

Darvell School

Darvell, Brightling Road, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5DR

Inspection dates

15–17 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Staff's collective dedication drives the school's clear ethos, which is based closely on the community's Christian values. Pupils are supported well and their wider needs are met.
- The proprietors and headteacher know their school well. They fulfil their legal duties diligently, meeting the independent school standards. They rightly recognise aspects of the school which could be even better.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders ensure that useful policies and training support staff well in addressing concerns promptly when they arise. The limited records of concerns available in the school reflect how infrequently issues occur.
- The curriculum supports pupils effectively in preparing for life beyond their unique community. Leaders ensure that pupils are appropriately equipped and skilled for the future. Pupils' work in humanities is enriched through links to their community's heritage.
- Leaders' effective use of training supports teachers in developing their skills, so that standards are maintained and school priorities are addressed.
- Learning in lessons supports pupils to make good progress across their subjects. Teaching is consistently effective. Pupils benefit from prompt and helpful guidance that helps them to improve their work and secure their understanding.
- Provision for pupils who have particular needs is effective. Pupils who need additional help are supported well and make strong progress that helps them to catch up quickly with their peers.
- Pupils behave very well at all times. They are mature, courteous and respectful to each other and the adults around them. This enables them to make good use of learning time.
- Adults provide pupils with high-quality opportunities for personal development, which equip them well for life in modern Britain. They know pupils and their parents and carers very well. Teachers and leaders work closely with families to ensure that pupils' welfare needs are met.
- Children in the kindergarten have a positive start to their learning experience at the school. They are happy and confident. They make good progress and are prepared well for the formal learning that follows.

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.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress in writing and mathematics, so that:
 - they write with increasingly sophisticated use of punctuation and sentence structure
 - they are challenged to think more deeply, reason and explain in mathematics.
- Explore appropriate ways to develop ways in which teachers and leaders work together to:
 - plan more precisely to meet the evolving needs of pupils, particularly the most able
 - check more systematically the difference that training makes to the quality of teaching across the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Darvell School is based on a site which comprises a Christian community known as the Bruderhof. All of the current pupils live in this community, although pupils from the local neighbourhood who wish to attend the school are welcomed. Pupils live and go to school on the same site, which sits apart from the area around it. Staff are not paid for working in the school.
- The school is registered to accept pupils aged from four to 16. However, pupils leave the school at the age of 14 to attend the sister school, Beech Grove Academy, which is based on a similar site in Kent and has the same headteacher. Therefore, pupils are educated at Darvell School from when they join the 'pre-k' class (pre-kindergarten/Reception Year) at the age of four until they finish the 'eighth grade' (Year 9).
- All those involved in the life of the school share a firm commitment to providing pupils with a quality of education that prepares them well for the future and instils in them the Christian values that support the school's clearly evident ethos.
- The headteacher and proprietors ensure that the independent school standards are met. Leaders describe this aspect of their work as being driven by a strong sense of moral purpose, based around pupils having a safe and effective learning experience. Leaders' determination is evident in their careful work in this regard.
- Leaders and teachers know their school well because they work so closely together and communicate openly with each other and with parents. Leaders do not, however, routinely monitor the quality of teachers' or pupils' work in a formal way, or make detailed records of any checks they make. This limits how incisively they can identify specific priorities for improvement. Staff recognise rightly the school's many strengths and can describe appropriately which broad aspects would benefit from further development.
- Leaders provide teachers with helpful support to improve the quality of their teaching. They make effective use of expertise in other Bruderhof schools around the world to share knowledge and skills about curriculum content and teaching techniques. Newer teachers benefit from working closely with more experienced staff in order to develop their knowledge and skills.
- The school's curriculum offers pupils rich opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of a suitable range of subjects, as well as a deep awareness of their community's history and heritage. Formal learning during morning lesson time is complemented well by the variety of clubs and activities that pupils have access to. Activities include art, cooking, woodshop and leatherwork, for example. These activities help to equip pupils with skills and knowledge that they can use to contribute to their community, as well as when they move on to key stage 4 education.
- Leaders work hard to ensure that the school's unique setting does not restrict how well pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils experience regular opportunities to engage with people from beyond their community, both through welcoming visitors to their school and going out on trips. Teachers make good use of these events to develop pupils' ability to identify and respond appropriately to risks they may not normally experience, such as crossing roads.

- The community includes families who originate from a number of different countries. Pupils benefit from learning about each other's different cultures, and are readily accepting of people whose backgrounds and experiences are not the same as theirs. They are highly respectful and tolerant of others. By adopting a common curriculum in Bruderhof communities across the world, leaders help pupils to settle quickly and keep up with their learning when they move to Darvell from another community or country.

Governance

- The school does not have a governing body. The proprietor delegates responsibility for governance to an education committee, which is formed from members of the Darvell community. Two members of the education committee are directors of the proprietary body.
- The education committee regularly seeks appropriate information that enables it to make valid judgements about the school's success. It keeps the proprietor informed via termly written reports. Members of the committee have a clear understanding of the quality of provision in the school and use it well to direct their ongoing work.
- Since nobody is paid for the work they do in the school, the school does not have a formal structure for managing teachers' performance. However, all members of the school community hold each other effectively to account for the difference their work is making to pupils' education and wider development.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have put an appropriate safeguarding policy in place, which guides their work successfully. They make sure that parents can access it via the handbook they are given when their children join the school. Staff participate in regular and helpful training, supported by the local authority, which ensures that everyone understands their safeguarding duties.
- The welfare of pupils in the school is the staff's number one concern. Because teachers know pupils well, they are quick to identify any behaviour which is out of character. The close integration of the school into the life of the community ensures that parents are alerted quickly to any concerns that arise.
- On the rare occasions when it is warranted, staff follow a clear referral process to seek support for pupils who appear vulnerable. The limited records of such actions that are currently in the school reflect the infrequency with which this is necessary.
- Pupils described feeling very safe in their school and community. They exhibit warm and respectful relationships with the adults around them. This gives them confidence to talk to their teachers about anything that may be worrying them, and the security of knowing they will be supported to resolve any issues they cannot sort out for themselves.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils are hardworking and keen to learn. They approach their lessons with respectful diligence. Established routines help them to make efficient use of their learning time. This was particularly evident in the more experienced teachers' classrooms.
- In English and mathematics, teachers use carefully constructed schemes of work to plan learning that builds incrementally over time. For older pupils, regular homework integrates smoothly into this process, so that pupils promptly consolidate what they have learned in lessons. This helps them to work consistently at the standard expected for their age.
- Teachers plan lessons that build on pupils' learning over time in an age-appropriate way. However, they do not necessarily ensure that learning activities sharply accommodate the needs of those pupils who are already working above this standard. Leaders rightly recognise that developing the way that teachers plan precisely to challenge the most able is a priority for school development.
- Teachers' questioning is used well to check pupils' understanding, but does not routinely stretch them to think more deeply or work in a more sophisticated way. As a result, although the most able pupils achieve well, their progress is not as rapid as it could be.
- Teachers use their secure subject knowledge well to support pupils' learning across the wider curriculum. They make effective use of the school's context and its community's cultural heritage to enrich pupils' learning about history, geography and religious education. Pupils told the inspector how they make use of opportunities to learn from people who join their community from other parts of the world, such as Korea, Iraq and Germany, finding out about their traditions, food and other aspects of their lives.
- Formal work in lessons is complemented well by activities during 'circle time' at the start of each day. For example, during the inspection, pupils in the third and fourth grade (Years 4 and 5) sang folk songs that linked to their geographical studies about Europe. They referred back to the map-work they had done in their books, and were looking forward to a celebratory event when they would share what they have learned with their parents, using posters they are preparing and sharing samples of food from different countries.
- Pupils who have particular needs are supported very well. Additional adults are deployed promptly and carefully, so that those at risk of falling behind are helped to keep up. Leaders review pupils' academic achievement regularly and put extra tutoring plans in place when needed. When individual pupils' learning needs require specific and specialist support, leaders secure this promptly and successfully through their liaison with experts beyond the school.
- Pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills enable them to access the curriculum successfully. Pupils review their prior learning of grammar and arithmetic as part of their regular routines, which helps ensure that their understanding is secure. Pupils make good use of the well-stocked library, reading regularly at home with their families.
- Pupils benefit from regular and personal feedback that helps them to improve their work. Teachers keep parents informed about how well pupils are doing, via termly report cards and frequent conversations that are facilitated by the school's integration into the community. This enables school and home to work closely together to help pupils achieve

well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The clearly established culture and ethos permeate every part of this school. Developing considerate, thoughtful young people who are prepared well for whatever lies ahead of them is the driving force that motivates everyone connected with the school.
- Leaders use emerging opportunities very well to develop pupils' understanding about how to keep themselves safe from potential risks. They recognise the importance of pupils being exposed to views and experiences that are different from those that exist in their community. Leaders work closely and sensitively with parents to ensure that pupils are prepared well for unfamiliar situations, which they subsequently tackle with confidence.
- Pupils understand what bullying is, but said that it does not happen at their school. Adults support and encourage pupils to sort out any disagreements maturely, if they occur, intervening appropriately on the limited occasions when that is necessary.
- Leaders retain a careful focus on ensuring that pupils are prepared well for life after school. They make effective use of the on-site business facilities to develop pupils' understanding of the world of work in a practical but impartial way. Regular visitors to the school capture pupils' interests and help them to learn about a range of possible career pathways.
- Teachers support parents' wishes not to expose pupils to computers, the internet or social media while at school, believing that it serves as a distraction. Pupils' awareness of computers and how to keep themselves safe online is therefore very limited. However, leaders take care to introduce older pupils to potential risks associated with the internet, so that they are prepared appropriately for when they come into contact with it at a later stage.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They demonstrate high levels of self-discipline and courtesy towards each other and the adults around them. One pupil told me, 'I'm proud of how we behave well even when nobody is watching us closely.'
- Pupils attend school very regularly, rarely missing a day. None is persistently absent from school. This reflects how happy pupils are to come to school and how well they are looked after when they are there. Parents reflect their highly positive views about how effectively their children are nurtured, how well they behave, and how readily new pupils are accepted into the school.
- Pupils conduct themselves extremely well during lessons and when moving around the site. They understand the consequences of their actions. This motivates them to make positive choices about their behaviour and to encourage others to do the same.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils begin their formal learning in the first grade (Year 2), so typically start with standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are below those that might be seen in other schools. They make good progress throughout their time at the school, attaining at least broadly in line with other pupils nationally by the time they leave at the end of the eighth grade (Year 9).
- The vast majority of pupils are working within the range expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. This ensures that they are prepared appropriately for their future learning in key stage 4 and beyond. Leaders' records show that pupils typically move on to a varied range of further education, employment and training, demonstrating that they acquire the skills and knowledge they need to do so.
- Pupils enjoy rich learning experiences across the broader curriculum. These support their clear understanding of their own histories and the world around them. Older pupils make careful records of their learning, writing with age-appropriate stamina and fluency. However, the most able do not routinely demonstrate the sophistication of sentence structure and punctuation that would be typical for their age and stage of development.
- In the first grade (Year 2), pupils develop their literacy skills rapidly. They write carefully, forming letters and spelling words accurately. They use their phonics skills to sound out unfamiliar words, and use helpful rhymes to help them remember basic rules of grammar and spelling.
- Pupils demonstrate secure arithmetical skills, which they review frequently to reinforce their learning. During the inspection, there was less evidence of pupils routinely being challenged to deepen and explain their mathematical thinking, or to use what they know to solve mathematical problems.
- Pupils who need to, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, catch up quickly with their peers. This is because the extra help they receive matches their needs closely. In comparison, the most able pupils attain at least as well as others nationally, but their progress over time from their higher starting points is less rapid.
- Leaders are thoughtfully developing the way in which they measure pupils' progress from their starting points more accurately. This is helping them to pinpoint more precisely whether pupils make sufficiently rapid progress from their different starting points. Consequently, teachers are beginning to refine their planning so that it meets different pupils' needs even more closely.

Early years provision

Good

- Darvell School has a kindergarten that caters for children aged from four to six years. Children spend their first year in the pre-k (Reception Year) class then move into the kindergarten (Year 1) class. The kindergarten is exempt from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS).
- In the pre-k class, children learn predominantly through play. They explore the range of resources and activities that teachers provide them with, such as painting, block-building and role-play. They interact well with one another, but are equally happy to play

independently, demonstrating how happy and settled they are.

- Teachers use the appropriately structured curriculum to plan a suitable range of activities for children to take part in. Where necessary, they encourage children to try something different. This ensures that children access a suitably broad range of activities to support their physical and social development well.
- Children in the kindergarten (Year 1) class build successfully on their pre-k experience. Leaders recognise the importance of preparing children for the greater rigour of learning in the first grade (Year 2). Children enjoy learning about the letters of the alphabet, and develop their motor skills through activities such as paper folding and weaving. Children enjoy engaging with books and colour pictures with increasing dexterity and accuracy. This helps them to be ready for when letter formation and cursive writing is introduced more formally in the first grade (Year 2).
- Leaders use their experience to effectively support the ongoing development of the kindergarten. They know the children well, working closely with teachers to plan activities that meet emerging needs. The early years leader encourages and supports close working with the first grade (Year 2) teacher. This helps early years staff to adjust the curriculum appropriately to address potential weaknesses in children's development as they arise.
- Leaders ensure that the independent schools standards relating to the EYFS are met. Children enjoy a stimulating environment, which makes the most of the indoor and outdoor space, incorporating an appropriate range of resources and activities. Safeguarding arrangements and the curriculum are fit for purpose. Children are well cared for and feel safe.
- Children's enjoyment of their kindergarten experience is evident in their daily interactions with each other and the adults around them. As in the rest of the school, parents are closely involved in their children's learning experience, interacting daily with staff when they drop off and pick up their children. Consequently, any worries are addressed promptly and effectively. This results in children arriving at school confidently and settling quickly to purposeful activities.
- Children make good progress during their time in the kindergarten. Their academic and social learning needs are met appropriately. Although children leave the kindergarten with literacy and numeracy skills which are typically below those seen by the end of Year 1 in other schools, they are prepared suitably for their next stage of learning.

School details

Unique reference number	114646
DfE registration number	845/6003
Inspection number	10020919

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	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Church Communities UK
Chair	Bernard Hibbs
Headteacher	Timothy Maas
Annual fees (day pupils)	No fees charged
Telephone number	01580 883300
Website	None
Email address	SchoolDVL@ccimail.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 November 2010

Information about this school

- Darvell School is an independent day school for pupils aged four to 16. It has a distinct Christian ethos, which reflects the community it serves. It was set up in 1971 when Church Communities UK, a registered charity, established a Christian community on the site, and it serves the children from the families who live there.
- The school operates an American-style system and curriculum. Pupils enter the school's kindergarten (early years) at the age of four and start their formal learning in the first grade (Year 2). The school has an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS.

- The school chooses not to access funding for the very small number of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Instead, appropriate support is put in place and funded by the school. Consequently, there are no pupils who have an education, health and care plan.
- The school received its last standard inspection in December 2007 and was judged to be good. A light-touch inspection in November 2010 confirmed that this standard had been maintained.
- The school does not use any alternative providers for pupils whose learning or behaviour needs may require particular additional support. Any such pupils' needs are currently all accommodated within the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited all classes except the seventh and eighth grades (Years 8 and 9), that were away on a residential trip at the time of the inspection. These visits were carried out with the headteacher. The inspector also attended three 'circle' sessions at the start of the day, as well as an assembly.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and two members of the education committee, who act in the role of proprietors but also have other roles within the school. She also met with groups of pupils, staff and parents, and spoke to the early years leader during a visit to the kindergarten.
- Along with the headteacher, the inspector reviewed a small sample of pupils' work. In addition, she considered the quality of work seen during visits to lessons.
- The inspector considered a range of documents, including several relating to the independent school standards, as well as those linked to school policies and safeguarding arrangements.
- The inspector took into account 26 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, including 26 free-text comments. She also considered 16 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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