

Darwin School

2 November 2016

C/o Cambian Education, The Waterfront, Chancellors Road, London W6 9RU

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2, 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2), 2(2)(h), 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d) and 3(g)

- The inspection in February 2016 found that the school's curriculum lacked organisation and structure and did not meet pupils' needs. Staff morale was low and staff turnover was high, and there were some significant shortcomings in the quality of teaching and assessment. The combination of all these factors restricted pupils' progress and reduced their interest in lessons and learning. This is why the above standards were not met at that time. Since then, the school's leadership has taken effective action to bring about significant improvements in the quality of education provided.
- The school curriculum has been overhauled so that pupils now follow specific programmes of study that lead to achievable goals. During their time at Darwin School, pupils study appropriate academic and/or vocational courses that build on their prior learning and current interests. Many of these courses lead to recognised qualifications. Working towards these goals gives pupils a sense of success and provides a platform on which to build further. Pupils also receive timely and relevant careers guidance that takes account of their ambitions and aptitudes. During this inspection, pupils willingly shared the advice they had received and said that they found it helpful and would act on it.
- Schemes of work for key stage 2 have been put in place. These provide a clear structure and progression for pupils' learning and are fit for purpose. Consequently, the school is now better prepared to meet the learning needs of younger pupils, should any arrive.
- A permanent staff team has been recruited. Staff morale has risen and a sense of purposeful teamwork is evident in the school. Subject-specific responsibilities and lines of accountability are clearly understood by everyone on the team. In class, lessons are well organised and run smoothly. Teachers display good subject knowledge, keep a close eye on pupils' level of understanding and adjust teaching as necessary. Outside lessons, relationships between staff and pupils are positive and usually calm. When upsets do occur, these are managed properly and with firm, yet kindly, authority. Newly appointed staff have received appropriate training and all staff now get feedback about the quality of their work and are given targets for their future performance.

- The school's routines for gathering information about pupils' learning needs and checking on their progress have improved. Communication with a range of different agencies is now more regular and systematic. Each day, staff receive a morning update which informs their plans for the day ahead. At the end of the day, staff meet up to carry out an evaluative review of pupils' progress and to plan for the next day. Within lessons, ongoing assessment is now an established routine, although the school's leadership recognises that there is still more work to be done to sharpen up assessment across the whole curriculum.
- Pupils report that they have confidence in the teaching provided and see it as relevant and interesting. Indeed, establishing a curriculum and approach that serves the pupils' particular needs was an early priority for the current headteacher. Core subjects of English, mathematics and science are taught regularly and effectively. Beyond this, the school offers a suitably broad curriculum, with performing arts being a notable feature. During this inspection, pupils were seen practising a piece of blues music. The teaching was inspiring and a real sense of enjoyment and achievement shone out.
- The school has taken effective action to motivate pupils to attend regularly and on time and to make the most of school when they are there. In the past, many pupils arrived late; this has lessened considerably. Improvements in teaching and clearer boundaries marking out what is, and what is not, acceptable have given pupils a greater sense of purpose and direction. In addition, pupils have a say in creating rules and agreeing how things should be done in school. Recently, for example, pupils have chosen to introduce a smart dress code and to ban smoking on or near the school site. Pupils respect these decisions because they feel that the adults in charge listen to them and value their opinions. This is helping to build trust, self-respect and confidence in pupils. Furthermore, rewards such as 'ABLE' points (attitude, behaviour, learning and effort) enable pupils to earn vouchers or treat days. These serve as valued and effective incentives.
- **All of these standards are met.**

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 11 and 12

- The previous inspection found that the school did not comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Since then, staff have received appropriate training and all the required safety checks are carried out on a regular basis. Fire alarms are tested weekly and the emergency evacuation procedure is practised at least once a term.

■ **These standards are met.**

Paragraphs 7(a), 7(b), 32(1) and 32(1)(c)

- The school has an up-to-date safeguarding policy that is available on request. The most recent safeguarding training for staff took place in October 2016 and staff knowledge is checked regularly through quiz-type tests. Around the school there are numerous signs and displays reminding pupils and staff what to do if they have a concern. All staff are extremely alert to their duty of care and pupils report that they feel safe in school.
- **These standards are met.**

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)

- The previous inspection found a culture of crisis management, with limited focus on school development, staff training and performance management. The quality of leadership and management was judged to be inadequate.
- This inspection found significant improvements in leadership. A new headteacher appointed in the summer term has brought about many changes for the better. She has recruited a permanent staff team, which she leads with capable efficiency; all understand what is expected from them and there is a tangible sense of purpose and teamwork evident throughout the school. On top of this, the Cambian Group has taken action to both challenge and support the school in order to secure necessary improvements. As a result, staff morale has risen and the quality of teaching has improved.
- Subject leaders are in place and are increasingly effective in their roles. Already, these leaders have reviewed curriculum plans and assessment arrangements so as to ensure that teaching is pitched at the right level. The headteacher observes teachers at work and provides feedback in order to highlight strengths and sharpen classroom practice. She has also established routines whereby all staff are involved in checking pupils' work, which helps to share effective practice and benchmark standards. These systems serve to establish and reinforce expectations and help to maintain a growing climate of accountability.
- Communication within the school and between the school and home, and with linked services, is more efficient than previously. There is now more collaboration between different organisations and more regular staff training, all of which is focused on improving the way the school meets pupils' varied needs. A visiting psychologist, for example, has provided training in school. She reports that the school's leadership shows an informed understanding of the range of pupils' needs and how pupils' previous experiences affect their learning and behaviour. Other evidence gathered during this inspection supports this view.
- All in all, the headteacher displays a clear understanding of the demands of her role and her duty to the staff and pupils in the school. Since her appointment, she has taken effective action to bring about compliance with the independent school standards. She now has her sights set on bringing about further improvements.
- **These standards are met.**

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school now meets the following independent school standards

- Part 1 paragraphs 2, 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2), 2(2)(h), 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d) and 3(g)
- Part 3 paragraphs 7(a) and 7(b), 11 and 12, 32(1) and 32(1)(c)
- Part 8 paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)

School details

Unique reference number	131171
DfE registration number	893/6099
Inspection number	10022100

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 18 years
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Group
Chair	Anne-Marie Carrie
Headteacher	Rebecca Bhageerutty
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,000
Telephone number	0800 1381184
Website	N/A
Email address	education@Cambianguroup.com
Date of previous standard inspection	23–25 February 2016

Information about this school

- Darwin School is a small school which caters for up to 12 girls aged eight to 18 years. The school occupies two purpose-built, wooden buildings on the edge of a rural village in Shropshire. It provides education for girls with a range of social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs, linked to their previous experiences.
- There were 11 pupils on roll at the time of this progress monitoring inspection, all in key stage 4 or the sixth form.
- The school is owned by the Cambian Group, which specialises in providing a range of adult and children's services, including therapy support. All pupils are identified as needing a therapeutic approach to their emotional and learning needs.
- Pupils usually stay at the school for one year, before moving on to other placements.
- When the school received a full standard Ofsted inspection in February 2016, its overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This inspection was carried out with no notice and lasted one day.
- This was the first monitoring inspection since the evaluation of the school's action plan on 13 July 2016. This action plan was accepted by the Department for Education on 9 August 2016.
- The inspector observed learning in several lessons, talked to pupils about their work and looked at work in books. The inspector also spoke with staff and held numerous informal discussions with pupils during the school day.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, a director from the Cambian Group, the lead teacher for mathematics, the school administrator and a forensic psychologist who works with pupils.
- Several documents were examined, including curriculum plans, schemes of work, assessment information, and fire safety and associated health and safety records. In addition, records relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance and staff performance management were checked.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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