

St Dominic's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125455
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	359890
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	8–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	86
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christina Conroy OBE
Headteacher	Angela Drayton
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2007
School address	Lane End Hambledon Godalming GU8 4DX
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The boarding provision was inspected concurrently by a social care inspector. The inspectors visited 10 lessons, seeing nine teachers. Meetings were held with the principal, the senior leaders and others with posts of responsibility. In addition, a meeting was held with the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone conversation was held with the governor with oversight for safeguarding. The inspectors also met with two groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at samples of learners' work, assessment and progress files and the school's planning and other assessment records. The lead inspector analysed questionnaires from 31 parents and carers, 66 pupils, and 44 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Is the academic progress and achievement of pupils over time at the end of Year 11 good enough?
- Does assessment to support learning enable all learners to make the best progress possible?
- How effective is the boarding provision in supporting pupils' academic and personal development and what impact does this have on their learning?
- How effective is leadership and management at all levels in moving the school forward?
- How effective is the school's sixth form provision in preparing pupils for life beyond the school?

Information about the school

St Dominic's is comparable in size to other schools of this type. It is one of a group of schools which have the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary as their Trustees. Although it is distinctively Roman Catholic, pupils come from a wide range of religious backgrounds. The school provides for pupils with complex learning difficulties which include autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), speech and language impairment (SLI), attention deficit and hyperactive disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia and dyslexia. All have a statement of special educational needs. Most come from White British heritage and a few are from minority ethnic groups. Currently, boys outnumber girls by almost 12:1. Pupils from 26 local authorities attend the school. The percentage known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The school offers both daily and weekly boarding places. The principal has overall responsibility for care and education.

There have been significant changes recently in the senior leadership team. A new principal was appointed in January 2010, followed by a new head of care in May and a new head of education in September. The sixth form opened in September 2009. The school achieved National Healthy School status in 2008 and the Eco-Schools Silver Award in 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school is satisfactory. It provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It meets its core aim of being a supportive school where all are valued and achieve personal growth in a happy, secure and caring community firmly based on a clear set of values. Although attainment is low and learning and progress are satisfactory, they are improving securely and rapidly as a result of the school's provision and the clear direction and sense of purpose set by the principal and her leadership team.

A significant strength of the school is the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support it provides for pupils, including those in the sixth form. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The dedicated and committed staff ensure pupils are safe, listened to and have their best interests at heart, which supports well the good improvements in their personal development. The boarding provision also contributes effectively in this respect. The vast majority of pupils who completed the Ofsted questionnaire confirmed this. The school has good collaborative working with an extensive range of other professionals to extend curriculum opportunities and to support learners' medical and personal needs. The school also works hard and successfully to engage parents and carers, involving them in the admissions process and keeping them informed fully of their child's progress. Consequently, they are appreciative of the school's work. One wrote, 'Since being at St. Dominic's, my child has blossomed. He is gaining in self-confidence, self-esteem and is making progress in learning with the help he needs.'

Because of their special needs, pupils' attainment is low compared to what would normally be expected at the end of Year 11. Their academic progress across the school is satisfactory and improving. Greater numbers, for example, now follow GCSE courses as well as other accredited courses. Recent GCSE results have shown an unevenness in outcomes across English, mathematics and science. Comprehensive assessment procedures are effective in identifying standards on entry and showing how well pupils achieve in relation to their starting points. However, the analysis of progress data across the school is not yet sharp enough and is not used to full effect to plan future strategies to accelerate achievement and attainment even more rapidly. Notwithstanding this, all pupils, including the small number of girls, make satisfactory progress in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, as well as good progress in their organisational skills and independence. These skills prepare them well for the next stage of their education, either in the school's sixth form or with other further education providers.

Pupils generally enjoy their learning. Teaching is satisfactory and helps maintain an interest in learning, which then underpins improving progress. Although staff ensure that pupils understand what they are expected to learn, there is inconsistency in how well they ensure all learners know the specific steps they must take in order to improve the quality

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of their work and make even better progress. The good curriculum, particularly the personal, social and health education focus, underpins the school's ethos and supports well pupils' academic and personal development.

The areas identified at the previous inspection have been successfully addressed. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and underpins the school's strategic planning. The governing body is effective and supportive, working closely with the principal and other new leaders and managers in setting the agenda for improvement. Its particular focus is on pressing for better achievement and progress across the school. However, the impact of some of the changes introduced, that of the sixth form for example, have yet to be fully realised. In light of these limitations, the school's current capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

Up to 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement and progress, and the quality of teaching, by using assessment more effectively to meet the needs of all learners and ensure they are provided with clear and detailed steps for improvement.
- Sharpen the analysis and use of data across the school to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to help plan future strategies to improve achievement and attainment.
- The school must address the recommendations set for the boarding provision.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Although attainment on entry is low, in lessons, most pupils, the large majority of whom have ASD, and including those from minority ethnic groups, consolidate and build on previous learning, as well as making satisfactory progress in new learning. They benefit from working in small groups, where they receive appropriately focused individual attention. This, along with their enthusiasm for the rewards system, supports the progress they make. In a religious education lesson, pupils developed well their knowledge and understanding of Buddhism and the four 'signs' seen by Siddhartha Gautama on his journey. In addition, they made thoughtful responses to the teacher's questions about not letting something have power over you because of the individual's fears. However, in other lessons, the pace and challenge are less effective and some of the more-able learners are not making the progress they are capable of. In a mathematics lesson, for example, all were expected to complete the same practical task of making two-dimensional shapes.

Although there were occasional outbursts during the inspection, learning was not unduly interrupted by any untoward or disruptive behaviour. Although not all pupils consider behaviour is good all the time, they do say staff deal with it well. Overall, behaviour improves for almost all pupils as they move through the school and fixed-term exclusions have fallen. The atmosphere in the dining area at lunchtimes is friendly and sociable, being underpinned by good relationships between staff and pupils. Such relationships support well learners' contribution to the school and local community. They are, for

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example, involved in staff interviews, the school council and collections for charitable causes, both within the United Kingdom and overseas.

As well as eating healthily and having a secure understanding of this, pupils also take part in and enjoy a good range of physical activities. In addition, they follow personal fitness plans devised by the physiotherapist, occupational therapist and the physical education teacher. Achievement in this respect has been recognised by National Healthy School status. Attendance is average, although individual medical needs affect the statistics. There is no unauthorised absence.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and other adults work effectively together and know the needs of pupils well. In a lesson looking at the life of Roald Dhal, all worked effectively to ensure pupils thought about their answers rather than quickly calling out responses. Staff know what pupils need to do to improve but this is not always known by all learners. Behaviour management in all lessons is effective. Learning intentions are made clear at the start of lessons, which ensures pupils are aware of what is expected of them at the end of lessons. The use of information and communication technology enlivens learning and often involves learners, themselves, in its use. At the end of lessons, pupils are not always given enough time to recap what they have learned. Praise is used wisely by all adults in the room and success is rewarded appropriately, in line with the school's policy.

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The curriculum contributes effectively to learners' personal development, including aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Learning opportunities for Years 10 and 11 enable all pupils to leave with external accreditations, including a good range of GCSE subjects. A creative and expressive arts programme, with cross-curricular links leading to a production, resulted in all younger pupils being involved. Other specialists are used well. In a lesson led by therapists, functional life skills such as teamwork, collaboration and compromise were being developed as a result of pupils' planning for the 'egg combobulator' experiment.

Pupils' health and well-being are at the forefront of the school's strong ethos of care, including boarding provision. All adults work hard to ensure this, helping each individual, including the most vulnerable, in very specific ways. This results in all being looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. A carefully managed and executed programme of reviews is effective in supporting every pupil when they first join the school, as well as when they leave. Parents and carers, too, are given careful support when needed. Procedures for raising attendance rates are effective and those who are absent because of their medical needs are provided with appropriate work until their return.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The drive and ambition of the principal have resulted in a sharper focus on monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. The quality of teaching and learning is improving securely and quickly, and the leaders and managers have accurately identified areas for further improvement. In addition, new leadership in the boarding provision is working hard to secure further improvements. The school is effective in ensuring all learners have equality of opportunity, as it is in tackling any discrimination, which results in an effective ethos for inclusion and no underachievement of any individual or group. The governing body and the school work closely together to ensure safeguarding procedures and practices are effective, up-to-date and reflect current good practice. The school's work in improving the environment, including caring for and sustaining it, has been recognised by the Eco-Schools Silver Award.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The first cohort of Year 13 pupils continued in the sixth form in September 2010 and increased numbers joined Year 12. A new head of sixth form was appointed as recently as the start of this current term. It is, therefore, too early to judge the overall impact of current leadership and management on provision. Nevertheless, pupils who are all boarders are developing well their independence and personal attributes. Underpinning their personal development is the broad range of learning opportunities provided in the curriculum, including GCSE and other accredited courses both at the school and at local colleges, as well as work-related opportunities. These extend pupils' learning and help prepare them for life beyond the school. Pupils enjoy the sixth form, including the opportunity for weekly boarding. One wrote, 'I enjoy sixth form because I now go to college four days per week independently. At college I really enjoy my course and have made lots of friends. In the evenings we can ask to do anything and the staff will always try to help us make it happen.'

In lessons at the school, teaching and learning are satisfactory, as is the progress pupils make. Although teachers record progress carefully against the very clear objectives in the courses pupils follow, it is unclear how well pupils themselves know what progress they are making other than a tick from the teacher to show an objective has been met. The quality of challenge seen in lessons is variable. Some tasks, copying down the learning objectives for example, are too mundane and slow the pace of the lesson, while other tasks, such as using the internet for research, are too open-ended.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires returned was in line with the national average for special schools. The very large majority who returned the questionnaire are highly supportive of the school's provision. Without exception, they believe their child enjoys school, that the school makes sure their child is well prepared for the future and that their child's particular needs are met. This inspection confirms these views. A very small minority felt that the school did not take account of their concerns and suggestions. Inspectors found no evidence to support this during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Dominic's School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 86 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	39	19	61	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	55	12	39	1	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	11	35	16	52	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	45	14	45	0	0	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	12	39	16	52	2	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	39	15	48	2	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	48	14	45	1	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	13	42	14	45	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	58	12	39	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	39	14	45	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	25	14	45	3	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	29	18	58	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	58	11	35	1	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

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.



7 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Dominic's School, Godalming GU8 4DX

Not so long ago, three inspectors came to St Dominic's to see how well you are getting on, both in the school and the boarding houses. We also wanted to know whether we could suggest anything to make things even better for you. We enjoyed meeting you in lessons and at lunchtimes and in the evenings. We also met with small groups of you at the school and in the boarding houses. We were particularly interested to hear how most of you think you have improved personally. In addition, most of you who completed the Ofsted questionnaire felt that school was a safe place to be and that adults cared for you well. We agree with you.

We think your school is satisfactory. It makes satisfactory provision for you and the boarding provision is good. Here are some of the strengths we identified.

- The school works well with lots of other people, including your parents and carers, to support you.
- You get on well with all adults who work in the school and appreciate the help and support they provide.
- The staff care for you well and make sure you are safe.
- In lessons, teachers and other adults give you lots of help and support.
- The curriculum and other activities provide many things to interest you.
- The principal and the leadership team have plans to make things even better for you.

We think the school could be better and help improve your learning even more. Therefore, we have asked the principal to make sure teachers assess your work more carefully and give you clear and consistent guidance on what you need to do to improve the quality of your work. We have also asked that teachers use the information it has on your academic progress to help the school plan better support for you. In addition, we have asked the head of care to make sure the school meets all the necessary National Minimum Standards.

All of you can help, too, by continuing to work well. I would like to extend my best wishes to you all for your future education.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead inspector

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