

# Charles Darwin School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	101675
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bromley
<b>Inspection number</b>	307775
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 September 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Anne Feltham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1306
Sixth form	204
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Spencer Roberts
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Robert C Higgins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Jail Lane Biggin Hill Westerham TN16 3AU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01959 574043
<b>Fax number</b>	01959 540036

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, accompanied by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Charles Darwin is a much larger than average, popular comprehensive school, located in an area with many selective schools. The majority of students come from the local Biggin Hill area but nearly a third come from Croydon and Bromley to the north. Numbers of students eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The percentages of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and of those with statements of educational need, are above national averages. The school community includes students with visual impairment, speech and language, and emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are low, but increasing, numbers of students from Black and other minority ethnic groups in the school. There is a very small number of students whose first language is not English. The school is an established specialist college for performing arts. It has also won awards in many areas including Investors in People, Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and information and communication technology.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Charles Darwin School is a good school, which serves its community very well. It has many excellent features, including its outstanding sixth form. The headteacher, described as 'outstanding' at the time of the previous inspection, continues to lead the school in an exemplary way; he is widely viewed as both 'inspirational' and 'open'. Students say that he listens to them. One colleague spoke for many when he described the headteacher's highly effective 'nurturing' which enables less experienced teachers to develop into effective teachers and, often, leaders. Following a period of severe shortfall in the senior leadership team, the school now has a new and highly effective extended top team. Governors describe this as having an 'energising and dynamic effect' on the school, resulting in excellent senior leadership.

The school is implementing effective measures to raise students' achievement in Years 7 to 9, which are now beginning to show an impact. Having recognised underachievement in these years, the senior team has galvanised colleagues, students and parents to make rapid improvements. During a period of recruitment difficulties in key specialist areas, the school had prioritised work in examination groups from Year 10 to Year 13. This strategy secured important qualifications, based on consistent good progress, for older students, but contributed to progress amongst younger students slowing down. During this last year a full senior team and more stable staffing, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, have led to better teaching and learning for younger students. This is resulting in improved progress, which is now satisfactory or better throughout Years 7 to 9.

The quality of teaching and learning is now good overall, and in some areas outstanding. Strong classroom practitioners, including advanced skills teachers, are coaching other teachers in raising achievement in their classrooms. Successful teacher recruitment has now resulted in a skilled and dynamic staff. Subject leaders are increasingly aware of their responsibility in monitoring the work of their teams. There is now fast developing consistency of approaches to planning for students' progress. The school still has further to go, however, in ensuring that all teachers explain the purpose of lessons clearly to their students and set appropriate targets to improve their learning in the future.

Senior leaders and governors have an excellent knowledge of their school's strengths and weaknesses, and self-evaluation is honest and effective at all levels. School leaders have established a vibrant community in which students gain progressively in confidence from the outset and as they move through the school. Students are proud of their school, and older students particularly mention extra-curricular sporting and arts opportunities. The parental community is generally supportive of the school and confident in its ability to prepare students for success in life. As one parent said, speaking for many, 'My daughter was very shy and not confident about her ability before coming to the school. Now she is doing well and is a lovely, confident young woman.'

### Effectiveness of the sixth form

#### Grade: 1

The sixth form, a key area of the school's improvement in recent years, is outstanding. Standards have risen and progress has improved significantly so that both are now above average. Students make good progress in their lessons and greatly enjoy their sixth form experience. They make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community through, for example,

supporting younger students and the donations they raise for charity. Students express themselves with confidence, knowing that their views will receive a prompt response. They are well prepared for future work and study, both through the qualifications they achieve and the skills of team working and problem solving they gain. Teachers know their subjects well, and establish very good working relationships with their students, although some sixth-form lessons are too teacher-directed. The school is constantly developing its excellent curriculum to provide a suitable match with students' individual needs and interests. The very wide range of, and high participation in, extra-curricular activities are also outstanding. Students feel extremely well supported. The school has established very robust systems for monitoring students' performance and intervening where necessary. This has led to significant rises in standards and in attendance. The school provides excellent guidance, in collaboration with a range of agencies, for careers and higher education, as well as information to help students cope with the demands of independent life. Sixth form leaders show extremely high commitment to ensuring that students perform to the best of their ability, and to promoting their personal development and well-being. They have managed to create a very positive atmosphere where success is celebrated and any underachievement firmly, but supportively, challenged.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards by the end of Key Stage 3.
- Ensure that students are clear about the purpose of lessons and that they have clear targets to help them improve.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Students join the school with broadly average standards of attainment. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards have been average to below average over the four years up to 2007. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 improved in 2008 and are now more in line with national averages for pupils of all abilities. The percentage of pupils gaining higher levels is improving in core subjects. By the end of Year 11 standards have been above average on most measures in recent years. Provisional 2008 results show 48% of students gaining five or more A\* to C at GCSE including English and mathematics. School data show that students' attainment in English, mathematics and science in 2008 has improved in Key Stage 4 from the previous year.

Evidence from the inspection also indicates further progress being made in the first three years of students' schooling, so that it is now at least satisfactory in all subjects, and particularly improved for higher-attaining students. There has been a history of slower progress with these Key Stage 3 students but they catch up lost ground in Years 10 and 11 where progress is consistently good. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities do at least as well as their peers and many exceed expectations. Most school targets were met, or almost met, last year.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Students report that the school is a safe place and that they enjoy their education. Behaviour in lessons during the inspection was consistently good, although a few students and parents think that discipline could be improved in some classes. Attendance has improved over the past year so that absence is more in line with national averages. The number of students excluded from the school has declined considerably in recent years as a result of the introduction of two specialist units, one in school and the other off-site, that succeed in keeping the small minority

of disaffected pupils in education. Students feel that their views are taken seriously. They emphasise that school leaders listen to them: the 'student voice' systems are strong and they have confidence in the school council's effective contribution to the community. They appreciate the opportunity to elect the head boy and girl. Students in this predominantly White school have an informed view on diversity and there is a strong ethos of respect and cohesion. The school's very effective strategies to welcome Year 7 students into the school result in parents saying their children make a happy and confident start to their secondary schooling. Year 7 students are already participating in lessons with enthusiasm and confidence. Students make a good contribution to the school community, for example through the recent creation of a mural with a powerful message against knife crime and the school's excellent performing arts links.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

In most lessons learning is good and occasionally outstanding. This is because teachers have high expectations of their students; they challenge them and make constant efforts to encourage them to take responsibility for their work. The progress students make in most lessons is good. Where the pace of learning is slower, it is because the teacher tends to tell the students answers and questioning is less demanding and searching. Most lessons, however, proceed at a lively pace. There are good opportunities for group work and independent learning is encouraged. Teachers' questioning is skilful and is designed both to reinforce and extend knowledge and understanding. Students are encouraged to solve problems for themselves. They are given good opportunities to explain and evaluate and to develop their knowledge and understanding. Teachers generally plan their work in detail but there is a tendency for planning to concentrate on tasks rather than what will be learnt. What students are expected to learn is not always made clear enough. Learning is enhanced, however, by the wide range of assessment techniques used by many teachers.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students are offered good curriculum opportunities. In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum has been modified to ensure more teaching time is given to English, mathematics and science. This is an integral part of the school's drive to raise standards in Key Stage 3. Some enterprising developments have also been made in the teaching of information and communication technology, with innovative cross-subject partnership teaching. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has been planned to secure further improvements in standards and meets the students' varying needs well. Curriculum planning is good. However, the school recognises that some further refinements are needed, for example in developing the provision for modern foreign languages, where the number of students continuing with the subject beyond Year 9 is currently too low. The provision of extra-curricular activities is good.

The school is a successful performing arts college. Students have benefited from the greatly increased opportunities that specialist status has offered, and the school has identified, and is addressing well, the areas needing further support. The students appreciate the many and varied opportunities for music and drama and many report that they like to take part in school productions. Community work has also been enhanced. The school works well with a number

of education partners in both the primary and secondary sector. Students and staff also work successfully together with many community groups, ensuring that the specialist facilities are widely used. Events as diverse as amateur dramatics and samba classes for the local Women's Institute bring school and local residents together. Specialist status has been integral in promoting community cohesion, especially in the local community.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's robust systems ensure that good academic and personal guidance go hand in hand. Parents of Year 7 students comment on how the staff have helped them to settle in quickly. Students' personal development is a high priority for the school and staff respond to concerns promptly. The needs of students who struggle with their work are identified early, intervention is effective and so they progress well. Students who are partially visually impaired, who have speech difficulties or who present challenging behaviour receive appropriate support and they make good progress. The very small number of students who are learning English as an additional language get effective support and thrive. Extensive steps are taken to ensure students' safety. Vulnerable students are sensitively supported with good links established with outside agencies to guide and support them. Risk assessment is rigorous for both the school building and when students go on visits. Child protection procedures are firmly embedded and all staff have received appropriate training. Any racist incidents are logged and appropriate action taken. The school looks after its increasingly diverse groups of learners well. Students and parents from its Black and minority ethnic communities praise the school's inclusive approach. Students confirm the school's policy of 'zero tolerance' of racism.

Teachers' marking of students' work is good. It tells them what is good about their work and what are the next steps in learning. Students are also given opportunities to assess their own learning. Procedures for tracking students' progress are well established but the information is not used consistently to set challenging targets to further improve standards.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The leadership and management of the school are good overall and some features are outstanding. The senior team now monitors classroom work closely and current good teaching and learning reflect the impact of this strategy. Subject leaders mostly demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and they track pupils' progress in their subjects to set targets for improvement. Although this practice is not yet fully consistent in all subjects and in all classes, clear procedures are in place. Subject leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to raising achievement. Most are clear about what needs to be done to improve the work of their teams, although there is variation in the degree to which they have achieved success. They feel well supported and effectively challenged by senior colleagues, and all report a sharper focus on work in Key Stage 3 over the last year. Good line management arrangements have contributed well to raising the quality of subject leadership.

Senior leaders have intervened effectively where weaker teaching has been identified. Support staff, such as teaching assistants, are well deployed and play a key role in raising achievement. Governors have developed a closer involvement with the school since the previous inspection, and support and challenge effectively. They act as 'critical friends' and have a keen awareness

of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Partnerships with the local community are strong and students and staff benefit from a range of networks. Students are involved with presenting a positive image of the school. The school acknowledges that the development of national and international partnerships needs to be taken further.

Recognising underachievement in some key areas, the school has made up much ground in a short period of time. Improving further the quality of provision in Years 7 to 9 is now a priority for the school and there are clear signs of rising achievement in the current cohorts. The development of the sixth form reflects the school's capacity to identify and implement improvement rapidly. Strong leadership, which has the support of the wider school community, means that it has good capacity for further rapid improvement.



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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

30 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Charles Darwin School, Westerham, TN16 3AU

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to let you know the judgements we made about your school. First, thank you for your warm welcome. We enjoyed meeting you, listening to your views about school life and watching you at work. Your confidence impressed us!

Your school is a good school, with excellent features, which offers you many opportunities to develop as confident citizens and prepares you well for the future. You talked to us about your pride in the school and the opportunities it offers you. Charles Darwin's sixth form is outstanding, and this provides a real incentive to you all to work hard and move successfully through the school.

Your headteacher and his senior team have rightly pinpointed your work in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 for improvement and they are working with your teachers to help you make faster progress. Your progress as you move up through the school, to GCSE and further qualifications, increases apace and we were impressed with this. We were also pleased to see how much you benefit from the school's specialist status in performing arts and from work in ICT.

We have agreed that the school should prioritise work on improving overall teaching and learning at Key Stage 3. Teachers can help by sharing with you exactly what you will learn from each lesson and by setting you individual targets for improvement.

As more students come to your school from the wider world, you will be increasingly prepared to live and work in the international community. We wish you all well as you continue to work hard and aim high!

Yours sincerely

Anne Feltham

Her Majesty's Inspector