

Darvell School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	845/6003
Unique Reference Number	114646
Inspection number	320347
Inspection dates	11-12 December2007
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Darvell School is an independent school for children of nursery age (1 – 4) and pupils aged from 5 to 16. Opened in 1971, it is situated in Robertsbridge, East Sussex, and serves the Darvell Community, a distinctive religious community, with an Anabaptist heritage dating back to the 16th Century. The proprietor is Church Communities UK, a registered charity. This is the school's first published inspection and there are 114 pupils on roll.

Evaluation of the school

Darvell School provides a good quality of education with several outstanding features. The pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching and a relevant curriculum. The pupils' behaviour and personal development are excellent. The quality of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school meets all regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good and is effective in meeting the school's aims which are underpinned by a commitment to the service to others for the common good. The school's strong Christian ethos permeates its provision. The curriculum is good and is supported by appropriate schemes of work. The content is drawn from several sources, including guidance for the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum from England and other material from the United States of America. In Key Stage 4, the main focus is on GCSE requirements for English, mathematics, science and modern world history. Other lessons include researching significant writers and the development of life skills. There are currently no options for older pupils to exercise a choice of study. Almost all pupils achieve at least 5 good passes in GCSE examinations.

The school places a strong emphasis on the development of the 'whole child' in addition to basic skills in literacy and numeracy. This is successfully achieved by lessons in personal, social and health education and citizenship, physical education, dance, music, art and history. Careers education and guidance is largely given informally, supported by close involvement with families. There is also a strong

vocational element provided by regular access to the school's own community, where the pupils make a positive contribution to daily life.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and this results in pupils and children in the nursery making good progress across the curriculum. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils, with whom they enjoy excellent relationships. Skilled questioning ensures that pupils and staff know how much has been learned. Lesson planning takes good account of pupils' previous learning, their age and interests. Teachers have access to individual education plans for pupils with learning difficulties and these mostly contain good reporting and targets. Assessment is good, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where pupils follow GCSE courses. In earlier years, assessments are made according to the school's in-house system. The school does not currently use this data to predict GCSE success.

Pupils have a good dialogue with teachers through marking. There are some good examples of marking where pupils receive specific guidance about how to improve. The pupils' presentation of their work is a strength of the school and reflects their strong commitment to study and excellent attitudes to learning. Where pupils are encouraged to reflect and assess their own work and that of their peers, learning is very effective.

The headteacher and governors have a good overview of the quality of its provision although the systematic evaluation of whole-school academic achievement is at an early stage.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. Pupils' spiritual development is promoted very effectively through regular opportunities to reflect upon their lives and their faith. Moral issues are woven into many areas of school life and pupils play an active role and understand their responsibilities to others and to the environment. They respond very well to the school's ethos of service to others for the common good. They show very good social skills at break times and close friendships are evident. Visits to other schools and hosting visitors complement this aspect very well. The combined emphasis on vocational service and academic success provides well for both the pupils' individual economic well-being and that of the Darvell community.

Pupils show a well-developed awareness of tolerance, harmony and respect for a multi-racial community. Their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding and they clearly enjoy being at school. During 'prep-time' they choose which homework to complete, which they do diligently. Other opportunities for choice, for example opting for subjects in the final years, are limited. The 'buddy system' is well regarded and ensures that all pupils feel safe and respected. All

accept responsibilities for helping the school and community to run smoothly, for example, maintaining the School Community Garden where they prepare plots and harvest food to be served at mealtimes. They gain a good understanding of British institutions, including visits to law courts and the Houses of Parliament. Their cultural development is promoted very effectively by visits to the wider community, including music events, for example, the 'Kids for Peace' project, where they perform to great acclaim locally and abroad. The pupils' singing regularly permeates the school and is enjoyed by all.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The small numbers in each class and the evident regard for individuals means that the pupils receive close attention. The curriculum provides many opportunities to promote the pupils' welfare, health and safety, notably the adoption of a healthy life style and the importance of staying fit. Where necessary, pupils have good access to therapies, including speech and language, physiotherapy and occupational therapy to address their specific educational and learning difficulties or disabilities.

The school's policies take account of recent guidance and are effective in promoting the pupils' health, safety and welfare on site and whilst on visits to the community. Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding are good. Pupils indicate that they feel confident to talk to staff if they have problems. The school's policies regarding the promotion of good behaviour and administration of first aid are implemented effectively. Accidents and incidents are rare, nevertheless they are recorded in detail and are followed up appropriately.

Routine attention to health and safety is good. During the inspection, a small number of minor health and safety observations were brought to the school's attention. Registers of attendance are maintained regularly and the school's recent attention to its admissions register has ensured that it now contains all the required information. The school has given appropriate regard to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor has appropriate safeguards to ensure that the pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment procedures are informed by the most recent guidance and include the maintenance of a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are good and are conducive to safe and effective learning. There is an abundance of classrooms and specialist areas for art and music. All classrooms, particularly in the main building, have more than

adequate space for the numbers in each class. Teachers make good use of walls to display pupils' achievements and other useful information to support learning. The school libraries and hall are used well to support research, physical education and cultural events. Designated rooms are available for therapists and there are sufficient offices for administration. The medical room caters for pupils who are ill during the school day. The premises are very well maintained and are in good decorative order.

The outdoor provision is outstanding. The extensive grounds afford numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation and safe play using high quality equipment in the 'Peace Park' and the lake enables the pupils to study science and technology topics. Excellent use is made of the community's facilities to encourage vocational skills including animal husbandry and agricultural skills. The wider community is accessed on a regular basis to provide pupils with a breadth of social and cultural experiences.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information is good. The school maintains excellent communication with parents through daily contact, progress meetings and homework books. The quality of written academic reports, including those for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, is good overall. However, occasionally some give too little feedback about pupil's gains in knowledge, understanding and ability.

All parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and indicated that they are very satisfied with the work of the school and information received from the school. The inspection findings agree with the parental view. One parent commented "teachers work hard to build positive partnership with parents .. they teach the whole child .. my child is now confident as a result of the teaching."

The school prospectus is currently under review. The school's policies, some of which have been subject to recent revision, meet all of the requirements and are all available for parents on request.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and its procedures for handling complaints are set out clearly to ensure that they are understood and they meet all of the requirements. The school has not received any formal written complaints in the last year.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all requirements.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- make more systematic use of the information held about pupils' progress throughout the school to enable clearer evidence about the effectiveness of the provision
- introduce an element of choice of study for its older pupils, including more formal careers education and guidance.

School details

Name of school	Darvell School
DCSF number	845/6003
Unique reference number	114646
Type of school	Christian
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1971
Age range of pupils	1-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 61 Girls: 53 Total: 114
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ n/a
Address of school	Darvell Community Brightling Road Robertsbridge East Sussex TN32 5DR
Telephone number	01580 883300
Fax number	01580 883317
Email address	petermaas@mailstack.co.uk
Headteacher	Mr Arnold Meier
Proprietor	Church Communities UK
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell AI
Dates of inspection	11-12 December 2007