

School inspection report

07 November 2023 to 09 November 2023

St Dominic's Grammar School

Bargate Street
Brewood
Staffordshire
ST19 9BA

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

Contents

Summary of inspection findings	3
The extent to which the school meets the Standards	5
Recommended next steps	5
Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance	6
Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation	8
Section 3: Pupils’ physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing	9
Section 4: Pupils’ social and economic education and contribution to society.....	10
Safeguarding.....	12
School details	13
Information about the school	14
Inspection details	14

Summary of inspection findings

1. School leaders are highly successful in fulfilling the school's aims to deliver a wide-ranging and appropriate education that enables pupils to develop their academic potential. Pupils develop their independent thinking and empathy for others.
2. The senior leaders of the prep and senior school sections work collaboratively with the advisory governing board to set a clear vision for the direction in which they wish to take the school. This is supported by an effective culture of evaluation, review and on-going quality assurance procedures which involves both governors and senior leaders and effectively supports pupils' progress.
3. The school's culture actively promotes pupils' wellbeing and is one in which pupils are known as individuals. Pupils are tolerant, caring and show sensitivity to those from different backgrounds and traditions. Pastoral leaders actively create a caring and nurturing environment which results in pupils who are kind and mutually supportive. The positive values of the school promoted within the multicultural and multi-faith school population enable pupils to recognise and develop their understanding of difference. Pupils are happy and feel safe at school and show great pride in their school.
4. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Teachers provide highly focused academic support and targeted help. As a result, pupils achieve at least in line and often above their projected grades in GCSE and A-level examinations.
5. School leaders from early years to the senior school produce informative and detailed self-evaluation plans, over a four-year period, which are being increasingly used to inform and promote pupil progress. Longer term teacher planning at departmental level, however, is not yet consistent in fully evaluating success criteria for pupil performance.
6. Teachers ensure that pupils readily engage in their learning. Pupils prepare well for their lessons, they are organised, and are keen to participate and enjoy their class experience. Pupils collaborate well and most pupils are attentive and focused in lessons. In a number of lessons seen pupils engaged in effective peer-group marking. However, in the prep school marking is not uniformly effective as it does not always give pupils clarity about improvements they need to make.
7. The relationships and sex education programme (RSE) in both the prep and senior sections of the school meets the needs of the pupils. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) teaching positively promotes a culture which accepts diversity and individuality. Pupils feel listened to by senior leaders and that they have an influence on decisions.
8. The school ensures there are ample opportunities for pupils to make a contribution to the lives of others. Pupils respond positively and eagerly by raising money or through their involvement in the local community.
9. Effective systems are in place to ensure that pupils are well prepared at each stage of their education with careful planning, particularly at points of transfer between school stages. Equal care is given to ensuring pupils are well prepared for further education or employment.

10. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and in line with statutory guidance. Both senior leaders and governors give priority to this. Pupils feel safe, happy and well supported in the school.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards:

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met

Recommended next steps

- Ensure that longer term departmental planning identifies success criteria to promote pupil progress.
- Ensure that all prep school teachers consistently adhere to the school's marking policy so that pupils receive clear guidance about how they can improve.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders are highly successful in creating a school culture and atmosphere in which pupils take great pride in being members of the school and thoroughly enjoy their learning experience.
12. Senior leaders and members of the advisory governing board work efficiently together in the best interests of the pupils. They ensure that they focus on pupils' success and the school's key aim to allow pupils to thrive at the school. A quality assurance process, led by governors, ensures that both leaders and managers are sensitive to, and address any aspect of, the school's operation that may constitute a risk to either pupils or staff at the school.
13. Leaders ensure that pupils throughout the school feel well supported. Leaders understand and respond to the needs of pupils which informs their effective implementation of key policies, including safeguarding, health and safety and fire safety. As a result, pastoral support is very effective and pupils' safety and wellbeing is promoted across all school sections. Pupils' mental health and wellbeing is also promoted by the many social, recreational and sporting opportunities available to them.
14. Leaders have implemented a curriculum that is appropriate to meet the needs of pupils at the school. It includes provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders ensure academic support for pupils which enables them to identify their own successful learning strategy. Departmental longer-term planning is, however, less well developed because it lacks focus on success criteria for pupil progress.
15. The school provides appropriate information for parents on their children's academic progress at all stages. Tutors are provided with internal academic feedback throughout the year, which enables them to give relevant and up-to-date information to parents. Parent-teacher meetings are scheduled throughout the year at appropriate times. Full and detailed end of year reports are produced for all pupils at the end of each academic year. As a result, parents are well informed about their children's learning.
16. There is a clear complaints procedure. Almost all concerns are addressed by individual section leads. A central record allows senior leaders and advisory board members to have an overview and identify any merging issues. The complaints logs show that the very small number of complaints received are managed quickly and to the complainant's satisfaction.
17. Governing board members understand risk management in the areas of health and safety, security and the wider safeguarding needs of the pupils. Leadership and management ensure that the premises are well maintained and that health and safety processes are not compromised. The school complies with requirements of the Equality Act, and the accessibility plan highlights the required areas where adjustments are made for any pupils with a disability.
18. The school has well-established links with external agencies and is prompt to seek advice and support on occasions where there is a need to support the welfare and emotional needs of individual pupils. Pupils identify the scope of the pastoral support as the key contributory factor to their wellbeing.

19. Governors annually review in detail the school's safeguarding arrangements. Senior leaders manage a comprehensive system of quality-assurance and compliance audits in other areas. These demonstrate that the leadership and management have the appropriate skills and capabilities to ensure that the standards and requirements for regulatory purposes are consistently met.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders ensure that pupils of all ages experience a broad and effective educational programme which is appropriate to their ages, aptitudes and needs, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). School leaders provide strong leadership of teaching and learning within each school section, which enables pupils to learn and make good progress.
21. In the early years leaders have developed an appropriate programme of age-related activities which responds to the pupils' spoken language and communication skills. As a consequence, children become increasingly confident in using a wide range of vocabulary and language structures. Opportunities for frequent conversations with adults help children to develop their understanding and independence and good quality resources support pupils' learning.
22. Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to engage and support pupils' interests and enthusiasm. Teaching assistants provide highly effective support. As a result, in most lessons, pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive and engaged. Pupils communicate well when working in groups. Pupils make insightful contributions in lessons and engage creatively in their learning. In almost all lessons, the teaching engages the interests and enthusiasm of the pupils of all abilities.
23. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Individual teacher mentoring supports the achievement of Year 10 to Year 13 pupils. Individualised education plans for these pupils identify areas for improvement and progress whilst offering them extra support. There is a strong focus on English and mathematics throughout the school. Well-planned lessons in art, science, drama and physical education result in pupils also making good progress in these subjects. Teaching does not discriminate against any particular group of individuals, faiths or beliefs nor does it undermine the values of tolerance, democracy, or individual liberty.
24. Leaders incorporate whole school skills days into the curriculum that effectively bring elements of the curriculum together. Local organisations and parents are invited in to share their expertise with the pupils. Pupils solve challenges that cover a range of curriculum areas, which promotes development of specific learning skills, for example study skills, and mental health and wellbeing.
25. Pupils develop a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding through participation in a wide ranging co-curricular programme. This covers activities, such as traditional sports, dance, drama, young enterprise, and caters for a range of interests and needs. Pupils across the year groups benefit from enrichment trips and challenging opportunities, which extend their learning beyond the classroom.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

26. Leaders encourage and support a high level of participation in sport and other recreation through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Pupils represent the school in, for example, netball and swimming, and some pupils enjoy national success in boxing and tennis.
27. Leaders ensure that the culture of the school strongly supports the school's ambition to inspire mind, body and spirit. Their strategies to promote pupils' personal development are very effective. A vertical tutoring system in the senior school promotes a sense of belonging across the age range and creates opportunities for older pupils to mentor younger pupils in, for example, sport or help them with their academic work. Pupils feel happy in the school and are confident to speak to adults, especially if they need support.
28. Pupils receive timely first aid for minor ailments and illness whilst in school or on trips or sports fixtures. Supervision is effective both whilst inside school premises and when outside across recreational and sports areas. In the early years, vigilant supervision enables children to have free access to a number of learning spaces, including the outdoors.
29. The health and safety team meets regularly, receives frequent training and is supported by advisory board members. External and internal audits are conducted annually and ensure that standards continue to be met. Leaders treat fire safety as a priority and site security is well controlled. Admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained so that the wellbeing of pupils is assured. Pupils' safety needs are met appropriately.
30. The personal development programme covers all age groups and meets the requirements of the relationships and sex education (RSE) standard. Leaders have consulted parents and provided appropriate training to enable staff to teach the programme successfully. As a result, pupils are well informed about relationships. Their awareness is strengthened through a cross-curricular approach that incorporates aspects of RSE in other subjects.
31. Standards of pupils' behaviour are good across every age group. The culture of positive praise based on the promotion of the 'Dominican' values is valued by pupils. There are very few incidents of serious misbehaviour, and when they do occur these are dealt with promptly, sensitively with good communication with all involved, including parents. Records of behavioural and bullying incidents are appropriately maintained.
32. Pupils value the school's strong culture of equality, diversity and inclusion. They respect and understand differences. This includes others of different gender, sexual orientation, race and religion. Pupils treat peers who have particular needs with empathy, patience and respect. The pervading atmosphere enables pupils to have a strong sense of self as well as to build relationships with others.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

33. Pupils of all ages interact socially with each other and adults with confidence. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to participate in assemblies, debating and a range of school forum groups. These result in pupils very successfully developing their understanding of democratic processes, their respect for others' viewpoints and preparation for life in British society. Pupils value diversity. As a consequence, they demonstrate a respectful and thoughtful understanding of other cultures. Their approach is supported by school diversity days which highlight the range of backgrounds and which are enthusiastically supported by all in the school community.
34. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to enjoy international community events for example by hosting a group of Indonesian students on an exchange visit. Sixth-form pupils have worked in a Costa Rican turtle sanctuary and others have been to Malaysia to volunteer in an orphanage.
35. More locally, pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of events. For example, running or walking 100 miles for the school anniversary to support a charity, helping in a nearby food bank and supporting a Macmillan coffee morning. Pupils annually host the 'Brewood' cycle challenge in support of scouting. This commitment by pupils to help others supports their well-developed sense of social responsibility and engagement with the local community.
36. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong, supported by a behaviour policy that is viewed as fair and consistently implemented. At all age levels, high standards of tolerance and understanding are shown between pupils. Pupils are encouraged to see difference as a strength. Leaders invite parents to contribute to workshops which promote awareness of diversity, disabilities and faith. This further secures pupils' understanding.
37. Pupils value the individual guidance they receive to support the decisions they make about their futures. This includes making subject choices at key points of transition as well as preparation of university applications to a broad range of UK and international destinations. The school draws on effective internal career guidance, supplemented by visiting parents, alumni and guest speakers.
38. Leaders encourage pupil voice and pupil involvement in the life of the schools and pupils demonstrate commitment to positions of responsibility in both the prep and senior schools. Older pupils with positions of responsibility help to meet the needs of their fellow pupils whilst increasing their own decision-making skills and self-confidence.
39. In the early years and prep school, the curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils of all ages to learn about society and the wider world. For example, in Year 3 pupils discuss money matters and senior school pupils receive guidance on money management matters as they prepare for university life. Pupils proudly collect Dominican points to motivate them to be 'Good Dominicans'. They appreciate the need for rules and laws to help maintain a peaceful society. The school actively promotes the school's ethos of 'mind, body and spirit', which allows a spiritual dimension to pervade the curriculum throughout the age groups.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

All the relevant Standards are met

Safeguarding

40. Arrangements to ensure pupils are safe are robust across the school. The pastoral team underpins an environment which nurtures the needs of different age groups. School staff, at all levels, are well trained and regularly briefed on safeguarding matters. Appropriate consideration and support are offered to vulnerable pupils.
41. Where it is necessary to investigate safeguarding issues within the school, the school liaises appropriately with external agencies, including the local authority, social services and the police. Rigorous reviews of safeguarding incidents take place, changes of protocols identified, and appropriate actions are taken where required. Pupils are aware of how to report abuse, bullying, inappropriate behaviour and any concerns in and out of school. They report that they have adults in school to whom they could speak if they needed to.
42. Senior managers are trained in safer recruitment procedures, and appropriate safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff, volunteers and governors. A suitable central register of appointments is appropriately maintained; this reflects the content of staff personnel files, which supports this process. Regular and appropriate checks are carried out by both senior school leaders and advisory board members.
43. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the school's safeguarding framework, understanding the role of the designated safeguarding lead and their pastoral support staff. Pupils highlighted the personal development lessons that focus upon developing appropriate relationships and understanding of consent. Pupils know that they can approach their teaching and support staff for help, if they have a worry or concern.
44. A comprehensive annual audit of safeguarding matters is conducted. Additionally, the governor with safeguarding responsibilities is pro-active in the monitoring, support and challenge offered to the school leaders. Comprehensive quality-assurance audits conducted by governors with specific roles and responsibilities assists senior leaders in ensuring that the school consistently meets the regulatory standards and requirements.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met

School details

School	St Dominic's Grammar School
Department for Education number	860/6005
Address	St Dominic's Grammar School Bargate Street Brewood Staffordshire ST19 9BA
Website	https://stdominicsgrammarschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Mr Gary Hartland
Chair of advisory governing board	Sir Michael Griffiths
Headteacher	Mr Peter McNabb
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	295
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2023

Information about the school

45. St Dominic's Grammar school is a mixed independent day school for pupils aged 4 to 18 in the village of Brewood, near Wolverhampton. Founded in 1920 by the Dominican Order, it is now inter-denominational and still occupies the original premises. Since September 2017, the school has been owned by the current proprietor, who is supported by an advisory governing board.
46. The school is divided into three sections: the preparatory school, including the reception department, for pupils aged four to eleven years; the senior school for pupils aged eleven to sixteen; and the sixth form for pupils aged sixteen to eighteen years.
47. The school has identified 41 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
48. English is an additional language for one pupil.
49. The school states that its aims are to support all pupils to achieve their academic potential through inspiring growth in mind, body, and spirit in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship. The objective is that when pupils leave the school, they will have developed the independence of thought and empathy for others to be successful in the next stages of their lives.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 7 to 9 November 2023

50. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
51. The inspectors undertook tours of the school, observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and staff and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and members of the advisory governing board.
52. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
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