

Inspection of Darwin School

C/O Cambian Education, 33-37 Drakes Lane, Leighton House, Potters Bar,
Herefordshire EN6 1BB

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Insufficient evidence
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have ensured that the school is a safe and welcoming place for pupils. Staff care deeply about the pupils and take the time to get to know them well. Pupils benefit from trusting relationships with staff who know how to support each pupil to help them thrive. As many of the pupils have experienced disruption to their education, this helps them to settle down to learning.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic achievement. Pupils usually behave well. If issues do occur, staff resolve them quickly, including any incidents of bullying.

Leaders ensure that there is a balance of nurture and academic support. Pupils receive individualised teaching that addresses gaps in pupils' English and mathematics knowledge. Pupils gain qualifications in a wide range of subjects and they leave the school prepared for the next stage of their education. This helps pupils to develop a sense of confidence and self-belief.

Leaders have thought carefully about ways to develop pupils' understanding of life beyond the classroom. Pupils go on regular trips to support learning, for example to local historical sites. Pupils gain from the good use that is made of the local area. For example, pupils go foraging, bird watching and on nature walks.

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

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum that considers the needs of pupils who arrive at the school at different points throughout the year. The curriculum is well structured. Teachers use assessment to carefully check what pupils know and remember. They effectively target gaps in knowledge so that pupils have a solid foundation for further learning. Pupils recognise this and appreciate the help and support they receive.

A typical pupil comment was: 'They give us individual support. They want us to get GCSEs and they are helping us get them. They push us but in a good way. They will work with us until we really understand it. They really want us to succeed.'

Staff generally have good subject knowledge. The majority of staff teach the subjects they are trained in. However, due to recent staffing changes, some staff have had to teach outside their subject specialism. Leaders are aware of this and are supporting staff to develop secure subject knowledge in these areas.

Pupils' work shows that they take pride in their learning. Books are well presented, and pupils take the time to make improvements to their learning.

Reading is well supported throughout the school. All pupils read twice daily in structured reading sessions, which helps pupils to develop fluency. Reading, writing

and mathematics are a focus across all lessons. Teachers take opportunities to work on pupils' individual targets in all lessons. However, for those who struggle with reading, support has been inconsistent. Leaders have begun to introduce support in phonics, but it has not been maintained due to recent staffing issues. This means that a small number of pupils are not getting the precise help they need to read fluently.

There is a shared responsibility for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision across the staff. Leaders have worked hard to upskill all staff in their knowledge, identification and management of SEND support. Staff have a deep understanding of pupils' needs and how to support them, both academically and socially. Leaders ensure that this support helps to identify and remove any barriers to learning.

Low-level disruption in lessons is rare. When pupils do find it hard to manage their behaviour, staff follow a calm and consistent approach. This allows pupils to take a short time out, so they quickly return to learning. Pupils are taught ways to manage their own behaviour so they are equipped to cope with situations outside of school.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority. Leaders place a strong focus on developing pupils' self-esteem and independence. Staff teach pupils to be resilient, both when learning and facing challenges outside school. Pupils are provided with a bespoke personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. For example, relationships and sex education is delivered comprehensively, at a time when pupils are emotionally ready to access the information. Pupils show respect for all of the protected characteristics. They are taught to consider and debate wider issues such as discrimination and mental health.

Pupils receive independent careers advice and guidance. All pupils have opportunities to volunteer in the community, for example in charity shops, food banks and dog walking. They then have a structured work experience placement. Pupils receive support in preparing and writing their curriculum vitae and job applications. Pupils value this support.

Teachers feel that they are well supported by leaders with regard to their own professional development and their well-being. Workload is considered, and staff feel that expectations from leaders are manageable.

The proprietor has ensured that systems are in place to hold school leaders effectively to account. Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. The school meets its statutory requirements, including schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders provide a copy of the safeguarding policy on request.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders know and understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff are clear about what to do if they are worried about a pupil. They act quickly to report concerns, no matter how small. Leaders follow up on all issues effectively and make referrals to external agencies when needed. The checks made on staff before they work with pupils are very detailed.

Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe, for example when in the local community and online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Pupils who find reading difficult do not receive the support they need to learn how to decode words using phonics. This means that some pupils are not developing the knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers quickly enough. Leaders should ensure that their chosen phonics programme is implemented and that staff are supported to develop the skills they need to teach phonics effectively.

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	131171
DfE registration number	893/6099
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10238120
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Childcare Ltd
Chair	Christopher Strong
Headteacher	Tonia Lewis
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,661
Telephone number	020 8735 6150
Website	www.cambiangroup.com/cambiangroup.aspx
Email address	tonia.lewis@cambiangroup.com
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 July 2018

Information about this school

- The school currently has an executive headteacher who is overseeing leadership, before a substantive headteacher starts in December 2022. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed this term.
- The school offers places to pupils who have experienced significant trauma. Darwin School is part of the Cambian Group.
- Pupils are placed at the school by several local authorities across England.
- The school has capacity for 20 pupils. The school has nine pupils on roll. Currently, there are no sixth-form students on roll at the school.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher and a representative of the proprietor, Cambian Childcare Ltd.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, PSHE and child development. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- At the time of this inspection, there were no students in the sixth form. As a result, it was not possible to evaluate the quality of education and provision.
- The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding policy, along with a range of safeguarding information. This work included scrutiny of the school's single central record of recruitment checks. Inspectors checked staff's safeguarding training and spoke to staff about safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires. They also considered responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Eve Morris, lead inspector

Jane Edgerton

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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