



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Little Downsend Leatherhead

March 2023

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School's Details

School	Little Downsend Leatherhead			
DfE number	936/6435			
Address	Little Downsend Leatherhead 13 Epsom Road Leatherhead Surrey KT22 8ST			
Telephone number	01372 385437			
Email address	littledownsendleatherhead@downsend.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Vanessa Conlan			
Chair of Governors	Mr James Carroll			
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Limited			
Age range	2 to 6			
Number of pupils on roll	111			
	EYFS	99	Year 1	12
Inspection dates	7 to 9 March 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Little Downsend Leatherhead School (previously known as Downsend Pre Preparatory Leatherhead) is an independent co-educational day school. It has been administered by Cognita Schools Limited since 2006. Oversight is provided by a team appointed by the proprietor, led by a general manager. The school is one of four schools in the Downsend Schools family. The others are Downsend School, Little Downsend Epsom and Little Downsend Ashtead. The school has an Early Years (EYFS) for pupils aged 2 to 5 and Year 1 for pupils aged 5 to 6.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to inspire achievement, nurture individuality and capture each child's inner curiosity to enable them to become lifelong learners. It aims to develop resilience and character, to have pupils embrace the future as global citizens and aspires to equip pupils with the ability and the mindset to tackle the technology of the future. It also aims to encourage an awareness and an understanding of the world around us, with a responsibility to make change.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds and live locally. The school's own assessment indicates the ability of pupils is average. The school has identified nine pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include speech and language and epilepsy, all of whom receive additional support. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for nine pupils, whose needs are supported by individual help, small group work or books in their home language. The school modifies and extends the curriculum for pupils it has identified as the most able and provides opportunities for enrichment beyond the classroom.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
First Steps (for children aged 2 to 3 years)	Nursery
Rising Reception (for children aged 3 to 4 years)	Nursery

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils demonstrate an excellent attitude to learning from an early age and throughout the school.
 - Older pupils demonstrate excellent information, communication and technology (ICT) skills.
 - Pupils have excellent communication skills.
 - Pupil of all ages and abilities make excellent progress from their varied starting points.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils have an extremely mature understanding of the importance of making good decisions.
 - Pupils make positive contributions to the school and the wider community.
 - Pupils have an excellent understanding of what it means to keep safe.
 - Pupils are confident, resilient and understand that making mistakes is part of learning.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
- Enable the younger children to develop their independent use of ICT.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils throughout the school make excellent progress. By the end of the EYFS, a very large majority of children achieve a good level of development in the early learning goals having made rapid progress from their starting points. Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve well due to the high levels of support and timely procedures for intervention. Work seen in books confirms that progress is rapid, and achievements are high. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that

the school effectively meets the pupils' educational needs, and that teaching enables their child to make progress.

- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate high proficiency in their levels of knowledge, skill and understanding across the curriculum including in music, sport, outdoor learning and French. Pupils are ardent story writers and tellers, as in their response to 'The three Little Pigs'. The youngest pupils listen well, and all pupils engaged enthusiastically in their French lesson, showing ability to communicate using basic French words and phrases about the big bad wolf through games and songs. Skills develop well as pupils move through the school, supported by imaginative approaches to ensure pupils gain an excellent and secure grasp of basic numeracy. In music, composition and singing add to their knowledge and skills. Pupils are able to play their ukuleles, sing in tune very well and understand the convention of singing to music at all times of the day. In science work, pupils demonstrated excellent understanding of properties of materials when assessing the best waterproof material for an umbrella for a Teddy and in outdoor learning when making a den out of sticks for one of the three little pigs. Pupils also demonstrate an excellent ability to be creative and use their imaginations when recreating key features of paintings by Monet and Van Gogh.
- 3.7 Pupils display highly advanced communication skills for their age. They listen well to one another and are able to express themselves clearly in the course of class discussions. All pupils willingly answer questions in class and are keen to express their views. Literacy skills are very well developed with pupils demonstrating their ability to write well in a range of genres from poetry, reporting, descriptive and creative writing, to play scripts. In Year 1 pupils wrote poems and some of these will soon be published in a national poetry book. Pupils' reading skills are of an exceptional standard and they have an excellent grasp of phonetic spelling and punctuation. Children in Reception, for example, made excellent progress in spelling, and were able to discuss 'ch' words sensibly. They responded eagerly with well-developed oral skills and the confidence to ask questions and risk answers. Writing displayed throughout the school demonstrates a creativity and empathy more usually seen from pupils in much older years. Reading and writing skills are developed by carefully planned writing projects and by giving the children the opportunity to express themselves independently. Pupils enjoy reading their own stories aloud and recording them on their devices. The school's family atmosphere and its ethos of valuing what pupils have to say, promotes open communication across the school. Thoughtful planning, and an emphasis on cross-curricular work, ensures that many opportunities are provided.
- 3.8 Pupils demonstrate a robust understanding of numeracy and have an excellent grasp of mathematical skills which they apply confidently in problem-solving. Mathematical skills develop well as pupils move through the school, supported by imaginative approaches to ensure pupils gain an excellent and secure grasp of basic numeracy. Pupils in Rising Reception showed a high level of competence as they participated in creating the correct number of legs for an octopus and in Reception with use of the correct positional language in map-making. Reception children demonstrated excellent understanding when using positional vocabulary for their Bear Hunt work. During pupil discussion there was an enthusiasm for mathematics evidenced in all year groups with most pupils expressing confidence in the subject. Pupils' mathematical skills and understanding is mature. They progress rapidly through their time at the school, from simple counting to secure multiplication and calculating skills, based on real comprehension of number. Their rapid progress is founded on a well-planned and appropriate scheme of work, followed sequentially by all the staff and reinforced by the pupils' excellent attitude to their studies and developing their number skills.
- 3.9 Older pupils show excellent ICT skills at a level far beyond their years, which they use to undertake software challenges to enhance their writing, deductive and numerical skills. The teachers use tablets as a valuable tool to enhance and reinforce pupils' learning and to encourage independent thinking and experiment. Older Nursery children independently coded programmable robotic toys. Children in Reception successfully recorded each other describing their favourite book character. Year 1 pupils created books using text, sound and pictures. The leaders of the school have been accepted into a national digital innovation programme which satisfies one of the aims of the school of 'aspiring to

digital mastery by equipping themselves with the ability and the mindset to tackle the technology of the future'. Clever use of robotic bees to learn simple ICT skills and controls were seen allied to bridge building construction skills in Reception. Pupils are extremely confident in the use of ICT as seen, in Reception where QR codes are available for them to independently access storybooks to read. Younger children are not yet able to access digital storybooks to independently read and create stories related to their current learning.

- 3.10 Pupils show willingness to apply their learning skills when faced with new challenges. The song writing after-school club enables them to create a new song each week on a theme, employing composing skills. The school's ethos of 'self-belief leads to success' instils in the pupils the value of trying hard, not giving up and not being discouraged by their mistakes. This has provided pupils with the confidence to embrace any challenges they face such as in a reception ball-throwing activity. Work at differing levels to match ability and effective use made of improvement points in the excellent marking, provides challenge and targets, encouraging pupils to think independently and apply their learning to new situations. From the earliest stages, pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and make independent choices.
- 3.11 The school celebrates the pupils' successes and makes them feel that they are valued. Pupils are proud of their many achievements, whether they be reading a story in class or receiving a certificate in assembly and explaining what it is for. Certificates are given for a wide range of success both in and out of class. All Nursery parents are able to send in 'Wow!' moments and these indicate a wide range of achievements accomplished out of school. Pupils also described how they value helpful comments and targets given in their books. The school's governance and leadership has ensured that pupils have sufficient opportunities both to expand and to excel in their personal interests, successfully meeting the stated aim of encouraging an awareness and an understanding of the world around us, and our responsibility to make change.
- 3.12 Pupils have an excellent attitude to learning as seen when observed engaged in activities and listening well to their teachers. Exceptional staffing ratios mean all pupils have attention and support which helps maintain their focus and engagement. Pupils show they can work well together. Their behaviour in class is excellent and this is underpinned by the teachers' careful planning and insistence on full concentration and polite respect for each other. Lessons are skilfully managed, and the use of praise and encouragement creates a positive atmosphere, as does the opportunity given to the children to share their achievements.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils display extremely high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. The family atmosphere, epitomised by the mutual respect and warm relationships evident in the classroom, encourages pupils to be open in expressing their thoughts and feelings and to risk making mistakes. They show considerable maturity as they acknowledge that hard work is the route to success and appreciate the support and guidance they receive from their teachers. They show resilience when thwarted, such as when a child's spaghetti tower broke and with a sigh she started again immediately. Pupils are learning to play well together and to experiment with an excellent selection of toys and larger play equipment, even on a snowy day in a useful outside covered area. The regular and significant periods of time spent outdoors in the wooded area and playtimes, combined with participation in physical activities, support both the physical development and mental health of the pupils. They chatted confidently, expressing their positive views on school life.
- 3.15 Pupils recognise the importance of a healthy lifestyle and are aware that the choices they make regarding exercise and diet could determine their own good health. Pupils understand via Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons that the decisions they make will affect them. For example, when studying Martin Luther King's *My Dream*, pupils had to decide what they would like to change

for the world as a whole, not just for themselves. Creativity and independence are valued by the staff, who encourage pupils to make decisions in class, such as which story book to read, or which activity to choose. Opportunities to make decisions are seen everywhere, from early years, such as deciding what activities to use to help the goats cross a bridge, to Year 1 where pupils decide what information to add to their story book challenge on screen.

- 3.16 Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of empathy and value fellow members of their school community. They are given opportunities to develop an understanding of their own and other faiths through regular PSHE lessons and assemblies. Their understanding is deepened through consideration of the positive contributions made by famous people such as Nelson Mandela and Mary Seacole. Nursery children confidently performed songs for the Mother's Day concert, taking pride in thanking their mothers. Pupils show a sense of wonder at the power and magic of dramatic stories. The teachers encourage this sense of wonder and pleasure in the pupils' school experiences in the outdoor learning area. School values are emphasised and added to during PSHE lessons and assemblies.
- 3.17 Children from the youngest years demonstrate a strong awareness of right and wrong, both within and outside school. They are very well behaved, show kindness and tolerance towards others and often go out of their way to look after each other. This was observed in their interactions, the way they welcome visitors to the school and the friendly ethos that pervades the corridors and classrooms. Teachers encourage moral behaviour, for example setting targets for pupils to improve their own performance in sport, rather than worrying about competing with others. In PSHE, pupils maturely discuss British values and respect for others' beliefs. They accept when they are wrong and are encouraged to see the other side of an argument.
- 3.18 Pupils clearly understand the benefits of collaboration and teamwork and are quick to recognise each other's successes and to offer help and encouragement where needed. They demonstrate excellent table manners at lunchtime. The whole ethos of the school, is about sharing and caring, looking after each other and helping their peers. The school has adopted a national scheme to promote language and communication, which includes social development such as eye contact and how to speak to others. Of those parents who answered the questionnaires, all feel the school helps their child to develop strong teamwork and social skills. Pupils respond sensitively to the performances of others, celebrating their achievements. The school encourages pupils to work together to achieve their goals, using group work, such as telling or enacting stories and pair work in solving a challenge set by a puppet hedgehog to create a winter den in the outdoor area for him to hibernate in.
- 3.19 Pupils discuss how fortunate they are and consequently are willing to support charities in the local community and beyond, such as bringing food for food banks, donating a book, baby items for a charity and stationery for Ukraine. Year 1 pupils all sit on either the school's eco-committee or school council, giving them the opportunity to experience leadership and decision-making discussion. The eco-warriors, as they call themselves, undertook a litter pick, collected used batteries, recycled plastic bottle tops, and held a cake sale. As a result the school was awarded an Eco School Green Flag. Pupils enjoy making an effort for others' enjoyment, as in their Mother's Day song. The leadership and management actively encourage this approach by urging pupils to do their best to contribute fully to the school community.
- 3.20 Pupils of all ages embrace each other's differences and completely accept and value each other, irrespective of faith, cultural background, ability and needs. They present as caring individuals who genuinely look out for and care for each other. The school actively supports respect for diversity through PSHE, assemblies and classroom discussion and management. Pupils understand this well and accept that everyone may be different, but all are equally important. Pupils have excellent attitudes to helping and valuing each other as seen in a Rising Reception mathematics lesson when all children helped each other with programming the robotic toys to follow a route. Pupils' understanding of their own and others' cultures is developed through a range of activities such as reading poems to the mayor at the local Remembrance Day celebrations. Many parents come into school and give talks on their own religious festivals and cultural celebrations, thus adding to the promotion of diversity.

3.21 Pupils clearly feel safe in the school environment and know what steps they need to take to keep themselves safe both within and outside school, whether working online using devices, if there is a fire, or out on the road. Pupils understand well the importance of a good diet and exercise for health. The school aims to provide a balanced and healthy diet during the day. Pupils develop their gross motor skills well through highly effective dance and drawing exercises to strengthen muscles needed for writing tasks, such as correct pen grip, using chalks and ribbons. Year 1 pupils greatly improved their coordination skills when throwing and catching balls in a PE lesson. They clearly enjoy singing to movement and spoke confidently about being able to share worries with the worry monster in each classroom.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registrations and an assembly. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Daphne Cawthorne	Reporting inspector
Mr Richard Curtis	Compliance team inspector (Housemaster, HMC school)
Mrs Jeanette Adams	Team inspector (Former deputy head, IAPS School)