

Inspection of Darvell School

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

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 September 2025

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?

One parent summed it up perfectly when they described the school as, 'A warm, nurturing, kind and yet disciplined environment.' The school has high expectations of its pupils. It wants them to make the best possible progress in all aspects of their learning and development. From a strong starting point, the school continues to strive for improvement.

Pupils hardly ever miss a day at school. They embrace their various lessons and activities with enthusiasm. Pupils are polite, confident and industrious. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. Pupils listen carefully and keenly follow directions. They make the most of opportunities across the full breadth of the school's offer and achieve well.

Throughout the school community, levels of mutual respect are high. Pupils' safety and welfare are paramount. 'Recess' breaktimes are a deliberately planned and hugely positive experience for pupils. These include a whole range of organised games and activities that usually get all pupils panting joyfully.

Pupils sense of enjoyment and fascination about themselves, others and the world around them is plain to see. This is partly fostered through the routine use of the school's incredible setting and community grounds, as well as frequent excursions beyond.

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

Pupils make good progress through the school's curriculum. The school ensures that new learning builds securely on pupils' prior knowledge. Pupils learn to read fluently and usually with great pleasure. They develop secure mathematical knowledge, which they apply well to solve problems. Through wider curriculum studies, pupils develop an understanding of bigger concepts, such as chronology, cause and consequence. The school promotes younger children's physical development well, and older pupils participate in physical activity with commitment. In art, they demonstrate considerable care to finesse their work.

Much of the school's broad, rich curriculum is well established. The school adopts an effective, systematic approach to teaching phonics and early reading. The proprietor is keen to ensure that the curriculum aligns with schools across the international Bruderhof community. This does not diminish the school's ambition to develop the curriculum further. Some new aspects and approaches in different subjects were introduced just before this inspection, for example in kindergarten phonics. Once the school commits to an improvement, staff collectively take great care to embed the changes as intended.

Teachers are well trained and supported to implement the curriculum effectively. They demonstrate and explain important learning points clearly to pupils. Teachers use effective strategies to help pupils remember and use what they learn. Their

close attention to building on what pupils know, and towards new learning, means time in lessons is well spent. Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and use curriculum materials and resources with confidence. This supports pupils' learning well.

Pupils are well prepared for their next steps. The school considers carefully what pupils need to learn to succeed now and in their future lives. For example, as pupils are introduced to the internet, they are taught how to keep themselves safe online. They have regular opportunities to discuss current affairs. Pupils know about other faiths and cultures. They are highly respectful in discussion.

Pupils' life experiences are further enriched, for example, through visits to the local area, London and abroad. Seventh- and eighth-grade pupils benefit from an increased emphasis on potential careers. For example, pupils start to experience work possibilities through 'tasting' sessions and hearing from visitors. This helps them to understand varied future possibilities. Pupils spoke of their current aspirations, including to become vets, plumbers or teachers.

Staff check regularly whether any pupil needs extra help. This includes, for example, providing suitable support for any pupil who does not learn to read as quickly as their peers. The school's high expectations of all pupils fully extend to those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Working closely with parents and carers, the school is prompt to identify pupils' needs. Individual learning plans offer appropriate, workable support strategies. These are regularly reviewed and often show demonstrable impact. Where they do not, the school works patiently to unpick why and try a different approach, linking with other professionals where necessary. There is an impressively high level of satisfaction among parents for the school's SEND work.

The youngest children quickly develop excellent habits for school, for example sustaining focus and attention to tasks. This includes being engrossed in their own activities and working with adults. In lessons across the school, pupils concentrate and apply themselves extremely well. Attendance rates are exceptionally high. The school pays close attention to sustaining this.

The school's promotion of pupils' personal development, and the opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests, are exceptional. Younger children in the kindergarten are extremely well provided for personally, socially and emotionally. Promotion of their physical development is similarly strong. The school harnesses the diverse range of specialist expertise and facilities that exist within the community for the benefit of all pupils. Rich and varied experiences are deliberately included as part of an extended school day. This means that every pupil consistently benefits from this excellent work.

The proprietor provides effective oversight and invaluable support for the successful running of the school. Parents are overwhelming in their praise of the school and how it engages with them. Staff readily signpost how the school promotes their well-being and ensures that work demands are reasonable. The proprietor has

established a reliable systematic approach to reviewing all aspects of the school's work. An education committee provides a helpful additional layer of governance. The school meets the independent school standards and the relevant requirements of the early years foundation stage. This includes compliance with paragraphs 3 and 4 of schedule 10 of the 2010 Equality Act.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school is in the process of strengthening further the curriculum in some areas to ensure that it consistently matches the school's ambitions and high expectations of pupils. Some changes are very recent and have not had time to make a sustained difference to pupils' learning and progress. The school should ensure that new approaches are securely established and embedded so that pupils achieve exceptionally well across the curriculum.

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	10391709
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Church Communities UK
Chair	Bernard Hibbs
Headteacher	Mark Huleatt
Annual fees (day pupils)	0 to £4,000
Telephone number	01580 883 300
Website	www.darvellschool.co.uk
Email address	SchoolDVL@ccimail.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 to 3 November 2022

Information about this school

- Darvell School is situated within the Darvell Bruderhof community at Darvell, Brightling Road, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5DR. 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's curriculum is based on the curriculum provided by the Bruderhof for use in Bruderhof Schools around the world.
- Darvell School is registered for pupils up to the age of 16. However, usually the oldest pupils are in the eighth grade, which is equivalent to national curriculum Year 9. The vast majority of pupils at Darvell transfer to the proprietor's other school in Kent from the age of 14.
- The executive headteacher works across both of the proprietor's schools. The school also has its own principal, who was new to post this academic year.
- The school has an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage. The school's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten include children from ages four to six.
- The school does not use any 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team met with the chair of the proprietor body, a member of the school's education committee, the executive headteacher and principal. They also met with other leaders and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, geography and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, 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.
- The inspection team also discussed some other subjects with leaders and staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors examined various documents and records relating to the independent school standards. They also checked arrangements for the health, safety and well-being of pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Perkins

Ofsted Inspector

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