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Mrs Sally Leach  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Leach

### **Short inspection of Epsom Downs Primary School and Children's Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 2018, 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 good in December 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have shown resilience and strong leadership through a period of significant changes in staff and recruitment difficulties since the last inspection. The difficulties meant that the school's intervention teachers and deputy headteacher became class based. This reduced the learning support available for pupils and the leadership support available to staff. During this time, there was also a substantial rise in the number of pupils who joined the school with complex additional needs. It is a strength of the school that it supports these pupils effectively to overcome barriers to learning. Staffing is now stable and teachers new to the profession or to the school are supported well by skilled mentors and school leaders. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is improving rapidly.

Your dedicated leadership inspires confidence in the whole school community. Staff morale is high and you have built a strong and united team. It is clear that all share your vision of excellence for the school. New leaders are already having an impact on standards in reading and writing. Pupils told me that the school is a happy, inclusive and exciting place to learn. They are proud of the school and appreciate how well the school supports them emotionally as well as with their learning.

You were rightly concerned about the dip in standards in reading in key stage 2 and in phonics in key stage 1. Staff training in the teaching of phonics, a raft of measures to raise the profile of reading across the school, and the use of good-

quality texts to inspire pupils' writing are having a positive effect on accelerating progress in reading and writing.

Pupils told me that they love school, and overall attendance is in line with national averages. Despite the school's 'above and beyond' support of some families, however, persistent absenteeism, although reducing, is still too high.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that the most able pupils were challenged sufficiently to enable them to achieve high standards. Since then, the school was the first in Surrey to achieve the National Association for Able Children in Education award. Previous strength in this area had dipped because of last year's staffing upheavals. The school is now in a much stronger position to focus on ensuring that all teachers use assessment information precisely to challenge the most able learners in reading and writing.

You were also asked to help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to write well and improve their handwriting. These pupils are supported to a high standard and current pupils are making good progress. Their emotional well-being is cared for particularly well by the school's support team.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that staff and governors, including those new to the school, understand safeguarding policies and procedures. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and regularly updated in line with current statutory guidance. The site is secure, with closed circuit surveillance and rigorous entry procedures. Checks on the suitability of staff are recorded in an exemplary way on the school's single central record. The school works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies when children are thought to be at risk. Leaders relentlessly pursue referrals for support and there are many examples of improved outcomes for children and families as a result.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, for instance from the risks posed by social media, and they understand how to stay safe online. They trust adults in school to listen to them and to act quickly and fairly in following up any concerns raised.

All absences are investigated thoroughly to make sure that they are not related to safeguarding matters. Overall attendance is now in line with national averages. The school is doing everything in its power to reduce the persistent absence of a small number of pupils, which remains stubbornly high.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the beginning of this inspection, we agreed to look at how effective safeguarding is and how well pupils attend and behave. We also agreed to check how well pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are achieving in reading, writing and phonics. Areas identified for improvement following the last inspection were

also investigated.

- The needs of pupils with SEND, including emotional or behavioural needs, are quickly identified, and specific programmes devised to support them. Excellent leadership of inclusion and a skilled team that delivers individual and group support programmes ensure that the majority of these pupils make expected or better progress in reading and writing.
- The curriculum promotes excitement and enthusiasm for learning. Pupils love enrichment activities such as gardening, learning practical skills at the school farm, studying first aid and taking part in numerous educational visits. These activities are used to stimulate writing, and outcomes in writing are improving throughout the school. Occasionally, however, teachers are too easily satisfied with the work produced by the most able pupils and, in some lessons, tasks are not matched sufficiently to their ability.
- Leaders have been quick to respond to disappointing results in reading at the end of key stage 2 this year. Displays abound about the importance of reading, and staff model reading for enjoyment throughout the school. Pupils love the 'reading retreat' area set up for quiet reading in each classroom. Home-school reading logs show that the less able pupils are heard to read regularly in school and increasing numbers of parents and carers are reading at home with their children. The school has invested heavily in good-quality texts, which drive curriculum themes, and in high-interest but easier texts for struggling readers. Pupils know which aspects of their reading they need to work on and leaders rigorously track individuals' progress to provide additional support where needed. As a result, the majority of current pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are making good progress and many more are on track to reach expected levels in reading in key stages 1 and 2 than last year.
- Pupils who read to the inspector were able to use their phonics knowledge to pronounce unfamiliar words correctly. The teaching of phonics in early years and key stage 1 is effective. The most able readers could explain their preferences for a favourite author or genre of book.
- Behaviour at the school is good. Behaviour management is a strength of the school. As a result, incidents of poor behaviour and fixed-term exclusions are reducing. Behaviour rewards and sanctions are clear and applied consistently. As a result, pupils understand exactly what is expected of them and are keen to please. Pupils feel safe, supported and confident that there is always a trusted adult with whom they can raise concerns. Pupils show a compassionate and mature understanding that some children need help to control their behaviour. Fewer numbers of fixed-term exclusions reflect the effectiveness of the behaviour policy and the expertise of adults who support the emotional needs of pupils.
- Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. They provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support to leaders. They regularly visit the school to see for themselves how improvement plans are progressing.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers make better use of assessment information, especially in planning writing lessons, so that the most able pupils are challenged to make even greater progress
- levels of persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils continue to improve to be in line with national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you, and your senior and middle leaders. I met with representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I observed the quality of learning with you in all year groups except for Year 6 pupils, who were on a residential visit, as well as the quality of teaching in intervention sessions.

I considered a range of evidence, including: the school's latest assessment information; the school improvement plan; leaders' self-evaluation; pupils' work; and child protection procedures and policies.

I observed behaviour before school and in the breakfast club, and the behaviour of key stage 1 pupils at playtime. As well as talking to pupils in lessons, I met with a group of pupils from different year groups to talk about their experience of school. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the day and viewed the 42 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.