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Pam Walden  
Headteacher  
The Surrey Teaching Centre  
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Dear Ms Walden

### **Short inspection of The Surrey Teaching Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 22 September 2016 with Sue Cox, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in March 2012.

#### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. With quiet determination and unassuming devotion, you and your staff team have assured that the school not only continues to provide an outstanding quality of education, but has also gone from strength to strength. You and your leaders maintain exacting standards, provide clear-sighted direction and are scrupulously organised. Staff are exemplary role models, exuding calm and confident purpose in everything they do. In short, the school is an awe-inspiring place to work and learn.

You have acted fully upon recommendations made at the previous inspection. The school's support for pupils making transitions to their next schools and your outreach work with schools locally and further afield are now major strengths. The school has amassed a vast store of research and practical strategies to support children and young people with acquired brain injuries.

Pupils make excellent progress academically, socially and in their behaviour. Staff possess a deep understanding of the implications of an acquired brain injury on pupils' prior knowledge, understanding and memory. Teachers set work for pupils that is far from easy. Pupils gain hugely from a rich experience of using the senses to support their recovery, combined with fresh and inspiring challenges. As a result, pupils' attention and interest are captured and they are stimulated to work hard.

It is inspiring to observe pupils in lessons. They persist in working hard, respond in whatever way they can and make visible progress. Sometimes pupils tire through their efforts to learn, practise skills and communicate, but often keep trying because they have developed intrinsic habits of motivation and resilience.

Staff deeply enjoy their work and are genuinely and deservedly happy in the school. They feel completely valued and actively contribute to the school's forward planning and new initiatives. You wisely take staff's professional development seriously and their training in new skills is rightly a top priority. Staff are encouraged to take on leadership responsibilities, research and projects. Teachers, teaching assistants, therapists, care staff and psychologists work together as a united team. As with the leaders in the school, classroom staff are similarly modest about their own immense expertise and impressive accomplishments. Their whole focus is on the pupils in their classes, who sometimes stay only for a short time, so every lesson and experience has to be totally meaningful and move pupils forward. It is both humbling and heartening to hear staff talking about how they learn about their work from the pupils themselves. For example, one member of staff commented that, 'Working with each child gives us another layer of expertise.'

Parents say that they find it hard to put into words how they feel about the outstanding care, compassion and individual attention that their children receive. A parent who spoke to an inspector described the school's impact on his child as 'a miracle'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding policies and procedures take full account of the particular needs, injuries and vulnerabilities of the pupils in the school. Leaders maintain thorough and orderly records, which can be easily shared with appropriate agencies when necessary.

Staff fully understand the implications of particular concerns that may not immediately appear to be related to safeguarding. For example, they report concerns if pupils are displaying unexpected behaviour. Whether this is part of the pupil's particular brain injury, or a sign of neglect, abuse or bullying, staff pass on their concerns because they understand that such signs may point to risks of harm in a pupil's life.

Serious incidents related to safeguarding are rare, but staff and leaders are not complacent. All systems related to safer recruitment or the checks on staff employed in the school are audited and monitored by leaders, the local authority and members of the management committee. The school deliberately explores potential risk and safeguarding concerns in order to be prepared for the unthinkable. In this way, staff feel confident to report any worries and always put the needs of pupils first.

## Inspection findings

- A key priority for school leaders is to ensure that all staff keep their knowledge of pupils with acquired brain injuries up to date. Staff also benefit from excellent training and opportunities to lead. For example, you were recently supporting another school. Leaders and staff made the most of the chance to lead specific projects and take responsibility for the smooth running of the school.
- School leaders are unfailingly self-critical and always seeking to improve their practice. For example, leaders are currently exploring and evaluating new ways of assessing pupils. They are determined to ensure that their assessments of pupils' progress are useful and easily understood by any onward school placement.
- The school's outreach work is exceptional. Staff work closely with local schools and those further afield, providing expert support for pupils with undiagnosed brain injuries or impaired functioning. Teachers and leaders in these schools are provided not only with practical strategies to support their pupils and assure their learning and positive behaviour, but also a deeper understanding of how pupils learn and progress. One leader in a neighbouring school told an inspector that the level of specialist knowledge in the school was 'astounding'. A parent of a child who has now left the school but still receives ongoing support said that the school provides 'a level of service unlike any other'.
- The school's curriculum is built around broad themes in order to unite the school and create a sense of common purpose for pupils who may attend the school for a relatively short time. There is a strong focus on developing the pupils as people, restoring their sense of self and their awareness of their place in the world around them. To this end, leaders have ensured that the curriculum includes a calendar of celebrations of national and international events, different religious festivals and opportunities to be involved in the community. For example, a successful visit from a Paralympian hugely inspired the pupils. The school is filled with examples of pupils' artwork and compelling photographs of what they have achieved.
- Members of the management committee provide expert professional support and challenge to drive improvement. As one member said, 'Staff know how to answer our challenging questions.' Members of the committee visit the school regularly, set demanding targets and ensure that the future of the school is sustainable.
- Teachers are flexible in their approach, plan for the individual needs and interests of each pupil and make it their business to find out exactly what will open a door to learning.
- Staff watch and listen to pupils with laser-sharp awareness, seeking signs of communication, memory and learning. All staff fully understand that pupils who have a diagnosis of disorder of consciousness may comprehend more than their physical communication indicates. Staff are able to read the slightest sign that a pupil is responding, recalling information or making choices.
- Staff also provide an excellent running commentary on pupils' responses

and the learning taking place. Classrooms are rich with soothing talk and the development of concepts and vocabulary. As a result, pupils' consciousness of the world around them develops. Memories and learning are stored and secured.

- Staff are typically firm but kind with pupils, providing just enough push to stretch and challenge them beyond what might have been thought to be achievable. They ask pupils probing, logically sequenced questions to help them think, order their ideas and crystallise their learning.
- All pupils have access to interesting materials and up-to-date equipment to spark their interest, arrest their attention and stimulate their senses. Children in the early years have a wonderful environment filled with activities, toys and resources to give them an outstanding experience. Children energetically make the most of everything on offer inside the classroom and in the well-equipped outdoor area.
- Pupils make outstanding progress, irrespective of ability, starting point or the extent of their injury. The most important factor affecting pupils' progress is their acquired brain injury. Staff and leaders take careful account of pupils' attainment and ability level before their injury and make careful assessments of the current skills and understanding before putting together a highly personalised programme of learning with individual targets.
- Most pupils make enough progress to be successfully reintegrated into a mainstream school. Pupils' progress is regularly assessed and reviewed and all information about what they know, understand and can do is passed on to their next school placements. Leaders and staff continue links with their pupils' onward placements, supporting staff and parents with strategies to help pupils to continue their excellent progress.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the scope of the outreach work with other schools is further developed and extended.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Information about the inspection

- Inspectors focused on the following key aspects of the school's work:
  - whether the school's work to promote pupils' safety and protection is effective
  - how effectively the school prepares pupils for their next steps in their education, including return to mainstream school
  - the impact of the school's outreach work on pupils and leaders in other schools
  - pupils' progress from their admission to the school.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and the chair of the management committee. Inspectors also met with staff, including teachers, teaching assistants and members of the therapy and educational psychology team.
- Inspectors spoke on the telephone to parents, leaders from partner schools and a member of the management committee.
- Learning was observed in all classes. Inspectors evaluated information about pupils' starting points and progress over their time in the school. The school's planning for the curriculum was scrutinised.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding records and procedures.