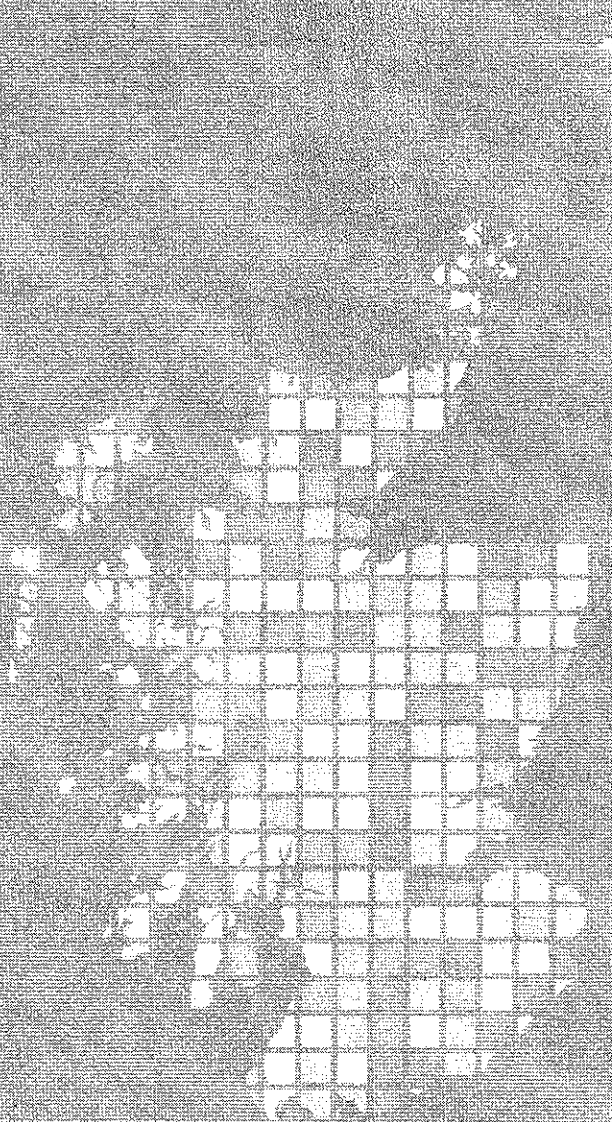


Inspection of mainstream school
care accommodation services



A report by HM Inspectorate of Education and
the Care Commission

Dollar Academy
Dollar
9 May 2006



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



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improving Scottish education

The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act, 2001 established the Care Commission, the responsibilities of which include the regulation of a broad range of care services in Scotland. The Act states that HM Inspectorate of Education and the Care Commission will collaborate in the regulation and inspection of care services which include an educational element. In April 2005, HM Inspectors of Education and the Care Commission commenced a programme of integrated inspections of mainstream school care accommodation services (SCAS). All independent mainstream boarding schools and local authority school hostels are included in this programme.

These integrated inspections cover key aspects of residential provision, including the environment for care, support for pupils, processes for self-evaluation, and capacity for improvement.

The report tells you how well the school or hostel is addressing particular National Care Standards for school care accommodation services and HMIE quality indicators from *How Good Is our School?* Evaluations using HMIE quality indicators use the following scale, and these words are used in the report to describe the team's judgements:

very good	major strengths
good	strengths outweigh weaknesses
fair	some important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

The report uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

You can find more information on the work of HMIE on its website: www.hmie.gov.uk or about the work of the Care Commission on its website www.carecommission.com

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1. Background

The inspection of Dollar Academy took place in January 2006 as part of a programme of integrated inspections of mainstream school care accommodation services by the Care Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). It follows from the commencement of integrated inspection under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act, 2001 on 1 April 2005. This report has been prepared and published jointly by the Care Commission and HMIE.

The inspection covered key aspects of the school's residential provision, including the environment for care, support for pupils, processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. Members of the inspection team interviewed teachers, care staff, and groups of pupils. They analysed responses to questionnaires issued to pupils, their parents or carers, and care and teaching staff. They also received comments from the chair of the Board of Governors.

Dollar Academy is an independent school which provides boarding accommodation for boys and girls aged 8 to 17. It is located in the town of Dollar. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,245 pupils on the roll, of whom 89 were boarders. The agreed maximum roll for boarding was 99.

2. Key strengths

The inspection team identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils who were courteous, well behaved and proud of their school and boarding houses.
- The range of extra-curricular activities for pupils, and the opportunities for them to take responsibilities within their boarding experience.
- The effective channels of communication operating throughout the boarding community.
- Staff commitment at all levels to providing a high quality of pastoral care and to developing pupils' personal and social skills.
- The very effective leadership of the rector in ensuring a varied and rich experience for boarders, with the very positive support of senior managers, house staff and the Board of Governors.
- The range and rigour of arrangements for self-evaluation, to sustain and develop the quality of pupils' boarding experience.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, pupils and staff?

Parents and carers were very satisfied with the quality of boarding. All were very pleased with the care their children received, and the accommodation and facilities. They were happy with the ease with which they could contact staff and their children by telephone and email. They

appreciated being consulted about welfare issues and the provision for their children's personal and social development. Staff were very positive about all aspects of provision. They agreed that the houses were well maintained and the menus were well balanced. They felt that rules were few and sensible. Pupils were very positive about most aspects. Almost all believed that they were safe and well cared for, that others were friendly and that new pupils were made welcome. They were pleased that they could phone family in private, and they knew what to do if they had a complaint. A significant minority, particularly of 14 to 15-year-olds, wanted some change to the food and the house trips. However, they were unable to agree on what should be provided. Similarly, although they liked the friendliness of other pupils, they wanted them on occasion to observe their privacy more and borrow their belongings less often.

Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 3.

4. How good is the environment for care?

Climate and relationships

Climate and relationships were very good. Each boarding house had a very supportive, friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Staff and boarders identified strongly with the school and with their respective boarding houses. Morale was high. Relationships amongst staff and pupils were positive. Pupils were friendly, courteous and well behaved. They took pride in representing the school in sporting and cultural activities, which boarding staff often attended to show support. Boarders were able to express their views clearly on boarding house life. They influenced ongoing changes to food, outings and furnishings through regular house meetings, confidential suggestion boxes, and regular minuted meetings with the deputy rector.

The school worked in close partnership with all parents, including those living abroad, and their representatives. Parents were kept well informed about the work of the school through a website, school magazines, annual policy updates and other briefings. They received regular invitations to events for boarders. The school thoughtfully provided electronic communication in other languages and face-to-face webcam contact for parents of overseas pupils. Parents of boarders were provided with informative termly reports about their children's progress. In addition, staff communicated with them effectively on a more regular basis, through emails, telephone calls and newsletters. Both parents and the members of the Dollar community, with whom the school had positive links, were represented on the active Board of Governors.

Comfort, safety and security

The overall quality of accommodation was very good. The boarding houses were maintained to a high standard. They each provided a clean, warm and relaxed, home-like atmosphere. Social areas in each house included appropriate common rooms and access to snack-making facilities. Pupils were able to personalise their rooms and had a lockable cupboard for valuables. The school made flexible and sensitive arrangements to allow day pupils to have planned 'sleepovers' and to join boarders for breakfast and evening meals where appropriate. Boarders ate their main meals in the school's attractive and bright dining hall. The school's extensive facilities provided a rich environment for leisure, sport and recreation.

The school paid especially good attention to the safety and security of pupils. Staff monitored boarders' whereabouts carefully, for example, through appropriate signing in and out arrangements. Staff had been well trained in implementing very good procedures governing health and safety, including dealing with incidents and accidents.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Pastoral care

Pastoral care was very good. There were always enough staff on duty. Resident house parents, mostly teachers in the school, were supported by two academic house tutors in each house and experienced and well-established assistant house staff. In addition, senior promoted staff were always available to provide appropriate additional assistance. Staff throughout the school knew and supported pupils very well. They had an informed understanding of pastoral issues. Several had undertaken specialist training in counselling, bereavement and depression, and had shared their expertise with others. New boarders had a clear 'welcome pack' and appreciated the well-organised support network of 'buddies', room mates and house staff. Spiritual needs were well met through regular school assemblies and weekly Sunday church services, adapted to interest young people. A variety of well-considered arrangements were in place to meet the needs of those from other faith groups.

The provision of medical care was very good. Pupils were registered with local doctors and dentists. The medical centre was staffed by qualified nurses. They and the doctors directly contributed to the school's health education programme. School nurses were sensitive to pupils' individual needs and offered a range of support strategies, for example in respect of smoking cessation and sexual health. House staff were vigilant about pupils' health and made appropriate use of medical advice. Arrangements for medication and looking after pupils who were ill were well-judged. Medical records were appropriately maintained. Well-balanced menus provided an appropriate choice of healthy options in ample quantities, and pupil preferences were frequently used in designing menus. Pupils were encouraged to participate in a range of sporting activities, the new fitness suite being especially popular. They were aware of the importance of exercise in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

The school's effective approach to child protection covered not only the prevention of harm but also the promotion of well-being. The school's annual child protection training provided a helpful and practical forum for all staff to share good practice. All staff were familiar with the child protection guidelines and how to implement procedures. The ChildLine number was publicly displayed near telephones. Staff had developed appropriate approaches to responding to and recording any incidents, including those related to bullying. There were well-judged systems in place to provide safe Internet access, as well as to monitor the use of laptops and films, and CCTV measures had been put in place to improve security around the houses.

Various handbooks for parents, pupils and staff provided helpful information on key aspects of boarding. Pupils were encouraged to raise any concerns directly with staff or senior pupils. Confidential suggestion boxes were especially effective in raising issues for resolution at house meetings or meetings of house heads and deputies with the deputy rector. Various channels available to parents to express concerns were outlined in the school's complaints procedure. The school carefully recorded and responded constructively to the occasional concerns it received from parents and pupils.

Supporting pupils' education

Arrangements for supporting boarders' education were well judged. In addition to the feedback given to boarders by academic and senior staff, house parents discussed progress reports with individual boarders at least termly. The school provided all pupils with clear guidance on good study habits and meeting homework deadlines. There were very good arrangements to help staff to monitor boarders' progress effectively. These included structured weekly meetings and regular reporting and emailing between house and school staff, under the direction of the deputy rector. Boarders with additional support needs, such as dyslexia, had well-targeted individualised learning support programmes. Those with English as an additional language had received specialist tuition until they were fluent in English. Age-appropriate arrangements for 'prep' and study were in place. These included well-understood times for 'prep', access to teachers on house duty and to reference materials, as well as to computers linked to the Internet and school electronic study guides. Younger boarders were helped and supervised during 'prep' while the older ones were expected to be responsible and independent in using their bedrooms for study.

Personal and social development

Arrangements for personal and social development (PSD) were very good. The well-planned programme of personal and social education included appropriate coverage of sensitive issues such as substance misuse, as well as preparation for independent living. House staff provided well-targeted additional provision to meet individual needs, for example on personal and behavioural needs, and in developing life skills, such as cooking. All boarders had very good opportunities to make a responsible contribution to their houses, for example through house meetings and doing house chores. Heads and deputies of house played a key role in helping younger boarders, organising social events and encouraging others to cooperate constructively. Several boarders were members of the school's successful Charities Committee. Others did community service as part of work towards a Duke of Edinburgh Award. Some pupils took part-time employment in the town. Boarders played an active part in the school's extensive extra-curricular activities, which included fitness, sporting, arts and other cultural activities. In addition, they had their own varied social programme including film and food theme nights, a book club and excursions decided by majority vote, often involving a mix of houses. Overall, pupils responded very well to the provision for PSD, enjoying socialising and widening their personal interests.

6. Improving the residential provision

Appendix 2 provides the inspection team's overall evaluation of the residential provision of the school.

Leadership of boarding was very good. The rector had established the appropriate school aims and a culture of respect for self and others. He had ensured very effective approaches to continuous improvement across the school. Under his guidance, the deputy rector had exercised his delegated responsibility for boarding very constructively. Working with the senior house parent, he had built a reflective and successful team of house parents, tutors and assistants linked to senior promoted staff and year heads. Together they managed boarders' care and welfare needs very successfully, with additional valued contributions from other key individuals such as the bursar. The Board of Governors contributed strategically to the management of the school, for example to policy development on health and safety matters.

Continuing professional development for all boarding staff was systematic, regular and had successfully developed staff skills and confidence. Induction arrangements for new staff were practical and supportive. All boarding staff, including the gap-year student, had well-understood and appropriate remits. They benefited from a well-developed system of professional review. There was a comprehensive set of school policies and practical guidance in a handbook for house staff. Policies, such as safe recruitment of new staff, were implemented thoroughly.

The arrangements for evaluating the quality of the boarding provision were very good. Staff in each house used quality indicators and Care Standards effectively when undertaking the annual house review and identifying priorities for development. Senior managers regularly and closely monitored the boarding provision. The deputy rector met heads and deputy heads of house to discuss boarders' experience and implement suggested improvements where appropriate. Regular surveys of the views of parents, staff and pupils were used effectively to identify strengths and development needs. The school made judicious use of outside experts to evaluate aspects of provision and provide advice. The school development plan included relevant and well-designed projects to improve boarding provision. Parents were suitably consulted on and informed about the school's priorities. The Board of Governors closely scrutinised and responded appropriately to regular progress reports on boarding provision, and approved plans for improvements.

Main points for action

The school and Board of Governors should act on the following recommendations.

- Continue to maintain the high standard of boarding.

What happens next?

As a result of the strengths in the performance and management of the school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The school and the Board of Governors have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report, the Board of Governors, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Following this inspection, Care Commission Officers will commence statutory twice-yearly inspections of the school.

Frances Corcoran
HM Inspector

Rachel Gillespie
Care Commission Officer

9 May 2006

Appendix 1 Summary information

In conducting this inspection the team took account of the following HMIE quality indicators in *How good is our school?* and *National Care Standards*.

How good is the environment for care?	
QI 5.1	Climate and relationships
Standard 5	Comfort, safety and security
How well are pupils supported?	
QI 4.1	Pastoral care
Standard 3	Care and protection
Standard 17	Concerns, comments and complaints
Standard 14	Supporting your education
QI 4.2	Personal and social development
Improving the residential provision	
QI 7.4	Leadership
Standard 7	Management and staffing
QI 7.2	Self-evaluation

Evaluations made using HMIE quality indicators use the following scale to describe the team's judgements:

Very good	:	major strengths
Good	:	strengths outweigh weaknesses
Fair	:	some important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	:	major weaknesses

Reports contain recommendations which are intended to support improvements in the quality of service.

Any requirements refer to actions which must be taken by service providers to ensure that regulations are met and there is compliance with relevant legislation. In these cases, the regulation(s) to which requirements refer will be notified clearly and time-scales given.

Appendix 2 Quality indicator summary table

How good is our school? Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Climate and relationships	Very good
Pastoral care	Very good
Personal and social development	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Self-evaluation	Very good

Appendix 3 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

What pleased parents and carers most	What parents and carers would like to see improved
<p>All felt that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care for boarders was good and they would recommend it to other parents and carers; • there were good opportunities for personal and social development; • staff knew their children as individuals; and • facilities and accommodation were good. 	<p>A few wanted changes to the food which their children received.</p>
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<p>Almost all felt that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they had a good, friendly household to live in; • they felt safe and well cared for; • they could make and receive telephone calls from family in private; and • new pupils were welcomed. 	<p>Around a third wanted more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choice of meals in the dining room; • leisure activities; and • places for being quiet.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<p>All staff felt that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care was good and they would recommend it; • there was good attention to health and safety; and • staff were good at dealing with pupils' worries and complaints. 	<p>Staff felt that no areas required to be improved.</p>

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the rector and school staff, the chairman of the Board of Governors and appropriate members of the Scottish Parliament.

Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, T1 Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8371. Copies are also available on the HMIE web site: www.hmie.gov.uk

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report you should write either to the Care Commission or to HM Inspectorate of Education at the address below. If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk

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