

Dollar Academy

Service name
Dollar Academy

Service address
Dollar

Clackmannanshire FK14 7DU

Type of care service
School Care Accommodation Service

Provider name
Dollar Academy

Service number
CS2006114865

Date of inspection
22 January 2008

Type of inspection
Announced

Period since last inspection
21 March 2007

Care Commission Office
Central East
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD14NY

Inspection Report for Dollar Academy

Introduction

Dollar Academy, an independent boarding school, was deemed to be registered with the Care Commission as a school care accommodation service from 1 April 2005. It provides accommodation for pupils, aged 9 to 18 years, from the UK and overseas, within three boarding houses located on the periphery of the school grounds. These comprise Argyll and Heyworth for girls and Tait and McNabb for boys. In August 2007 McNabb and Tait, adjoining houses, became one large house for both junior and senior boys, run by the same house parents. The maximum roll for boarding was confirmed as 99 in 2006. The school was operating at full capacity for boys at the time of the inspection. A recent reduction in girls' numbers was said to reflect the national trend. Most senior pupils occupy single study bedrooms. Pupils may access a range of facilities including the new Maguire building (an arts centre with fitness suite), dining hall, medical centre, library and computer areas, together with numerous sports facilities.

The Rector's introduction to Information for Pupils states: 'In your life and work at Dollar Academy we ask you, at all times to consider the feelings and interests of other people. Good relationships are based on courtesy, on respect and thoughtfulness, these being principles central to the life of Dollar academy...the basis for what is distinctive about our community'.

Basis of Report

Dollar Academy boarding provision was included in a programme of integrated inspections of boarding schools by HM Inspectorate of Education and the Care Commission during 2004-6. It now requires to be inspected a minimum of twice a year by the Care Commission. One of these inspections must be unannounced. This report was compiled following an announced inspection which took place over one school day, starting in the morning and finishing early evening.

Before the inspection

The Self-Evaluation Form

The service submitted a self-evaluation form, providing information about its strengths and areas of development for the service, as requested by the Care Commission.

Views of service users

The Care Commission did not use questionnaires on this occasion, but met with four groups of boarders representing all houses.

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This service was inspected after a Regulation Support Assessment (RSA) was carried out to determine the intensity of the inspection necessary. The RSA is an assessment undertaken by the Care Commission Officer (CCO) which considers: complaints activity, changes in the provision of the service, nature of notifications made to the Care Commission by the service (such as absence of a manager) and action taken upon requirements. The CCO will also have considered how the service responded to situations and issues as part of the RSA.

This assessment resulted in this service receiving a low RSA score and so a low intensity inspection was required as a result. The inspection was then based upon the relevant Inspection Focus Areas and follow up on any recommendations and requirements from previous inspections, complaints or other regulatory activity.

During the inspection process

The inspection was carried out by Rachel Gillespie, Care Commission Officer. During inspection, evidence was gathered from a number of sources including:

Staff at inspection

Discussion with a range of staff including:

- Deputy Rector/registered manager responsible for boarding provision.
- Assistant Rector, responsible for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of staff
- Assistant Rector, Child Protection Coordinator
- Four House Parents representing three boarding houses
- Other house staff including resident house tutor and assistant house staff

Evidence

A review of a range of policies, procedures, records and other documentation, including the following:

- Child protection policy
- Paperwork in relation to child protection and pastoral concerns
- Staff training in child protection
- Continuing professional development policy
- Induction and training records
- Sample staff evaluations of training
- Annual Review records
- Sample of training programmes accessible to staff
- Sample of pupil records
- Information booklets for staff, pupils and parents

The Care Commission Officer's observations of

- The interactions between the staff and pupils, and
- The general environment.

Inspection Focus Areas and associated National Care Standards for 2007/08

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This year's Inspection Focus Areas were:

- Child protection
- SSSC Codes and staff training

The Care Commission Officer took all of the above into account and reported under the following National Care Standards (NCS) for School Care Accommodation Services:

- Standard 3. Care and protection
- Standard 7. Management and staffing

The inspection also took into account the Regulation of Care Act (Scotland) 2001 and the Scottish Statutory Instrument 2002/114.

The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced new regulatory arrangements in respect of fire safety, as of 1 October 2006. In terms of those arrangements, responsibility for enforcing the statutory provisions in relation to fire safety now lies with the Fire and Rescue service for the area in which the care service is located. Accordingly, the Care Commission will no longer report on matters of fire safety as part of its regulatory function, but, where significant fire safety issues become apparent, will alert the relevant Fire and Rescue service to their existence in order that it may act as it considers appropriate. Further advice on your responsibilities is available at www.infoscotland.com/firelaw.

Action taken on requirements in last Inspection Report

No requirements were made at the last inspection.

Comment on Self-Evaluation

A fully completed self-evaluation document was submitted by the service. This was completed to a satisfactory standard and gave relevant information for all standards specified. The service had identified its strengths and some areas for future development.

Views of Service Users

The Care Commission Officer spoke to groups of pupils representing all boarding houses and age groups.

All pupils were generally happy and very positive about boarding provision. They spoke enthusiastically about the choice of co-curricular activities such as sport, choir and cinema trips. Christmas social events like ceilidhs provided lasting memories of fun occasions. Pupils enjoyed the sense of belonging to a small community, where everyone knew each other and was very friendly and people got on well together. They spoke of staff having a good knowledge of individual pupils.

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Girls in Argyll felt that the house parents who had taken over in August 2007 had settled into their roles well on the whole, competently maintaining familiar arrangements and showing their receptiveness to comments about any changes.

Pupils believed there was good communication between staff and also with parents and pupils. All could name a trusted adult with whom they could share a concern and who was competent to provide appropriate support and advice. However, for the most part, pupils looked to each other for resolving issues. This was in line with the comment in the Self-evaluation that 'The ethos of the houses is one of mutual support and respect, with a deliberate attempt to create a home from home feel'. They did not think bullying was an issue and spoke of any disagreements as 'blowing over within a couple of hours', as one would expect within a family. Suggestions boxes regularly provided effective, and confidential, means of raising issues at house meetings. Some pupils said they preferred discussion to lectures on school rules at such meetings. Junior boys in McNabb and Tait welcomed the new joint meeting, though they appreciated that the youngest boys might feel intimidated in expressing their views, simply by the presence of older pupils. Senior pupils praised the meetings between the heads and deputies of houses and the Deputy Rector as a constructive means of raising issues. They commented that the latter 'definitely listened', as exemplified by further development of the 'McNabb and Grab' lunch option.

Senior boys were in favour of the merger of the two houses, stating that they had not been substantially affected by the change. They referred to the need for younger ones to have the space to develop at their own pace and not be answerable to older pupils. The house parents explained that the joint house had provided more flexibility to meet demand for places, while facilitating more consistency of approach as boys did not have to cope with a change of house parents. Pupils confirmed that there was always a strong adult presence within the house, especially for younger pupils at prep time when the boys engaged in informal group discussions. Likewise, the bed-time round enabled house parents to talk to boys individually about their day.

Pupils were happy with day to day arrangements such as laundry and food, with routine chores complemented by opportunities to cook and iron for those who chose. All ages had some grumbles about bed-times, especially at weekends, while acknowledging flexibility was available for older ones. Again, the winter curfew of 6pm was a common source of discontent for many pupils, who felt strongly that the principle of choice was fundamental rather than the practical need or desire to spend much free time outside school in Dollar village. Minutes showed topical issues such as wireless internet access, Skype, fire walls and compulsory church attendance were raised at recent Deputy Head meetings with house heads and deputies. As part of ongoing dialogue, the Deputy Rector advised of a modification to the curfew enabling house parents to adopt a flexible response to individual requests.

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Views of Carers

The Care Commission did not specifically seek the views of parents on this occasion.

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National Care Standards

National Care Standard Number 3: School Care Accommodation Services - Care and Protection

Strengths

Not all elements of this standard were inspected on this occasion. The inspection focussed on Child protection, this being one of the Inspection Focus Areas for school care accommodation services for 2007-8.

Child protection

Dollar Academy viewed pastoral care of its pupils as a fundamental priority. The Self-evaluation stated 'Child Protection issues are well understood and taken very seriously by all in the community'. The Child Protection Coordinator (CPC), with considerable experience and expertise in this area, was now supported by three colleagues. She indicated their role included 'the promotion of well-being as well as the prevention of harm'.

All staff had their own handy, A5-sized copy of the school's comprehensive child protection guidelines which took account of relevant national and local documents. Clackmannanshire Council's local child protection committee inter-agency guidelines were available. Apart from recognised procedures, based on 'Observe, Record and Report', the guidelines included key aspects, for example, staff recruitment, confidentiality and mobile phone use.

Significantly, the school had suitably adopted principles for standards of care from 'Another Kind of Home (Scottish Office 1992), focussing on safety, individual development and child-centred care, for instance, to support its approach to boarding. The school stated they updated its policy annually to reflect national developments and new challenges, such as information technology. Documentation confirmed the CPC had also established constructive, face to face links with local agencies such as police, social workers and the Children's Hearing Reporter.

Interviews and staff records confirmed that, at least annually, all school staff undertook in-house child protection training, with external specialist input every three years. In addition to reminders about procedures to follow in case of any concern, the CPC helpfully included topical issues such as risk assessments for trips, local and abroad. She added she also took specific account of the role of overseas gap students, as young adults moving from the role of pupil to responsible staff member, by providing additional guidance as part of their induction. All staff spoke very highly of the benefits of discussions of 'What if' scenarios, based on recent or familiar dilemmas, in providing good learning experiences. They said dividing initially into house groups facilitated a safe environment for participation of all staff, including assistant house staff, to pool their knowledge of issues, before contributing to a plenary.

The school had very good communication and reporting procedures for sharing confidential information and concerns about pupils and family situations in a discreet and sensitive manner.

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Senior management also identified potentially vulnerable pupils at weekly meetings and carefully monitored their progress through monthly tracking systems. In turn, the CPC methodically kept a log of pupils presenting specific pastoral concerns, with easy access to supporting documentation. House staff referred to effective lines of communication, verbal and written, at 'handover', with information shared appropriately on a 'need to know' basis. Discussion and records showed the school, especially house parents acting in loco parentis, liaised very closely and fully with parents, providing reassurance and clear information about actions taken in response to issues. One file inspected demonstrated parental gratitude for the considered and responsible approach taken by the school in relation to a concern about a pupil's behaviour.

While there had been no formal child protection referral of a boarder, there was evidence of the school working collaboratively with social services within a child protection framework. Written comments by the social worker testified to appreciation of the school's contribution to supporting and safeguarding the child. Comprehensive records also demonstrated good child-centred practice in supporting pupils and families presenting a wide range of issues.

School notice boards in all areas displayed Childline posters and the Information for Pupils booklet included a high-profile page, with the key message 'Talk to someone - Don't bottle it up'. This guidance, as a community responsibility to listen and respond, strongly reflected the aims of the Children's Charter, while explaining the limits of confidentiality and offering Childline as an alternative.

Areas for development:

The child protection policy did not include the actual telephone contact numbers for local police and the child protection teams (or the new National Child Protection Helpline which can access them) nor reference to local child protection guidelines. The pupil and parent handbooks did not fully include a synopsis of the child protection procedures stated in the staff handbook, to ensure they were aware of the school's responsibilities in this area. (See recommendation 1.)

The school generally did not have an awareness of the national reform programme Protecting Children and Young People: Children's Charter and Framework for Standards (Scottish Executive (SE) 2004), a self-evaluation tool using quality indicators. Some teaching staff recalled reference to these documents in a school talk on legal matters. (See recommendations 2. and 3.)

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National Care Standard Number 7: School Care Accommodation Services - Management and Staffing

Strengths

Not all elements of this standard were inspected on this occasion. The inspection focussed on Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice and staff training, these comprising one of two Inspection Focus Areas for school care accommodation services for 2007-8.

SSSC Codes

The Self-evaluation reported senior management felt that, as a school, they were already meeting the requirements of the Codes of Practice. All staff had received a copy of the Codes some time ago.

Staff training

The staff information book made reference in its learning and development policy to encouraging staff to pursue their own continuing professional development. The Assistant Head responsible for CPD explained how training needs were assessed through an annual staff review process. Records showed this practice of involving all boarding staff individually with their line managers was well established and valued. Additionally, senior management, and staff in general, identified training needs which benefited both individuals and the school, feeding responsively into the school improvement plan.

Dollar Academy provided most training for boarding staff in-house. Individual records evidenced that all staff participated in the rolling programme of essential training on inset days, including first aid, food hygiene and dispensing medicines. Some staff had undertaken training in relevant topics, for example, drugs awareness and asthma. The Scottish Council of Independent Schools' (SCIS) programme of training provided development opportunities for key staff, including the school nurse, in self-harm and eating disorders. Other staff contributed input from training in other work settings, like knowledge of the autistic spectrum disorder.

Completed staff forms evidenced post-training evaluation of potential use within the school, and dissemination of written information among colleagues. The Deputy Rector made periodic visits to the houses to speak to pupils and attend house meetings as part of his monitoring role. He was also in daily dialogue with house parents to evaluate the effectiveness of input to staff development.

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Areas for development:

SSSC Codes of Practice

Some boarding staff were not aware of the SSSC Codes of Practice and their relevance to everyday professional practice. This may include guiding practice through staff meetings and training; being clear about what standards of conduct staff must meet in considering issues of misconduct; reviewing policies in light of the standards set in the Codes; and taking the Codes into account during internal audit or self-assessment for inspection.

The Self-Evaluation indicated that the school would welcome more SCIS-provided courses of interest to boarding staff.

The policy for continuing professional development of staff was very succinct. It did not address all aspects which might ensure it provided a more robust framework in terms of expectations and accountability of the school and staff respectively. It did not have:

- clear aims and objectives
 - reference to its induction planning for new appointments
 - more detailed information on how to access training and development
 - indication of how identified learning and development needs might be met other than through specific training
 - personal commitment to participation in the learning activity
 - application of new learning and training to policy, procedure and practice and
 - evaluation of the effectiveness of learning (including reflective practice and outcomes for pupils)
- (See recommendation 4)

SCIS, the umbrella body for independent schools, was in discussion with SSSC about suitable training for boarding staff. Until these discussions are concluded, the school is not able to develop a concrete plan to ensure all relevant boarding staff pursue professional qualifications to meet the SSSC criteria for registration. This will need to be done as soon as it becomes practically possible and will be considered again at the next inspection. Meanwhile, the school is proactively seeking staff with relevant qualifications or studying to this end, when recruiting for vacancies.

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Enforcement

There has been no enforcement action against this service since the last inspection.

Other Information

The Care Commission Officer informed the Deputy Rector of the 'Regulating for Improvement' project - a development which will significantly change how the Care Commission will regulate services from April 2008. It will mean better information, more involvement with people who use care services and their carers, and the introduction of clear gradings which will help people make more informed choices about the care services they want to use.

The Deputy Rector was advised by the Care Commission Officer that staff in the care service should familiarise themselves with the information that has been made available at [www.carecommission.com/Care Services/Regulating for Improvement/Information for Service Providers](http://www.carecommission.com/Care%20Services/Regulating%20for%20Improvement/Information%20for%20Service%20Providers).

Requirements

A requirement is a statement which sets out what is required of a care service to comply with the Act and Regulations or Orders made under the Act, or a condition of registration. Where there are breaches of the Regulations, Orders or conditions, a requirement must be made. Requirements are legally enforceable at the discretion of the Care Commission.

There were no requirements made at this inspection.

Recommendations

A recommendation is a statement that sets out actions the care service provider should take to improve or develop the quality of the service but where failure to do so will not directly result in enforcement. Recommendations are based on the National Care Standards, codes of practice and recognised good practice.

1. Some minor additions should be made to the child protection policy. A synopsis should be included in the handbooks for parents and pupils.

**National Care Standards - School care accommodation services:
Standard 3.3: Care and protection.**

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2. Staff, pupils and parents should be made aware of the Children's Charter.

National Care Standards - School care accommodation services:

Standard 3.3: Care and protection.

3. Staff, pupils and parents should be made aware of the Framework for Standards for child protection

National Care Standards - School care accommodation services:

Standard 3.3: Care and protection.

4. The training and development policy should be reviewed and updated.

National Care Standards - School care accommodation services:

Standard 7.8 Management and staffing

This report was written by

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Care Commission Officer

Date: 04 March 2008

Further information about the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, can be found on the Care Commission web-site, under the section 'The Law'.

www.carecommission.com.