

Darvell School

Independent school light-touch inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mike Thirkell

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.^{1, 2}

This was a light touch educational inspection which focused principally on: the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Darvell School is an independent school of particular religious character, situated in Robertsbridge, in East Sussex. Owned by Church Communities UK, a registered charity, it was established in 1971 for the purpose of educating children whose parents are members of the Christian community within which it is situated. The school is registered to take up to 120 pupils between the ages of six and 16 and there are currently 62 boys and girls attending between the ages of six and 14. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs, but the school provides support for three pupils with varying degrees of special educational need. The school was last inspected in December 2007. The school aims involve 'educating the whole child and inspiring in them a love of learning and service to others'.

Evaluation of the school

Darvell School provides a good quality of education which successfully meets its aims. The curriculum provides pupils with a varied range of activities, including careful attention to developing literacy and numeracy skills. Teaching is good and occasionally of outstanding quality. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils say that they enjoy school and this view is reflected unanimously in comments received from parents. They are well cared for and all matters relating to their safeguarding are rigorously attended to. The school meets all regulations for registration as an independent school.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and is supported by appropriate subject planning, which is enriched by reference to the history and traditions of the community. The curriculum, which is broadly based on the subjects of the National

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Curriculum in the United Kingdom, reflects many features of schools in the United States. In addition to the emphasis it places on literacy and numeracy, the school also teaches science, social studies, history, woodwork and physical education. Information and communication technology is strictly controlled in accordance with the religious principles of the school and the internet is not used. The provision of personal, social and health education is in line with the aims and ethos of the school. Schemes of work are detailed and, along with planning, incorporate a suitable preparation for pupils' future lives and decision making. Religious education is not taught as a separate entity but elements are incorporated into all areas of study where it is relevant to the subject. Literacy and mathematical skills are further developed by their incorporation into other subjects such as social studies. Pupils frequently sing songs in other languages but there is no formal provision for teaching a modern foreign language.

The school places strong emphasis on the individual. For example, it seeks to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs through a balance of one-to-one work outside the classroom and an inclusive atmosphere within. Pupils are able to learn and make progress because the curriculum draws on the rich learning environment which surrounds the school and provides some good opportunities for pupils to draw on their own experiences. The curriculum is further enhanced by a wide range of community-related activities such as horse-riding, sports such as football, and gardening. Classroom activities are enhanced by the prominent display of pupils' efforts around the school which emphasises the school's ethos that every pupil should do his or her best. There are opportunities for all pupils to do well in the range of extra-curricular activities, although occasionally there are too few opportunities planned in lessons to provide extended learning tasks for more-able pupils.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teaching is occasionally of outstanding quality. Teachers work hard and are committed to ensuring that pupils of all abilities develop a love of learning in a calm and supportive classroom environment. Pupils of all abilities make good progress, including those with special educational needs. The school's systems for supporting the outstanding progress made by pupils with special educational needs are notable and strongly reflect the school's commitment, its values and those of its community. Pupils say that their teachers are always willing to provide help and support.

Teachers have suitable expertise to teach the subjects of the curriculum. This is supported by good opportunities for teachers to discuss learning opportunities for each class and to review the strategies they use in their teaching. The headteacher monitors classroom activities regularly and so maintains good contact and dialogue with teachers. Teachers plan their lessons carefully. Questioning is used effectively in lessons and teachers ensure that it is used to ensure the involvement of all pupils in the class and, in general, it is well pitched to pupils of varying levels of ability; for example, to challenge the most able and to encourage those pupils who are less confident or who find a topic difficult.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. This ensures that lessons are conducted in a positive atmosphere and support pupils of all abilities in developing an enjoyment of learning. Behaviour is invariably good and pupils show clear respect for their teachers. They are keen to ask as well as respond to questions during classes. Their response in lessons is open and unselfconscious, for example, in a circle time/social studies lesson in Year 2 where joyful and robust singing of songs from around the world provided an effective start to the day. Teaching demonstrates good classroom management skills. Teachers understand the importance of listening to what their pupils have to say as well as expecting to be listened to. Teaching and learning are supported by a suitable range of resources.

Assessment is good with some significant strengths, for example, the school maintains detailed records of pupils' progress and effective systems are in place to ensure that teachers receive the necessary information with which to plan their lessons. Folios of work provide an effective way of monitoring the progress of pupils with more complex special learning needs. There is a suitable framework for assessment established that sets out clearly the school's expectations with regard to the marking of pupils' exercise books and feedback about their work. The good quality of assessment is supported by the small size of classes which enables teachers to discuss their work regularly with each pupil individually. There are excellent opportunities for teachers to discuss the pupils' progress regularly with parents. There are four formal meetings between parents and teachers annually and three reports on progress provided through the academic year. Overall, reports are of good quality but the amount of detail contained within each subject report, on what level a pupil has attained and what they need to do to improve further, varies.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and reflects the Christian values and beliefs of the school's community. It emphasises the school's key aim to develop the whole child, their relationships with others and a developing recognition of the importance of caring for others. It reflects pupils' expressed enjoyment of their learning experiences and their developing sense of service within their own community and the local as well as wider world community. Spiritual development is at the core of the pupils' personal development, as reflected in religious assemblies, singing joyfully, moments of reflection, as well as care for others. Attendance is good.

Pupils in the school demonstrate high levels of care for their peers. Older pupils show care for those younger than themselves and this strength is particularly notable in pupils' involvement in the support given to their peers with learning and/or physical disabilities. A wide range of activities contribute to pupils' growing self-confidence and self-esteem. Care is taken to use praise and encouragement in all activities. Structured outdoor activities encourage a sense of self-reliance. The school regards these activities as opportunities for developing the inner strengths of individuals.

Very good links are established in the local community, including with local maintained schools. The school is visited by various members of the local community, for example, a police officer, who contributes to the pupils' developing understanding of the law. This is strongly supported by the school's own guidance and example to support pupils' developing sense of right and wrong. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they show well-developed social skills relative to their ages.

Pupils develop knowledge of other cultures through geography and other subjects. Their school and community are composed of people from different cultures. They sing songs from around the world, notably in German, and have the opportunity of eating Korean food provided by a parent. Social studies involves studying South America, in particular Paraguay, where the community has historic ties. The Christian values and beliefs of the school provide a strong reinforcement of attitudes of living in harmony and of tolerance towards those of different heritages and cultures.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

All matters relating to pupils' safeguarding, welfare, health and safety are good and are supported by comprehensive policies. Policies and procedures relating to health and safety are carefully prepared and pupils are confident and feel safe. Supervision is good and reflects the care provided by the community. Fire drill procedures are regular and recorded. Staff are suitably trained in child protection procedures. The school is meticulous in its procedures for checking that all staff employed meet the appropriate requirements to ensure they are suitable to work with children. All adults employed are members of the community. All details of checks made are kept, as required, in a single central register. The small numbers in each class, allied to the school's concern for the individual, mean that staff know pupils well and give them close attention and supervision. As a result, pupils feel confident about talking to staff if they have any difficulties. Access to the curriculum and support is good. The school buildings are sound and well maintained. The school fulfils its duty with respect to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended with suitable plans to increase access.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Consider how planning can provide, more consistently, for extending the learning opportunities of more-able pupils.

- Consider adding to the opportunities for recognising the rich cultural heritage of the school by introducing the study of the German language.

Inspection judgements

Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Christian		
Date school opened	1971		
Age range of pupils	6–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 34	Girls: 28	Total: 62
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	N/A		
Address of school	Darvell Community, Brightling Road Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5DR		
Telephone number	01580 883300		
Email address	BernardHibbs@ccimail.com		
Headteacher	Mr Simon Manke		
Proprietor	Mr Bernard Hibbs		