



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Little Downsend Ashtead

March 2023

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School's Details

School	Little Downsend Ashtead			
DfE number	936/6548			
Address	Little Downsend Ashtead 22 Oakfield Road Ashtead Surrey KT21 2RE			
Telephone number	01372 385439			
Email address	ashteadpre-prep@downsend.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Vanessa Conlan			
Chair of Governors	Mr James Carroll			
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Ltd			
Age range	2 to 6			
Number of pupils on roll	67			
	First Steps	30	Rising Reception	19
	Reception	7	Year 1	11
Inspection dates	7 to 9 March 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Little Downsend Ashtead is an independent co-educational day school situated in Ashtead in Surrey. It is one of three similar pre-prep schools that form part of Downsend School, Leatherhead and is owned by Cognita Schools Limited. Oversight is provided by a team appointed by the proprietor. Downsend School and Little Downsend Leatherhead were inspected at the same time as this school. The school has four year groups: First Steps for pupils aged 2 to 3 years; Rising Reception for those aged 3 to 4 years; Reception and Year 1. The head, who also oversees the other Downsend pre-prep schools, was appointed in September 2020.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to inspire its pupils to be global citizens, aware of the world around them and who take responsibility to change it for the better. It seeks to enable pupils to develop the emotional intelligence to build strong relationships, to be creative and innovative and to have the digital skills to master the technologies of the future.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a diverse range of professional families mainly living within a three-mile radius of the school. The school's own assessment framework indicates that the ability of pupils is average. The school has identified four pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), such as speech and language delay, three of whom receive additional specialist support. One pupil has an education and health care (EHC) plan. Two pupils identified as having English as an additional language (EAL) receive support when necessary. The school modifies and extends the curriculum for pupils it has identified as the most able in its population.

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.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils are highly focused and enthusiastic, ready and willing to learn.
 - Pupils are eloquent, having outstanding communication skills for their age.
 - Pupils have excellent numeracy skills which they apply successfully across the curriculum.
 - Pupils are deeply knowledgeable and highly creative with a strong appetite for learning.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils are highly collaborative and readily celebrate each other's achievements.
 - Pupils' behaviour is outstanding as a result of a calm, nurturing and warm environment.
 - Pupils have a mature understanding for their age of how to stay safe and well, mentally and physically.
 - Pupils have excellent strategies for making improvements in their learning.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
- Enable pupils to further improve their creativity by deepening their responses to stimuli and broadening their technical skills, such as drawing and painting.

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 achieve extremely highly as a result of teachers' skilful and focused provision that successfully enables children of all abilities to make strong overall progress. At the end of the Reception year in 2022, a very large majority attained a good level of development. Pupils at the end of Year 1 also achieve very high standards. The school's own assessment data confirm that in English and mathematics, pupils in Year 1 achieve well above average for pupils taking similar tests nationally. Pupils with SEND and EAL make strong progress in line with their peers as a result of the highly specific support provided by leaders and other adults in lessons. The most able pupils make outstanding progress as a result of the highly tailored provision that ensures they are further challenged by teaching that extends and deepens their knowledge and skills. Pupils make excellent short-term

progress in lessons. For example, children in Reception developed their knowledge of sounds and letter combinations to spell and write simple words on the board.

- 3.6 Pupils have outstanding attitudes to learning. They demonstrate high levels of motivation, engaging with focus and enthusiasm in lessons. Reception children maintained strong levels of concentration when undertaking a *Jack and the Beanstalk*-themed art activity. Pupils are attentive to the directions they are given, readily acting on instructions with the minimum of fuss and a significant degree of enthusiasm. For example, Rising Reception children willingly used a dust pan and brush to sweep up soil spilt from an activity tray. Pupils in Year 1 are highly productive in lessons, completing large amounts of work across the year, as seen in their English books. Pupils are resilient, for example when they persevered with practising their leg kicks in swimming to improve their front crawl stroke technique. Pupils' positive approach to school is a significant contributory factor to their overall success in learning across the curriculum.
- 3.7 Pupils are extremely articulate for their age, engaging and communicate with adults and peers with confidence and self-assurance. They have well-developed reading skills as a result of teachers' high expectations and skilful planning. For example, more able pupils in Year 1 accurately read with expression a letter to the class from a bear inviting them to join a bear hunt. They exhibited achievement which exceeded the expectations for their age. Success in reading, throughout the school, is underpinned by pupils' strong knowledge of letters, their combinations and the sounds they make. For example, Reception children's excellent knowledge enabled them to accurately identify and write simple words starting with 'sn', such as *snail*, on the white board. Pupils' writing is outstanding for their age and successfully enables them to demonstrate their innate creativity and curiosity. They develop well-formed handwriting and show strong regard for the rules of grammar and spelling, supported by teachers' thoughtful and helpful feedback. Pupils accurately apply their proficient communication skills across other areas of the curriculum. For example, Rising Reception children made highly appropriate use of descriptive vocabulary in their responses to questions to help them find and then describe smooth and bumpy items in their outdoor learning area.
- 3.8 Pupils are competent and confident mathematicians. They show fluency in counting, demonstrating ease and comfort in their use and manipulation of numbers. Rising Reception children demonstrated strong knowledge of numbers up to fifty. Their ability to successfully identify the number of items in front of them by just looking and not counting them is above expectations for their age. Pupils complete simple calculations to a high level of accuracy using appropriate mathematical symbols. For example, pupils in Year 1 used 'less than' or 'greater than' symbols when comparing quantities. Pupils successfully apply their understanding of mathematics across other curriculum areas. For example, First Steps children made appropriate use of comparative language when building bridges for the *Billy Goats Gruff*, describing them as bigger than, smaller than, longest and strongest.
- 3.9 Pupils have detailed knowledge, skills and understanding well above age-related expectations, supported by a strong appetite for new knowledge. Pupils exploit their curiosity to successfully broaden and deepen their scientific knowledge. For example, Year 1 pupils' knowledge of materials enabled them to accurately describe a variety of different objects using the correct scientific vocabulary. SEND pupils achieved in line with their peers, correctly identifying a cloth bag as being flexible, soft and opaque. Pupils are extremely successful in French lessons. For example, they demonstrated strong knowledge of the correct vocabulary for the days of the week and different types of weather which they accurately used in simple spoken sentences. Pupils demonstrate strong musical skills, as demonstrated by Year 1 pupils' successful rendition of *Row, Row, Row the Boat*, whilst accompanying themselves on ukuleles to a high standard for their age. Pupils are physically well-coordinated for their age. For example, Rising Reception children's excellent hand-eye coordination enabled them to use scissors to accurately cut out pieces of paper to create a montage of different types of food. Pupils are highly creative in art and engage with high levels of enthusiasm. They demonstrate vivid use of colour and expressive intent in their responses. Their drawing and painting

skills, however, are not always sufficiently well developed to enable pupils to fully express themselves successfully in their art work.

- 3.10 Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are put to highly effective use across different areas of the curriculum, successfully meeting the school's aim to help pupils develop strong digital skills. Pupils are adept and confident when using tablet computers. For example, pupils in Year 1 skilfully used an application to create non-fiction books on topics such as 'how to grow a sunflower'. They make confident use of digital tools to enable them to review and improve their learning. For example, when children in Reception independently recorded thoughtful responses to questions posed by their teacher about their individual science projects. First Steps children effectively demonstrate age-appropriate coding skills, for example, when they created simple instructions to guide programmable robots around their classroom.
- 3.11 Pupils have secure study skills and demonstrate mature skills of analysis for their age. For example, children in Reception successfully recognised differences between examples of letter-combinations being studied in a literacy lesson compared to those from prior learning. Pupils demonstrate strong reasoning skills. For example, pupils in Year 1 accurately determined the likely properties of hidden materials based only on the sounds made when they were struck by a hard object. Pupils' learning is significantly enhanced by their willingness to reflect on how they could improve. For example, Year 1 pupils identified sensible next steps they could take to further improve their swimming, such as practising diving. Pupils can use learning in different contexts to synthesise new ideas appropriately. For example, Year 1 pupils applied their secure understanding of place value and the inequality symbol to correctly solve a complex problem in numeracy.
- 3.12 Pupils achieve considerable success outside of the formal curriculum for their age. For example, in discussions with inspectors, pupils explained with eagerness how much they enjoyed taking part in the song writing activity. Children in Reception and Year 1 showed excellent engagement and enthusiasm in the after-school outdoor learning club. Pupils have achieved individual success outside of school in ballet, swimming, gymnastics and go-karting. For example, pupils play football and rugby at local clubs, regularly winning awards for skilful play. Pupils, supported by the school, have taken part in regional and national art competitions and have successfully participated in national writing competitions to celebrate World Book Day.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' social development is strong for their age. They recognise and readily celebrate each other's achievements, as when Reception children enthusiastically praised a peer's accurate spelling in literacy. Pupils interact well with one another and with adults, forming strong relationships based on respect and courtesy. These underpin their highly successful collaborative skills in lessons. For example, Rising Reception children successfully worked together practically and effectively to solve simple subtraction problems in a numeracy lesson. Pupils strongly develop their ability to identify and express their emotions. They successfully use the language of reconciliation and how to give or withhold consent. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school helps the children to develop strong teamwork and social skills. Inspection evidence confirms this to be true.
- 3.15 Pupils' behaviour is excellent as a result of the thoughtful and considered approach of staff. This encourages pupils to be honest about their emotions and reflective about their actions. Pupils have clear regard for the school's routines and regulations and take responsibility for their actions when they make mistakes. They have a good understanding that rules are there to keep them safe. In discussions with inspectors, older pupils explained that having rules gives them a framework to know how to avoid making mistakes in the future. The school fulfils its aim to enable pupils to develop the emotional intelligence to build strong relationships.

- 3.16 Pupils reflect effectively on their experiences and use this to influence future decision making. Children in the EYFS make successful and personally challenging choices of activities in free-flow sessions. Children in Reception make uninhibited choices when dressing up, showing mature disregard for cultural biases, celebrating and accepting the freedom to be different in their choices.
- 3.17 Pupils are highly tolerant and inclusive of one another, showing ready acceptance of each other's differences in abilities and preferences. They engage enthusiastically when learning about cultures and faiths different to their own. For example, pupils in Year 1, when sharing their work with inspectors, accurately explained the meaning of candles and crosses as artefacts and symbols important to those with a Christian faith. They also shared vivid and colourful art work representing displays of fireworks, reflecting their appreciation and interest in the Hindu festival of Diwali.
- 3.18 Pupils have excellent self-understanding for their age. They have a keen awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and show perseverance and determination in overcoming challenges. For example, First Steps' children demonstrated strong resilience when they fell over during outdoor play, cheerfully picking themselves up and brushing themselves down without making any fuss. They have a mature understanding that success is born of hard work. Rising Reception children persisted determinedly, through numerous attempts, to master how to write the figure 8. They cheerfully corrected their own and others' mistakes. They are self-confident without being arrogant, readily sharing their enthusiasm for learning with those around them. Pupils have a sensible regard for risk, as when using outdoor apparatus. They are bold when taking risks in their learning, recognising that making mistakes is part of the learning process. Pupils have a strong awareness of their emotional state and develop successful strategies for regulating their emotions. In questionnaire responses, all parents agreed that the school helps their children to be confident and independent. Inspection evidence confirms this view.
- 3.19 Pupils are strongly aware for their age of how to stay safe and keep healthy and have an age-appropriate awareness of how to stay safe online. They engage enthusiastically with physical activities, such as swimming and the many sports offered by the school. Pupils have a good understanding of the need to include vegetables and fruit as part of a healthy diet. They develop an excellent capacity to self-monitor and express their emotions, far above the expectations for their age. This is strongly modelled by staff through a variety of age-appropriate strategies that enable pupils to maintain strong and resilient mental health. Pupils are secure in their understanding of how and when to seek support, showing confidence and trust that when they ask for help, it will be given. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages their children to adopt a healthy lifestyle.
- 3.20 Pupils have a well-developed appreciation for the spiritual aspects of life. They have a strong affinity with the natural world as reflected in their interest in animals and engagement with outdoor learning activities. For example, Year 1 pupils demonstrated their concern for the environment in a two-way conversation with the International Space Station. They prompted the astronauts to confirm that the threat to the world's great reefs was being carefully monitored from space. Pupils have a mature aesthetic appreciation and are highly creative, describing art as the most beautiful thing they can think of. They take deep pleasure in the discovery of learning, for example when First Steps children expressed delight and joy when observing how water and flour interact when mixed in different ways.
- 3.21 Pupils readily engage with activities that contribute to others and their school. They take a full and active part in developing the school's provision through the school council. For example, pupils helped to develop new playground rules and secured new playground equipment. Members of the eco-committee have been successful in helping to improve the school environment by promoting litter picking and planting bulbs and seeds in the garden. Pupils take an enthusiastic role in fundraising events organised by the school. For example, pupils made donations to the local food bank, and contributed to and sold copies of a cook book to raise funds for a local charity which supports families in need. They willingly engage with members of the local community, for example, by singing with enthusiasm in a care home for the elderly at Christmas. Rising Reception pupils demonstrated their

appreciation of those who help within their community by writing expressive and thoughtful letters of thanks to the school's refuse collectors, which were gratefully received.

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 chairman of governors, and observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents and staff to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Matthew Lovett	Reporting inspector
Mr Shaun Wilson	Compliance team inspector (Bursar, IAPS school)
Dr Karen McNerney	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)