrimination against learners, job applicants or staff. Young people's care plans show regard for special needs and sensitive attention to gender issues. However, issues relating to culture, race or identity are not properly recorded on the plans.

Young people's health is promoted. They are well supported by a team of health professionals, while residential staff offer sensitive guidance on health and personal care. Young people take part in activities which assist with physical development and coordination.

Mealtimes in the boarding provision are conducted within a relaxed atmosphere; but

young people say that the quality of food in the evening has deteriorated, that they lack the opportunity to cook and plan menus; that it feels less homely. The school is responding, but the concerns raised still remain.

The school makes a good contribution to safeguarding young people. There are robust procedures guiding the vetting of staff and volunteers and there is monitoring of visitors to prevent young people being exposed to potential abusers. Privacy is respected and information is confidentially handled. Staff support young people well and assist them in developing socially acceptable behaviour. Staff receive appropriate child protection training and there are good links with the statutory protection agencies. Management continues to review strategies to protect young people from bullying.

There has been a recent review of safeguarding to address the few, but significant gaps noted and ensure consistent recognition of the vulnerabilities of the boarders. These have included, for example, analysis of incidents over a protracted time line, to identify patterns or what young people are expressing through their behaviour and ensuring that staff are clear about what is confidential and what must be reported. A permanent head of care has been appointed, who has significant experience in child protection and therefore is well set to drive the safeguarding strategy for boarders. However, contingency arrangements, in case of a protracted absence of the head, to ensure that a similarly experienced professional can step-in, to safeguard boarders, are not well defined. Not all significant events relating to the protection of young people in the school have been notified to the appropriate authorities.

Young people talk positively about their relationships with staff and their interactions are relaxed and inclusive. Good communication is maintained between boarding and education staff, enabling care staff to support young people's educational progress. Young people engage in a range of activities that they enjoy and that contribute to their sense of achievement and well complement the formal curriculum.

Young people experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes, but visits to where young people are transferring from are not made, although these are valuable sources of information.

There is a range of fora to enable young people to express their views and exercise choice; records do not always show how actions agreed are acted upon and the outcomes. Young people are well supported to maintain contact with their families.

Young people have their needs assessed and reviewed; each has a statement of special educational needs and a care plan covering the relevant areas. Care plans are monitored and updated as appropriate. There is input from the multidisciplinary team and evidence of thorough consideration. The effectiveness of steps taken to meet previous targets and what has changed are not always clearly evidenced.

All boarding houses provide adequate space for the young people. A number of young people share sleeping accommodation and, although not all like this, the arrangements are managed well. Management is aware that some bedrooms lack

personalization and those touches that help create a homely environment and intends to address this imminently.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- review the provision of food to ensure that it reflects children's needs and wishes; that they are consulted over the planning of menus and have the opportunity to learn to prepare their own meals. (NMS 15)
- ensure that all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities. (NMS 7)
- ensure that written individual plans and reviews of children include how cultural and racial needs are to be met and the effectiveness of work done to achieve the targets set. (NMS 17)
- ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of staff have completed their Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People NVQ or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies as the NVQ. (NMS 31)
- ensure suitable contingency arrangements, to continue to drive the strategy for the safeguarding of boarders, in case of a protracted absence of the head of care. (NMS 32)