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29 April 2014

Simon Wall  
Headteacher  
Lexden Springs School  
Halstead Road  
Colchester  
CO3 9AB

Dear Mr Wall

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lexden Springs School**

Following my visit to your school on 28 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in Jan 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- improve the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning by taking into account a wide range of evidence to judge whether practice is at least good;
- refine the success criteria in the 2014-15 Teaching Assistants Action Plan so that:
  - they are more tightly focussed on outcomes for pupils;
  - they include the work of the additional support for more able pupils;
  - and identify how governors will measure the impact of actions on pupils' learning to check the value for money of this significant investment.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you and with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I met the local authority Standards and Excellence

Commissioner (SEN). I evaluated the school's post-Ofsted action plan and other documentation. We carried out brief visits to classes and spoke to teachers and teaching assistants about their work.

## **Context**

The senior leadership group has been strengthened through the appointment of the deputy headteacher in February 2014 and assistant headteacher in March 2014. An additional assistant headteacher will start in September 2014.

## **Main findings**

With the support of your senior leadership group you are clearly articulating what needs to be done to make the school a good or better school. Your key aim is to promote higher expectations for learning while maintaining high levels of care. Staff are working collaboratively towards this aim. Early successes include more bespoke support for pupils and stronger focus on achievement in lessons. As we jointly visited classes we noted that teachers are making activities enjoyable and relevant to pupils' needs, such as counting toys, learning through sport and developing pupils' dexterity through use of shapes, paper, scissors and other resources. Pupils receive lots of encouragement and praise. Teaching assistants are on hand to offer practical support. Where teaching is most effective, teaching assistants know in advance what they need to do during the lesson and they contribute very well to pupils' progress. They are proactive when the teacher needs help. This good practice is not yet consistent across all classes because not all teachers explain clearly enough how the teaching assistants will contribute to individual pupil's learning objectives and some teaching assistants do not have the right strategies or confidence to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. You have begun to address these issues and training has started through the Maximising Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA) project. You have also appointed an additional teaching assistant to focus on the more able pupils. It is too early to see the full impact of this work but the teaching assistants I spoke to are very willing to review and improve their practice.

You recognise that some teaching is not good enough and you are giving staff clear guidance on what is expected. You have introduced robust performance management processes for all staff that give high importance to pupils' progress. Your evaluation of teaching and learning is frequent and is routinely part of the normal working week. This gives you and senior leaders opportunities to share good practice and check the effectiveness of activities on pupils' daily experiences. You now need to use more than just lesson observation to judge whether the quality of teaching is of a sufficiently high standard over time. Your evidence should include, for example, the range and quality of work seen, the extent to which assessment is used to match activities to pupils' needs and whether the work of teaching assistants is developing individual pupil's skills.

You are managing relationships with parents well. You have set up a parents' group and have dealt effectively with concerns over rare incidents of bullying taking place

mostly on school transport. The lines of referrals to report issues are made clear to staff and pupils. Progress on this issue is good.

The Chair of the Governing Body knows that much remains to be done to improve governance and the review completed in March provides a way forward. It is too soon to see the full impact of governors' actions, however, they are responding positively. A range of training activities, particularly to improve governors' understanding of data and their skills in holding the school to account, are scheduled to take place over the coming months. The success criteria in the Teaching Assistants Action Plan need consolidating so that governors can monitor progress more readily and check the value they get from this investment.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

Support from the local authority is clearly mapped over this term with frequent visits intended to check progress. A National Leader for Governance has been identified to work with the governing body. A senior member of staff from a local school is working with you to improve the quality of teaching. You have good links with outstanding schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**