

Lexden Springs School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115475
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357757
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Lucie Calow

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	94
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Jones
Headteacher	Jacky Wood
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Ten lessons were observed during which nine teachers were seen. A further five lessons were visited as part of learning walks. Meetings were held with the school council, with members of the school leadership group and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation form; monitoring logs for teaching and learning; school quality assurance documentation; a sample of student records; and a sample of policy documents. They analysed 42 questionnaires from parents and carers, 13 student questionnaires and considered 90 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

Whether there is high quality teaching across the school and the extent to which each student's needs are met within lessons.

- How the curriculum is structured to maximise students' progress.
- How senior managers ensure clear systems for internal procedures, including safeguarding, and the shared use they make of all available information.

Information about the school

All pupils at Lexden Springs have a statement of special educational needs, although the school also contributes to assessments for initial statements for a very few pupils from time to time. The majority of pupils have a severe learning difficulty and just under one third of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school also has a few students with more moderate learning difficulties in the sixth form. New students join the sixth form from other schools, both special and mainstream. Education for Key Stage 4 students from Lexden Springs is also currently made from within the sixth form. Most pupils at the school are White British with a small number from a range of other minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly more than the national average for mainstream secondary schools. There are more male than female pupils; approximately two thirds of pupils are male. The school has achieved several awards including Healthy Schools, Eco-schools, Sports Mark, and Inclusion Quality Mark. Work is currently underway to achieve Continued Professional Development Mark and Autism Accreditation. The school has recently opened a second site in the community, Holly Lodge, to extend its sixth form provision.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Outstanding care, guidance and support are the reasons why pupils enjoy coming to this good school. Enthusiasm for new experiences and trust in staff who support them are evident across the school. The exceptional way in which pupils are known and understood makes this school a warm, welcoming and deeply caring community. Pupils develop the best possible personal skills and this is exemplified in a relentless focus on communication, whether in the classroom, the corridor, the lunch hall or the pool. The use of symbols, objects of reference, signing and intensive interaction are fundamental features of all sessions where students have need of them. The school's physical and social health (PaSH) team ensure that advice from other agencies, such as the physiotherapist, is effectively delivered. Overall outcomes for pupils are outstanding because of the careful attention to their personal development. The school is good overall because aspects of provision other than care guidance and support are good, and because aspects of leadership and management range from satisfactory to outstanding.

In this school, cohesive action to bring about priority improvements delivers results. This can be seen, for example, in the outside forest walk area and in the opening of Holly Lodge. The school identifies its own new projects based on need, whether developing the grounds or focus days on curriculum areas, and pushes them forward to completion. There is a very strong school identity to which committed staff are proud to belong. The school's outstanding capacity to improve can be seen in the actions taken to meet key recommendations from the school's previous inspection and the drive of senior leaders to secure improvements. For example, the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved from satisfactory to outstanding. As a result, Lexden Springs provides an outstanding start to education for its youngest pupils. They are excited by all the creative opportunities provided for them and they make significant progress in their learning.

The sixth form provision is satisfactory. There have been recent changes to the leadership and management of this particular team and these leaders have been focused on establishing the new second site. Holly Lodge successfully opened at the start of this academic year and is already well organised. There remain some strategic developments to take place across both sites and they mirror those required in the school as a whole.

The curriculum is good because it is highly personalised to meet individual pupils' communication, emotional and behavioural needs. Support from non-teaching staff is effective. There are very many enrichment opportunities which inspire and engage pupils' attention. However, these highly effective aspects are not equally matched by a strong structure to the curriculum. As a result, lessons are sometimes planned around activity or module completion rather than around learning. When this happens, teachers and support staff adapt plans instinctively while the lesson is in progress to meet pupils' immediate needs. The curriculum is not consistently monitored to check that all students receive a

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balance of subject time according to their age and stage of education, or that course coverage supports, rather than detracts from, planning for pupil abilities.

Teaching is good. Inspectors saw a range of teaching including some that was outstanding. At its best, teaching is closely matched to individual learning targets and lively use is made of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils are encouraged to express opinions, as seen when teachers supply symbol prompt cards to enable comment on lessons, and to be as independent as possible.

Pupils make good progress and, in particular, their effective development of communication and social skills is evident in lessons. Progress in English, mathematics, science, personal, social and health and economic education (PSHE) and information communication technology (ICT) is tracked using a commercial package. The school also uses the Early Years Foundation Stage profile to track progress for pupils up to the end of Key Stage 2. For other areas of learning and development, the school has collected a range of information so that, on an individual basis, achievement can be celebrated and shared with parents and carers. Internal tools, such as individual learning plans, are reviewed by senior leaders for quality assurance. However, the school does not yet systematically bring all of this data together in a way which facilitates all leaders to make best use of it.

Attendance is low. Reasons for absence are known on an individual, daily basis but data are not scrutinised for patterns or regularly compared to national expectations. Intimate knowledge of, and work with, pupils' personal situations has led to some with the lowest attendance being able to come more often. During this academic year, the school has rightly identified attendance as an area of concern and has begun to address it at leadership and governor level.

Students feel very safe at school and are cared for in a close community where supervision is high. Partnership work is deeply embedded so that work with pupils with exceptional needs, and support to their parents and carers, are high priorities. However, commitment to strong partnerships has sometimes resulted in a lack of clarity around procedures. This means that the school is not always clear about its own responsibilities and accountabilities. Internal procedures for storing and passing information between key personnel are in place, but do not reflect best practice in all areas of the school's work. There is too much reliance on verbal communication and discussion. Risk assessment documentation does not yet embrace all possible 'what if' scenarios in the same depth as staff have thought these issues through.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the curriculum is structured to meet individual learning needs and that:
 - lessons are always planned for progress from pupils' academic starting points
 - routine monitoring ensures an appropriate balance for all students between enrichment activity and core skills relevant to their age and stage of education
 - accreditation routes are regularly reviewed in light of individual and cohort needs.
- Embed clear, shared lines of responsibility and accountability across all staff groups so that:

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- all leaders analyse and use available data to ensure that their action plans are based on deep insight into the most pertinent issues
- internal procedures, especially related to safeguarding, are clear, rigorous and efficient
- data on attendance are scrutinised and appropriate actions are taken to ensure all pupils attend as often as is possible.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils make good progress overall because teaching is good. The most evident area of progress seen in classrooms is the development of communication skills. Some pupils, such as those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, make very good progress from their starting points. Pupils have enormous confidence in school staff to keep them safe and this is reflected in the views expressed by parents and carers. They are proud of their school and fond of their teachers. Quality relationships are fundamental to the school's approach and can clearly be seen in classrooms. There is a calm and friendly atmosphere throughout the school. Inspectors observed pupils who sometimes present behaviour which challenges due to the nature of their disabilities. On most occasions pupils were calm and engaged: when challenging behaviour did occur, inspectors observed staff resolving the situation quickly and calmly. Pupils talk positively about the ways in which the school helps them to keep healthy. They have a sound understanding of diet and exercise relative to their abilities and know that some situations in everyday life can be dangerous, such as using sharp knives and negotiating traffic. Happy, secure pupils behaving as well as they can are able to make the most of the learning opportunities available to them.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers use their deep knowledge of individual pupils' needs to deliver good personalised teaching. Pupils' well-being is exceptionally well supported and the work of the school's physical and social health team is a key element of its success.

The school has made a wide number of community links which it uses effectively to bring new and stimulating dimensions to the curriculum, for example by having visitors in to share cultural celebrations. There are many special events, such as an ICT day and French day, to extend the curriculum. Exemplary displays around the school point to a wide range of experiences supporting the curriculum. The forest walk resource provides opportunities for exploration and outside experiences related to a range of curriculum areas.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders in this school are highly motivated to make the necessary changes and improvements to the benefit of their pupils. The success they have had can be seen in those issues highlighted for improvement in the school's previous inspection. Teaching by all staff, including that delivered by higher level teaching assistants, is regularly monitored and weaknesses robustly tackled. The school has taken on and successfully achieved large projects, such as the forest walkway and Holly Lodge. Morale among staff is very high. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, all said that they are proud to be a member of staff and all said they are involved with what the school is trying to achieve. The school community is highly cohesive and has established many strong community links, such as with local churches.

There have been several changes to the governing body and some recent new appointments. Training has either been provided or is planned for new arrivals. The governing body has suitably trained personnel, for example for safer recruitment. They have constructive relationships with staff, the vast majority of whom said they think governors do a good job. They are frequent visitors, for example in their link roles to the newly formed curriculum groups.

The school is effective in promoting equality because of the highly individual attention it gives to meeting individual pupil needs. This ensures that all pupils are supported equally well. Staff are trained to meet the specific needs of groups, such as those who require physical interventions or medical interventions, and those with complex communication needs.

While pupils feel exceptionally safe and staff provide excellent supervision, some internal procedures lack the robustness of best practice. All statutory child protection responsibilities are met, including suitable training for staff at all levels. There is rich multi-agency involvement.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Teaching for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is impressively creative, interesting and well paced. Classrooms and the outside space are exceptionally well organised to provide a wide range of learning opportunities. An excellent balance is achieved between learning through play and guided support. Well-prepared staff contribute to high-quality learning and care. Assessment on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is continuous and seamlessly carried out during activities. Parents and carers are well supported through transition periods and involved with their children's learning, for example, by sending in notes to add to learning profiles.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

The school has two sites for sixth form provision. Some students are based at the main school site and some at Holly Lodge. This is a house in the community making it well

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placed to foster acquisition of independent life skills, although it is too new for its impact to be fully evaluated. Progress for students overall is satisfactory and some students make better progress. Care, guidance and support and the development of social skills continue to be of high quality and focus. Teaching across the department is at least satisfactory and much of it is good or better. Accreditation is through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) for all students. School assessment continues through the commercial tool used in the main school, but is not yet used to analyse and compare the progress of different groups of students within the department.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

'I have nothing but praise for the headteacher and her staff, school to home communication is excellent, my child is very happy, safe and well cared for at the school.' This is how one parent summed up their feelings, and was typical of the comments received. All parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that their child enjoys school. The very large majority also felt well informed of their child's progress, although a very few did not feel that the school took account of their suggestions and concerns. Fewer still also felt that the school did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors were impressed by the close communication which exists between home and school and observed challenging behaviour being effectively and sensitively dealt with.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Lexden Springs School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 42 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 94 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	79	9	21	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	76	9	21	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	32	78	8	20	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	71	9	21	1	2	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	31	74	8	19	1	2	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	69	11	26	0	0	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	64	13	31	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	24	59	12	29	0	0	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	71	10	24	0	0	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	60	15	36	0	0	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	61	13	32	3	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	28	67	12	29	0	0	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	74	9	21	0	0	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lexden Springs School, Colchester, CO3 9AB

I very much enjoyed visiting your school this week with my colleague, Peter. Some of you met him as members of the school council. Thank you for doing that because it was really good to hear what it is like to come to Lexden Springs School. Thank you also for your questionnaires which were helpful.

We are very happy that you go to such a good school. The adults who help you care about you very much. They work hard to make sure you can communicate with everyone around you. Your school really knows how to get things done! Big and little projects happen all the time and we think that is fantastic. Those of you who are very young get a brilliant start to being at school.

We think your lessons are good and you do well in your learning. Some of you do not come to school very often. Sometimes that cannot be helped, but we want you to come as often as you possibly can so that you can have even more time enjoying all the interesting things that happen in school.

We have asked Mrs Wood and all your school leaders to make sure that they do some things to make your school even better. In particular, we have asked them to:

- make sure that what you are learning is always just right for you
- record everything very carefully and look at all the information they have about you to help them make the best possible decisions.

You can help too, by continuing to be just as enthusiastic and happy as you are and by remembering to behave as well as you can.

Yours sincerely

Lucie Calow

Lead inspector

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