

Inspection of Darvell School

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

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 November 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Darvell School is a welcoming place with an ethos firmly rooted in the community's Christian values. Pupils feel very safe and happy attending this school. This is evident in their energy and enthusiasm as they arrive in the morning, greeting each other and their teachers warmly.

Pupils work consistently hard because they enjoy learning and know that their teachers have high expectations of them. This work ethic helps them to achieve well and equips them with the determination to succeed in life. Pupils are also taught the value of working together and helping each other. They enjoy opportunities to contribute to the running of their school, for example by helping to clean and maintain the building. Poor behaviour and bullying are extremely rare and always dealt with effectively.

Parents and carers appreciate the way that teachers and leaders work with them closely. Many parents visit the school to talk about their jobs in the community or to share their skills with the pupils. In responding to our survey, one parent told us, 'there is a strong sense of partnership with parents. We love the emphasis on holistic education. We have seen our children making excellent progress both socially and academically'.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils' personal development is a top priority for leaders. Pupils at Darvell School learn to be exceptionally hard-working, independent and self-motivated. Leaders make sure that every pupil engages with the impressive range of afternoon activities provided by members of the Darvell community. This includes woodwork, bike maintenance, needlework, bushcraft, music and agriculture. Pupils develop a deep knowledge of these activities, becoming impressively competent. For example, one group of pupils recently serviced the school's bikes so that their class can complete a 50-mile bike ride together. Children explore their talents from the early years, where they have a small but fully functional woodwork bench.

Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. Leaders are aware of those areas where most pupils are likely to have limited experience and they plan specific activities to fill gaps in their understanding. For example, although pupils have limited access to computers, they learn in detail about how to stay safe online. Pupils learn about diversity and treating everyone fairly. They are mature, articulate and respectful when talking about the beliefs and way of life in the Darvell community and how this differs to the way others live. The proprietor ensures that the school meets the independent school standards by publishing a compliant policy on relationships and sex education. Pupils are taught about healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way. Pupils also have rich opportunities to learn about careers. They take part in careers events with speakers from the local area and have extensive opportunities to meet with professionals and employers in a range of fields.

Behaviour in the school is consistently exemplary. Pupils are extremely polite. They are kind to each other and adhere to the school ethos that they should work and learn together as one team. Teachers establish their high expectations with the youngest children. Those in the early years learn to work and play together with impressive cooperation. They are taught to communicate clearly and politely with each other as well as their teachers.

Pupils make solid progress in English and mathematics. Leaders have ensured that there is a well-sequenced curriculum in these subjects which begins right from the early years. Teachers know their classes well and make sure that they have learned each concept securely before moving on to the next. As a result, almost all pupils develop a secure grasp of reading and mathematics which prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Almost all pupils read for pleasure and are keen to talk about the books they enjoy. If pupils fall behind, they are identified as soon as possible and helped to catch up effectively by highly trained staff. The same approach is taken for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who learn well. The needs of pupils with SEND are identified accurately and quickly. Leaders make sure that effective support is put in place for these pupils.

Most pupils also learn well in a wide range of other subjects, including history, geography and physical education. Older pupils can talk in detail about what they have learned previously in these subjects and make links between different concepts. However, this is not consistent or always reflected clearly in pupils' written work. Sometimes the tasks given to younger pupils are not well chosen to reinforce what they are supposed to be learning. Some subject leaders do not check as formally or frequently as they should that the delivery of the curriculum in all year groups matches their vision. Senior leaders have identified the need to strengthen the impact of subject leaders.

The headteacher and chair of the proprietor body work closely together in their leadership of the school. They know their school well because they work closely and supportively with staff. They make sure that teachers have the training they need and that they are supported in managing their workload. Parents appreciate the very regular communication they get from the school. The proprietor body has a keen understanding of its responsibilities. The proprietor body makes sure that the school continues to comply with the independent school standards, including the publication of an appropriate accessibility plan.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is a priority for all staff. Pupils feel very safe here and learn to keep themselves safe. This includes learning about how to stay safe online. Although safeguarding concerns are extremely rare, leaders are not complacent. They ensure that there are clear policies and procedures and that all staff have a detailed working knowledge of these. When there are concerns that need to be addressed, leaders take appropriate action. This includes working with

the local authority and other organisations where necessary. Leaders ensure that the required pre-employment checks are carried out on all staff and volunteers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some of the tasks given to younger pupils in foundation subjects do not contribute strongly to their learning of the intended curriculum. This means that some pupils do not learn as effectively in these subjects. Leaders, including those responsible for leading subjects, should check that the delivery of the curriculum matches their vision and expectations. They should provide further training and support where needed to help ensure that younger pupils learn as well in all foundation subjects as they do in reading and mathematics.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	114646
DfE registration number	845/6003
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10232298
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	53
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Church Communities UK
Chair	Bernard Hibbs
Headteacher	Timothy Maas
Annual fees (day pupils)	£0 to £1,800
Telephone number	01580 883300
Website	None
Email address	rachelhibbs@ccimail.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 May 2018

Information about this school

- Darvell School is situated within the Darvell Bruderhof community in Robertsbridge, East Sussex. This is a Christian community of around 300 people who live and work together. The vast majority of the school's pupils come from within this community.
- The school operates an American-style curriculum. Children start in the Kindergarten and are then grouped into Grades 1 to 8.
- The school is one of two Bruderhof schools in England owned and run by Church Communities UK, a registered charity. The other school is Beech Grove School in Dover, Kent. The vast majority of pupils at Darvell go on to attend and board at Beech Grove once they reach the age of 14.
- The school has its own principal and there is an executive headteacher who works across both Darvell School and Beech Grove.
- The school has an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school does not have a website.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a range of senior staff including the headteacher, head of school and special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector met with representatives of the proprietor body and its education committee, including the chair of both.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, social studies and physical education. For each deep dive inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises on each site and specific checks of the school's policies and website.
- Inspectors judged the effectiveness of safeguarding by meeting with leaders, discussing records of concerns and speaking with pupils and staff about this aspect of the school's work.
- Inspectors considered responses to the staff surveys as well as to Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to the pupil survey, but inspectors spoke to many pupils during the course of the inspection.

Inspection team

Chris Ellison, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Maxine McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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