

# Lexden Springs School

Halstead Road, Colchester, CO3 9AB

**Inspection dates** 16–17 January 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not all pupils are achieving as well as they should from their very low starting points on entry to school. Too few more-able pupils are achieving more than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- Too much teaching requires improvement and there is no outstanding teaching.
- Adults do not all work consistently with individual pupils in lessons to help them make rapid progress or inform them about how well they are doing.
- Occasionally, pupils are given low-level activities in lessons which do not extend their thinking.
- Behaviour requires improvement because sometimes pupils lose interest in learning and do not try hard enough. A significant number of parents are concerned about how the few incidents of bullying are dealt with.
- The school's view of itself is inaccurate and of little use to drive whole school improvement.
- The new systems for managing teachers' performance are not having enough impact on the quality of teaching or pupils' achievement.
- The governing body is not yet having a full impact on school improvement

### The school has the following strengths

- The amount of good teaching has improved in the last three months.
- A few pupils make good progress particularly in communication skills, personal development and physical development.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium make good progress as a result of good use of this funding.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress due to good leadership
- The sixth form is good and students make good progress.
- Pupils' safety is good because safeguarding is promoted well across the school.
- The new headteacher is providing a strong sense of direction and is ably supported by senior leaders and the new Chair of the Governing Body.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons jointly with senior leaders and saw all teachers teach.
- Inspectors heard a few pupils read and looked at samples of pupils' work. A few individual case studies were discussed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, staff with leadership responsibilities, the Chair of the Governing Body and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views by looking at 17 responses to the online survey, Parent View, and 62 responses to the school's most recent survey of parents' views. The lead inspector also held telephone discussions with five parents.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a variety of school documentation including the school website, safeguarding policies and procedures, the schedule of governors' visits and minutes of meeting held since the appointment of the new headteacher. They looked at self-evaluation and school development planning, risk assessments, records of behaviour and attendance figures. Inspectors also looked at pupils' progress over the last three years, jointly with a senior leader.

## Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Susan Cox

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Lexden Springs provides for pupils with a range of complex disabilities and special educational needs. The majority have severe learning difficulties, a significant number have profound and multiple learning difficulties and a few students in the sixth form have moderate learning difficulties. Many have additional special educational needs such as autistic spectrum disorders. Nearly all pupils have a statement of special educational needs and a very few are undergoing statutory assessment.
- Pupils at Key Stages 2 to 4 are mostly taught in mixed-age classes. There are five children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, nearly all of whom are in the Reception Year. New students join the sixth form from other schools, both mainstream and special.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. This is additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care or from families where a parent is in the armed forces.
- Students in the sixth form attend Colchester College and the Arts Café in Colchester for aspects of work-related learning.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant turnover of staff. A new headteacher was appointed in November 2013, and there are new acting senior leaders in post. A new Chair of the Governing Body, the fourth since the previous inspection, took up post last October.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching so it is consistently good, enabling all pupils to make good progress, by making sure that:
  - learning activities are always challenging to extend pupils' thinking
  - adults provide continuous feedback to each pupil they work with in a lesson so all pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their learning.
- Develop leadership and management by making sure that:
  - any bullying incidents are dealt with completely, so that pupils and parents are fully satisfied with the outcome
  - the school's evaluation of its work is accurate and is robust enough to drive school development planning
  - the recently introduced arrangements for managing the performance of staff based on the National Teaching Standards and pupils' achievements are secured in practice.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- It is inappropriate to judge pupils' attainment against national norms because nearly all join the school with very low levels of attainment. This is due to the severity and complexity of their disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Records of the progress of pupils over time show that a significant number of pupils do not make the expected amount of progress in English and mathematics. In recent years, hardly any pupils have made better progress than expected. Pupils' work also shows that not all pupils are achieving as well as they should.
- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the majority make good progress in the different areas of learning, especially in personal, social and emotional development, physical development, communication and mathematics.
- A few pupils in the rest of the school make good progress in developing their communication skills, in personal development and physical development.
- More-able pupils and those with additional disabilities and special educational needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders, make the same progress as their classmates.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium make good progress in English and mathematics, better than their classmates, because the additional one-to-one and small group support for their learning is effective.
- Annotated photographs show that primary aged pupils enjoy the additional physical activities provided by Colchester football club coaches from primary sport funding.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress in their relevant academic and work-related courses which prepares them well for the next stage of their lives. As a result, all students move on to further education, day care or training.
- The headteacher and senior leadership team have successfully introduced a robust system of external checking to make sure teacher assessments are accurate.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- School data, pupils' work and teaching seen during the inspection, show that teaching requires improvement because too little is good or better.
- When adults work with individual pupils, they sometimes watch the teacher or supervise pupils at arm's length instead of engaging pupils in learning continuously in lessons.
- Low-level relaxation tasks were given to pupils in physical education lessons for too long a period. During these sessions, teaching assistants did not engage pupils in learning sufficiently. This was also seen during a reading and writing lesson for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.
- Adults who work with individual pupils do not always give feedback to them during their activities so they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. For

example, when pupils were jumping and hopping, some made mistakes. Pupils were not made aware of these nor were they shown how to jump on two feet or hop on one leg and they were not encouraged or given time to perfect their techniques.

- The teaching of basic skills of literacy and numeracy requires improvement because expectations for learning are not always high enough.
- School data show that the support provided for the few pupils at an early stage of learning English and those with additional special educational needs is not quite as effective in raising achievement as the support for those on pupil premium. It is less effective because additional one-to-one support to meet their specific needs is not provided for these pupils, other than that provided in the normal classroom.
- Teaching is consistently good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the sixth form as a result of effective leadership by the senior leaders who directly oversee the work of these phases. Here, teachers have high expectations of what pupils should be learning and teamwork with teaching assistants is strong. Well-chosen resources are used consistently well in lessons where teaching is good. As a result, pupils remain focused on learning and do their best, making good progress.
- Teachers are making better use of assessment information since the new leadership team has been put in place. As a result, most lessons are usually well planned to ensure learning tasks are matched to different pupil's needs.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** requires improvement

- Behaviour and safety require improvement because in weaker lessons some pupils switch off and are easily distracted. School data over time confirm this because a few pupils make little or no progress. Attitudes to learning require improvement.
- A few parents who completed the online questionnaire disagreed that bullying was dealt with effectively and this was also confirmed in the school's own survey and in the telephone discussion with a very small number of parents. Records of incidents confirm that the management of bullying requires improvement.
- Behaviour seen around the school and in the majority of lessons was good. This is also confirmed by the governors' visits and the school's own monitoring of pupils' conduct over time. The majority of pupils with more challenging behaviours usually make good progress in self-control and respond well to the consistent management of behaviour of most staff. This was confirmed in discussion with parents.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils and their parents say they feel safe in school. Pupils adopt safe practices, walking with support and moving wheelchairs carefully along corridors as a result of staff vigilance in ensuring pupils are safe at all times. Pupils play safely outdoors, they use equipment, such as cutlery safely and they stay safe on entering and leaving the school. All potential risks to pupils are thoroughly assessed, especially when they attend offsite provision such as college or the art café.
- The behaviour and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good because staff work strongly as a team and liaise closely with parents to assure children's welfare and safety.
- Attendance is steadily rising because the new senior leadership team has ensured attendance is

rigorously monitored and good attendance is rewarded. As a result, most pupils, except those with medical needs and those who are ill, achieve broadly average attendance.

## **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- School self-evaluation is over optimistic in all areas because insufficient account has been taken of aspects of the school's work and pupils' learning and behaviour over time. As a result, the priorities for development within the whole school development plan, such as moving teaching to outstanding, are not realistic within the given timescales.
- Leadership over time has not ensured that different groups of pupils make equally good progress, so the promotion of equality requires improvement.
- Until November 2013, the system of performance management was not rigorous enough because its objectives were not precisely set against the National Teaching Standards or focused on raising pupils' achievement. This has not improved the quality of teaching fast enough over that time. The new systems for performance management are more rigorous but are too new to measure any impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement.
- There is a wide range of activities to interest and motivate pupils with a strong emphasis on personal development and the development of communication skills. Leaders have made sure that they are preparing well for the forthcoming changes to the National Curriculum and have already begun to adapt it to the range of pupils' learning needs in the school.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing communication through the use of communication aids, switches, pictures and photographs as well as real objects. The specialised sensory experiences are provided for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties to develop an awareness of the world around them. Highly structured specialised methods for teaching pupils with autistic spectrum disorders are now under closer scrutiny by senior leaders to ensure they are having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well by building confidence and self-esteem through the positive atmosphere for learning, good use of praise and encouragement and by providing pupils with enjoyable experiences. Pupils have good opportunities for reflection and learn about diversity through music, art and the celebration of different festivals.
- Good use is made of pupil-premium funding to provide additional individual support for literacy and numeracy which is ensuring these pupils do well. Primary sport funding has been used to buy in additional physical educational programmes from Colchester Football Club coaches but the impact of this has yet to be measured.
- The local authority has provided frequent support for the school to develop the effectiveness of the new leadership team. This is already showing impact with the new headteacher providing very clear direction for the school.
- He has developed a strong leadership team who share his vision for improvement and reviewed nearly all aspects of the school's work to identify areas for improvement. He has strengthened performance management by linking salary progression to staff performance and basing objectives on the National Teaching Standards and raising pupils' achievements. The monitoring of teaching by senior leaders is more rigorous and in recent months has led to a more accurate view of the quality of teaching.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is informed on the spending of pupil-premium funding and primary sport funding through receiving headteacher reports. Since the appointment of the new Chair, who works very closely with the headteacher, regular visits to the school have taken place to review its work. Governors know what teaching is like because they visit lessons and consider school data. They are just beginning to use this information to shape whole school priorities for development and performance management objectives. They are rigorous in making sure that safeguarding requirements are met, by checking and updating policies, reviewing risk assessments and vetting procedures for staff. The work of the governing body has yet to have full impact on school improvement.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	115475
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	431178

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community Special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	116
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	30
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Wendy Crockett
<b>Headteacher</b>	Simon Wall
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 March 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01206 563321
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