



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

**Dollar Academy
Dollar**

21 March 2000

Inspection of the Care and Welfare of Residential Pupils

Dollar Academy

1. Introduction

Dollar Academy is an independent co-educational school situated in Clackmannanshire, central Scotland. At the time of the inspection, there were 1131 pupils of whom 88 were boarders. The overall roll was steadily increasing but boarding numbers were in decline.

Dollar Academy had had an inspection of the care and welfare of residential pupils in 1995 and the school had significantly improved provision since that time.

An unannounced inspection of care and welfare took place in November/ December 1999 as part of a national sample of residential provision. It evaluated the quality of resources provided, how well pupils were cared for, the support provided for their learning and development and how well residential provision was managed.

HM Inspectors surveyed the views of staff and pupils and interviewed a sample of both. They attended a series of meetings concerned with pupils' welfare and a number of extra-curricular evening and weekend activities. They analysed a range of documents including the school development plan, the Child Protection policy and the medical logbooks and the central record of complaints. They inspected accommodation

and facilities and investigated the school's arrangements for ensuring the welfare of residential pupils by day and night. There was a focus on the pastoral care, support and supervision of pupils.

The results of a questionnaire sent to parents of all boarders were taken into account during the inspection. A member of the inspection team also met the Executive Board of Governors and HMI had a separate meeting with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors.

2. How effective is pupil-care?

Views of parents, pupils and staff

Parents, pupils and staff expressed high levels of satisfaction with almost all aspects of pupil care.

Thirty three parents returned the inspection questionnaire. All thought that residential facilities were good and parents were made welcome to the residences. Almost all would recommend the boarding provision to other parents. They saw staff as approachable and helpful and thought that their child felt safe and secure. However, some had concerns about aspects of the provision of food. A few wanted more weekend leisure activities and more facilities for communicating with their children.

Almost all pupils felt safe and well cared for. They thought that their boarding houses were comfortable and friendly and that staff resolved problems when necessary. However, the majority were dissatisfied with evening and weekend meals. One in every four boarders wanted more weekend activities and more say in boarding rules. Senior boarders wanted more opportunities to give their views to senior promoted staff. A few requested readier access to means of communicating with their parents.

All staff with responsibility for boarders thought that care, including health and safety procedures, was good. However, a significant minority felt that there should be changes to weekend and evening meals and closer links with the school.

Ethos

Overall, the ethos in the houses was good.

- Most houses had a family atmosphere.
- Pupils and staff were open, positive and co-operative.
- Well-organised house routines helped staff provide a caring and secure boarding experience.
- Pupils responded well to the school's high expectations of standards of behaviour.
- All boarders had some appropriate house responsibilities.
- Pupils and staff in almost all boarding houses were proud of their own house. However, pupils in McNabb house felt that they had

less attention and fewer comforts than fellow boarders.

- House meetings and notices kept boarders informed but there were insufficient opportunities for boarders to influence their boarding experience.

Partnership with parents

Partnership with parents was generally good.

- Parents received clear and concise guidelines on boarding.
- They were involved in key welfare decisions, including giving parental permission for weekend leave.
- House staff kept parents well informed through letters, phone calls and contributions to school reports.
- Regular rector's letters and newsletters and regularly updated handbooks provided useful information on the life of the school.
- Public telephones within the houses were available for home-school contact.
- Parents were encouraged to attend school events and were involved in end of term house activities.
- The rector gave the lead in responding professionally and sensitively to parental concerns.
- The school maintained a central record of complaints.

Accommodation

Overall, the accommodation for boarders was good.

- Bedroom and sitting room accommodation was comfortable in Playfair and Heyworth, and of a very high standard in Argyll and Tait houses.
- There was a very good supply of washing facilities.
- Most boarders made good use of opportunities to personalise their bedrooms.
- All houses had very good facilities for boarders' laundry, study and relaxation.
- Staff had appropriate living and office accommodation.
- The central dining hall was clean and modern but institutional in layout and decor.
- The school provided excellent sports facilities and a very good range of extra-curricular weekday activities.
- Appropriate entry systems and exterior lighting contributed to very good security arrangements.
- The S4-S6 social centre gave boarders some opportunity to meet on weekend evenings and there were suitable arrangements for boarders' friends to visit and socialise in downstairs public areas.

Some improvements were needed.

- Communal showers in the three boys' houses provided insufficient privacy and should be phased out.
- The functional bedrooms and bathrooms in McNabb house should be up-graded and made more comfortable.
- The school should implement plans to provide secure personal lockers for boarders' belongings.
- Childline posters should be placed near boarders' telephones and access to e-mail facilities for home-school contacts should be increased.

Resources

Resources for the care and welfare of boarders were generally very good. Each boarding house had a suitable budget and there was a well-organised programme of building maintenance.

- All houses had several televisions and video recorders, a leisure space for indoor games and access to daily newspapers.
- The junior boys' house had a sheltered rear garden and an area with an all-weather surface for outdoor play.
- All houses provided separate common rooms for junior and senior pupils. Senior pupils had appropriate access to snack-making facilities.
- School minibuses were available for weekend excursions by boarders.

Some improvements were necessary.

- The school needed to find ways of taking more direct account of boarders' preferences when providing packed lunches and evening and weekend meals.
- The school required to take further steps to encourage the involvement of boarders in a wider range of weekend activities.
- Although all houses had modern computers, boarders in most houses needed improved evening and weekend access to computing facilities.

Staffing

The houses were well staffed by suitably qualified house parents supported by teams of ancillary staff and house tutors.

- Staff had well-understood general duties and almost all had formal remits. This was a good basis for providing all paid house parents with clearly specified remits and contracts of employment.
- Suitable arrangements were in place to select new staff and parent helpers and to provide relief staff.
- The school had very good links with external support services such as social work, health and community police.

Care of pupils

Pastoral care was very good overall. Staff and pupils were clear that pupils should report their concerns and that bullying was unacceptable.

Safety Issues

School procedures gave a high priority to pupils' safety.

- Staff knew the school's child protection procedures and boarders were aware of adults they could turn to in case of difficulty.
- School rules provided clear guidance on serious matters such as the misuse of drugs or alcohol.
- There was a suitable level of staff supervision within the houses and well-organised arrangements for boarders' unaccompanied excursions.
- Appropriate safety checks were made on fire alarms, electrical appliances and kitchen hygiene.

The following improvements were required.

- The good induction procedures in some houses should be extended consistently to all houses. These should include advice for pupils on complaints and on child protection issues.
- School rules gave very good attention to pupils' safety but should be reviewed to ensure that they provide all pupils with sufficient opportunity for personal growth.

Health Issues

The school encouraged pupils to look after their health.

- Healthy eating was encouraged and generally well monitored.
- An extensive programme of sporting activities involved pupils in regular exercise.
- The school provided appropriate health education.
- Commendably, the school was introducing a personal safety programme for young pupils and some house parents had organised useful and appropriate evening sessions on health issues.
- Boarders with short-term ailments were looked after in their houses while those requiring nursing care were taken home or to appropriate hospital facilities.
- Staff on duty at sports fixtures held a qualification in first aid procedures.

The school was strengthening its procedures for recording and responding to incidents when pupils required medical treatment. However, there was a need to ensure that all staff consistently implemented the school's appropriate medical procedures.

There were very good arrangements for supporting study and prep. Younger pupils did prep in their own houses with appropriate staff supervision and access to computers. Older pupils worked in their study bedrooms.

Sunday services and regular school assemblies provided good opportunities for religious observance and were an important part of the school ethos. Commendably, the school enabled

pupils of different faith groups to attend various churches.

Support for pupils

Pupils had very good access to sources of support and had some good opportunities for taking responsibility.

- The school had a well-organised guidance system led by senior promoted staff.
- Effective links between school guidance staff and house parents included weekly meetings and pastoral reports.
- Case-conferences and sensitive monitoring were well used to support individual pupils.
- The support for learning department and its homework clubs made a valuable contribution to pupils with individual learning difficulties.
- Pupils for whom English was an additional language had access to specialist tuition.
- Participation in work experience and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme with its community service programme encouraged senior pupils to develop a sense of responsibility.
- All boarders had appropriate house duties. Senior boarders with particular responsibilities were given the status of head and depute head of house.
- In some houses, pupils were fully consulted on house activities. All pupils had some

opportunity to influence minor house routines, such as choosing weekend videos.

School committees such as the charities committee and the pupil councils provided appropriate opportunities for all pupils to develop leadership and citizenship skills and to influence key decisions. Boarders needed further opportunities to discuss boarding issues with house and senior promoted staff and feel that their views were valued.

3. How well is pupil care managed?

Staff management and leadership

The rector provided effective leadership in developing a positive climate for care and welfare and for improving the quality of boarding.

He was well supported by his senior promoted staff. His deputy undertook a range of important organisational duties for boarders. However, boarding was an only one part of the deputy's extensive remit and the school needed to establish more specific senior staff responsibilities for boarding, including that for line-management. The bursar's efficient administration and strategic resource management contributed significantly to the quality of care for boarders. The child protection co-ordinator had played a key role in establishing an awareness of child protection procedures.

- House parents were committed to their boarders' welfare. In some houses, they

provided very good leadership in promoting boarders' care, welfare and personal development.

- House tutors provided useful relief cover for house parents and gave boarders access to a range of supportive school staff.
- Commendably, all staff had taken part in training on a range of appropriate welfare issues such as first aid and child protection.

Overall there was too much inconsistency in managing boarding experience. Good practice in arrangements for resource management, provision of weekend leisure activities, staff deployment, making and recording complaints and suggestions, and documenting of welfare decisions should be extended consistently across boarding houses.

The school should introduce an appropriate system of professional review for house staff. Teaching staff already participated in a system of professional review linked to staff development.

Aims and policy making

Aims for boarding were clearly stated as providing a secure, supervised home for pupils whose home was elsewhere. There was a need to adapt the aims to take account of existing legislation and advice on the rights of the child and to include due emphasis on boarders' personal development. The school should share these aims more widely with staff, pupils and parents and use the revised aims in evaluating boarding provision.

Concise policies for staff, pupils and parents covered key welfare issues and contributed to the smooth running of the school.

- Meetings of house parents with senior promoted staff provided some good opportunities for reviewing boarding issues and clarifying school expectations.
- Opportunities for ancillary staff to contribute to boarding decisions were informal and too variable.

Quality assurance

Commendably, the school had surveyed parents and boarders to identify their views on the quality of care and welfare. The results were being used effectively to make a series of improvements.

External consultants were employed to provide professional audits and contribute to a high standard of maintenance.

The Board of Governors played an important strategic role in promoting and evaluating care and welfare provision. A Governors' committee on health, safety and security monitored welfare and child protection arrangements and maintained an overview of provision.

Some house parents had begun to use national performance indicators to evaluate care and welfare in their own houses. However, senior promoted staff needed to monitor the quality of the boarding experience more directly through a systematic programme of visits to boarding houses and support more consistent provision for boarders' care and welfare.

Development Planning

The concise school development plan indicated some appropriate welfare priorities.

However, the school needed to specify more clearly how boarding would contribute to planned developments and also identify both the success criteria and the boarding staff responsible for each development priority.

Commendably house parents had used an audit to produce house action plans matched to boarding needs.

4. Key strengths of pupil-care

The key strengths of provision for boarders included:

- attention to boarders' health and safety;
- in some houses, very good understanding of children's development matched to good practice;
- effective leadership from the rector and support from senior promoted staff and Governors in creating a positive climate for boarders' care and welfare;
- high levels of commitment shown by staff with care and welfare responsibilities;
- a commendable range of extra-curricular facilities and activities overall;
- all staff trained on a range of appropriate welfare issues such as first aid and child protection; and

- effective management of sensitive welfare issues and support for individual pupils.

5. Main points for action

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

- The school should phase out communal showers for boys and identify a programme of planned improvements to McNabb house.
- The school should use existing good practice to establish more systematic procedures for making, recording and monitoring complaints and suggestions at house and whole school level.
- School aims, rules and procedures should give further attention to boarders' personal development and should provide boarders with more opportunities to influence decisions about their care and welfare.
- A system of professional review should be put in place for house staff.
- Senior promoted staff should implement systematic arrangements for monitoring boarders' experience of care and welfare.

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher, school and residence staff, Chairman of Board of Directors and the Member of Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below.

If you want to make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to the HM Chief Inspector whose address is given below. If you are unhappy with the response, you will be told in writing what further steps you may take.

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Appendix

HM Inspectors use indicators of quality when making judgements about the work of a school. These indicators have been published so that schools can use them to evaluate their own work.

This appendix summarises some of the findings contained in this report about the effectiveness of the care and welfare for residential pupils and how well it is managed.

<i>very good</i>	major strengths
<i>good</i>	more strengths than weaknesses
<i>fair</i>	some important weaknesses
<i>unsatisfactory</i>	major weaknesses

We judged the following to be *very good*

- Provision of Resources
- Provision of Staff
- Pastoral Care
- Links with other schools, agencies, employers and the community

We judged the following to be *good*

- Ethos
- Partnership with parents and Governors
- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- Organisation and use of resources and space
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff
- Personal and social development
- Effectiveness of leadership
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- Self-evaluation
- Implementing the development plan

We judged the following to be *fair*

- Staff development and review
- The development plan

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- No aspects were found to be in this category