

Charles Darwin School

Jail Lane, Biggin Hill, Westerham, Kent TN16 3AU

Inspection dates

24–25 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Exam results are good in an increasingly wide range of subjects; students make good progress.
- Teaching is typically good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers have high levels of commitment and strong subject knowledge which underpin effective learning.
- Teachers and students have high levels of mutual respect. This has resulted in a positive learning atmosphere across the school.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and during social time. Students are well cared for and feel safe.
- The governors, headteacher, senior leaders and other leaders and managers are ambitious and driven in their pursuit of excellence. Their efforts are evident in terms of good-quality teaching, resulting in good achievement.
- Attendance has improved continuously since the academy opened. The need to use fixed-term exclusions has reduced and the exclusion rates are low compared with schools nationally.
- The sixth form is good. Good teaching results in extremely well-motivated students and good achievement. Students are very well prepared for higher education, training or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of lessons where the teaching is outstanding is too low. Although expectations and challenge have risen significantly, some teachers do not provide all students with opportunities to extend and develop their thinking.
- There are still a few weaknesses in teaching and learning and not all actions taken by all leaders result in rapid improvements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 53 lessons, of which seven were observed jointly with senior staff.
- Discussions were held with groups of students from different age groups.
- As well as evaluating students' written work and teachers' marking during lessons, a selected sample of books was also scrutinised by inspectors.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, the headteacher, senior staff and middle leaders.
- Inspectors evaluated school documentation, including information on 2013 GCSE and A-level results, students' current progress, the curriculum and improvement plans, as well as procedures and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of 107 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 55 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors studied the school's self-evaluation and achievement tracking procedures.

Inspection team

Philip Storey, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jane Ladner	Additional Inspector
Andrew Lyons	Additional Inspector
Samuel Ofori-Kyereh	Additional Inspector
Gill Walley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Charles Darwin School converted to become an academy school in April 2011. When its predecessor school, with the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good. The headteacher was appointed in September 2011.
- The school is larger than the average secondary school.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. Approximately a tenth are from minority ethnic groups. A very small proportion of students, less than a quarter of the national average, speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who receive support at school action is slightly below national average. The proportion of students who are supported at school action plus, or who have statements of special educational needs, is above the national average.
- At Key Stage 4, fewer than ten students attend off-site provision at Skills Xtra as part of the curriculum. This provides students with work-related skills in preparation for their future career choices.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be entitled to free school meals, looked-after children and those from service families) is below average. Currently, there is one service family child and the number of looked-after children is low.
- Less than one fifth of Year 7 students are eligible for catch-up funding, which is for pupils who did not achieve the expected level in reading and/or mathematics at the end of primary school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons where teaching and learning are outstanding by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have a strong focus on providing greater challenge, particularly for the more able students
 - creating more regular opportunities to develop independent learning skills.
- Strengthen the impact of the school's plans, by all leaders ensuring that best practice is adopted consistently by all teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the academy with attainment broadly in line with national averages. As a result of good teaching, close monitoring and well-targeted support, the large majority of students make good progress and achieve well by the end of Year 11.
- Students' performance in GCSE mathematics, English and, more recently across science subjects is particularly strong. The proportion of students achieving five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, has accelerated over the last two years.
- There has also been a significant reduction in the variation of GCSE performance across subjects over the last two years as a result of improved teaching. However, although the percentage of students achieving A*–C grades is typically above national averages, the percentage of students achieving A and A* grades is generally less favourable. School leaders do not ensure that all teachers have the highest expectations and are equipped with the skills to challenge the most able students.
- All students with special educational needs make good progress in most subjects, including English and mathematics. This is due to an appropriate curriculum, good teaching and effective additional literacy support, particularly for reading.
- In its second and third years with academy status, the school has provided additional tuition for targeted students supported by the pupil premium and ensured that they have appropriate resources to secure good progress, particularly in English and mathematics. These students now achieve well and their results have improved in English and mathematics.
- Students receiving the pupil premium in 2012 to 2013 attained above national average point scores in GCSE English and mathematics for this group of students. Also, during the same period, the progress of these students closed the gap on other Year 11 students both at the school and nationally.
- Generally, the majority of students are not entered for GCSE examinations early. However, in exceptional circumstances early entries are available for some students. The school ensures that this does not limit the final grades achieved.
- The small number of Key Stage 4 students who take the Skills Xtra course develop important skills so that they are well prepared for further training or their first step into the world of work.
- The school works well to improve reading skills for students with low Key Stage 2 attainment (most of whom are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding), as well as for those who speak English as an additional language. This has had a marked impact on these students' confidence and how well they access learning across the curriculum.
- The small number of students who speak English as an additional language make progress above the national average for these students.
- Sixth form students make good progress and achieve well, so that they are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment. In a very few subjects, where achievement patterns have been less consistent, senior leaders are taking action to address the causes. As a result, rates of progress for most groups of students are accelerating and achievement is rising.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is typically good and sometimes outstanding in English, mathematics and in several other subjects. Teaching is particularly effective in the sixth form. Teaching was outstanding in a sixth form mathematics lesson on trigonometry because the teacher used extremely skilled questioning to challenge students of all abilities. Students were highly motivated and had the confidence to take risks as a result of the teacher's infectious enthusiasm and supportive approach. Students were encouraged to articulate their thought processes and they made rapid

progress.

- Marking is a strength at Charles Darwin School. The overwhelming majority of teachers provide students with regular and useful written feedback which helps them to accelerate their progress.
- Homework is set and marked regularly. However, at times, it does not meet the needs of all students. For example, homework is occasionally not challenging enough and the written feedback is too general, particularly for the most able students.
- Teaching assistants achieve the right balance of support and challenge for targeted students.
- Reading and writing skills are supported particularly well in English, humanities and during form time. Students have sufficient opportunities to practise their literacy skills and specific additional support is provided where appropriate.
- When teaching is good, teachers:
 - use highly skilled questioning to stretch and check thoroughly students' understanding before they embark on productive and enjoyable group work
 - plan carefully to match work to students' different abilities and needs
 - set up well-organised teacher-supported learning activities which promote good progress
 - provide a wide variety of interesting and thought-provoking tasks which encourage students to develop and express their ideas.
 - circulate around the classrooms giving effective support through guiding questions.
- In lessons where teaching is less effective:
 - learning activities are not sufficiently inspiring or challenging and the pace is too slow, particularly for the more able students
 - teachers do not provide sufficient time during lessons for students to find things out for themselves and work independently
 - a few teachers' questions do not check students' understanding thoroughly or give students enough challenge.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school provides a calm and welcoming environment where students are polite and thoughtful. Students move around school sensibly and safely.
- Students' relationships with staff are good and high levels of mutual respect are very evident. This is a direct response to the high quality of care and support staff provide.
- Students' attitudes to learning are positive and behaviour is good. Occasionally students lose concentration in class, but teachers intervene promptly and appropriately, maintaining the constructive relationships already established.
- Sixth form students have a tremendous thirst for knowledge.
- Students feel safe, happy and enjoy coming to school. The school has effective procedures in place for monitoring and improving attendance and consistently focuses on those students who regularly miss school. As a result, attendance continues to improve and is in line with the national average.
- The school's records show that the use of fixed-term exclusions is below the national average and declining. The school has high expectations of students and sets clear boundaries to ensure that the school community is settled and productive. Effective support is in place to address any potential behaviour issues.
- Bullying, particularly discrimination, is rare and the school deals effectively with the few incidents that do occur. Students and staff are very aware of how to deal with bullying; good procedures are in place. Students know about different forms of victimisation, such as cyber bullying, racism and homophobia, as well as how to keep themselves safe.
- Students say that behaviour has improved in recent years and that it is now good.

- Parents who responded to Parent View said they would recommend the school. They feel that there is a high standard of behaviour at the school and agree that their children are kept safe.
- Staff who responded to a questionnaire were extremely positive about students' behaviour and feel proud to work at Charles Darwin School.

The leadership and management are good

- Since his appointment, the headteacher has had a striking impact on the students' achievement and the quality of teaching. He leads with drive and a steely determination to achieve high standards across all areas of the school. Together with his senior and middle leaders, a few of whom have been appointed recently, the headteacher is relentless in eradicating any identified weaknesses. This has resulted in rapid and sustainable improvements in most areas.
- All school leaders are aware of what needs to be done to further improve outcomes for the more able students. However, not all of them ensure that all teachers are fully supported so that the achievements for most able students are maximised.
- The headteacher has created a cohesive, positive and hard-working school community which strives to improve. Staff morale is high.
- The school offers a broad range of subjects focusing mainly on academic qualifications. There are also well-targeted vocational programmes, such as health and social care and business studies, to support students' aspirations. Students are provided with clear and detailed guidance and support so that they reflect carefully on their choice of GCSE and A-level subjects, and consider further education colleges or other schools for post-16 provision. This means that the proportion of students continuing in education, employment or training is significantly higher than the national average.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is well developed in assemblies and through a wide variety of lessons in English, particularly media studies, art and music. The school actively promotes equality of opportunity.
- A comprehensive range of school trips, sporting activities, school productions, fund raising opportunities and an enrichment week make a positive contribution to this aspect of students' personal development.
- The quality of teaching is monitored closely. School leaders' observations about the quality of teaching are accurate.
- Arrangements for managing teachers' performance, together with a bespoke training and development programme, have been effective in improving teaching. Only those teachers who meet the required high standards move up the salary scale.
- The management of safeguarding, and the provision for students with disabilities and those with special educational needs, is impressive. Statutory requirements are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are astute and provide good support and challenge for the headteacher. They are particularly effective at organising staffing and finance, with a strong focus on raising achievement. This results, for example, in highly constructive use of the 2012 to 2013 pupil premium to maximise the achievement of those students eligible for the funding.
 - Members of the governing body ensure that the performance of staff is monitored and they take well-considered actions to ensure salary progression and promotions are linked to teachers' performance.
 - Governors are kept very well informed about students' progress, the quality of teaching, behaviour, attendance and exclusions. The budget is managed very effectively.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136545
Local authority	Bromley
Inspection number	425631

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,335
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Spencer Roberts
Headteacher	Sunil Chotai
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01959 574043
Fax number	01959 540036
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