

Lexden Springs School

Halstead Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 9AB

Inspection dates 15–16 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people		are good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher provides very strong leadership and there has been a significant improvement in teaching and pupils' achievement since the previous inspection. Pupils are now supported effectively in tackling well planned and challenging work. As a result, they make good progress and achieve well.
- Governors and senior leaders make a good contribution to school improvement.
- The early years provision is managed outstandingly well. All staff work in very effective teams. The early years provision is characterised by the drive to make sure that all children achieve as well as they can.
- The sixth form is outstanding. It is extremely well led and provides excellent tailored programmes. These are highly effective in meeting the needs of students and preparing them for life after school.
- Teaching across the school is consistently good. This is due to the rigorous monitoring by the senior leadership team and the governing body, together with focused training and support for staff.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Pupils enjoy learning and apply themselves to the tasks exceptionally well. As a result, they learn well and gain in confidence and self-esteem. Their gains in spiritual, moral social and cultural development are exceptionally strong.
- The vast majority of pupils are very clear that they feel safe in school. Activities included in the school's Forest School programme help them to develop skills and understanding of how to keep themselves safe both inside and outside of school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to ensure that pupils' achievement is outstanding.
- Not all policies and procedures are implemented consistently across the school by newer staff.
- Middle leaders, who are new to the school or their role, are not yet sufficiently involved in monitoring their areas of responsibility.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors jointly observed learning in 14 lessons with senior leaders to see how staff provide for pupils with different learning needs.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a variety of documentation including: the school self-evaluation summary and school development plan; safeguarding policies; records of behaviour; reports to governors; minutes of governing body meetings and governors’ monitoring records; attendance figures; information about children’s progress in the early years; pupils’ progress over time, including that made by sixth form students. They also took into account the monitoring of teaching over time and the procedures for managing the performance of teachers.
- The lead inspector met with the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, as well as a representative from the local authority. In addition, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and senior leadership team, middle leaders and the transition team.
- The inspectors looked at pupils’ work and their learning journals. They heard a small number of children read and held a meeting with the school council to talk about their work and their experience of school. Informal discussions with pupils took place during lessons.
- Inspectors checked the school’s website and the reports made by the local authority and external consultants.
- The inspectors considered the 61 responses made by parents to Ofsted’s online questionnaire (Parent View) and the schools own parental survey. They also took into account 75 completed staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Lynda Walker, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christopher Christofides

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lexden Springs provides for pupils with a wide range of complex disabilities and special educational needs. The majority have severe learning difficulties, and a significant number have profound and multiple learning needs. Many have additional special educational needs such as autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or are undergoing assessments for an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils at Key Stage 2 to 4 are mostly taught in mixed age groups based on their ability. There are seven children in the early years provision, one of whom attends part time. New students join the sixth form from other schools, both mainstream and special.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or those looked after by the local authority.
- Some students in Years 13 and 14 are taught at Holly Lodge, which is the school's additional accommodation situated about half mile away from the main site.
- Students in the sixth form attend a wide range of work experience placements and also attend Colchester Institute for work-related learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching to outstanding by using best practice already in the school to help staff develop their skills further and so raise pupils' rates of progress and levels of achievement to outstanding.
- Improve leadership and management by developing the skills and expertise of the middle leaders so that they play a full part in monitoring the school's work.
- Make sure that new staff are fully aware of all policies and procedures, and understand the need to implement these consistently.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- As a result of the determination, drive and ambition of the headteacher and senior team, the school has improved a great deal since the previous inspection. The sixth form and the early years provision are now exceptionally well led. All of the staff and governors are now a very cohesive team and the school mission statement, 'Attend, Aspire and Achieve', has real meaning for every member of the school community.
- Staff now have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve and effectively support the vision and ethos of the school by striving to ensure that 'every day for every child is an exceptional rather than ordinary day'. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of the school's work and there is no discrimination of any kind. Pupils thrive on the care and support they receive from staff and there is a genuine feeling of mutual trust and respect.
- Following the previous inspection, a comprehensive training programme for teaching assistants was put in place to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of a range of special needs and how these could be supported within the classroom. This has had a significant impact on their ability to question and assess the learning and progress of the pupils. Teaching assistants now work effectively as co-educators within the classroom.
- Senior leaders now have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and an increasingly detailed picture of the progress of different groups. This is as a result of the rigorous monitoring procedures that have been put in place.
- Pupils at risk of falling behind are very quickly identified and additional support is provided to ensure that they can be quickly supported to improve. Disadvantaged pupils now achieve as well as, and sometimes better than, their classmates in English and mathematics. This is because of the effective use of the pupil premium funding to provide additional support in a range of curriculum areas. This enables the pupils to remain focused and make progress, which improves their self-confidence and self esteem
- Middle leaders go about their responsibilities with enthusiasm and commitment. Their impact on school improvement is developing as they become increasingly involved in checking teachers' planning and monitoring pupils' work and progress. Senior leaders have set high expectations for middle leaders and have effectively planned their further involvement and development.
- The curriculum takes into account the needs of each pupil. There is a major focus on developing the skills of communication, literacy, numeracy and personal, social and health education across the school from early years to the sixth form. As a result, many pupils make good and often outstanding progress in these areas. The transition team work very closely and effectively with pupils from Year 9 upwards to help to prepare them to make informed choices about their future.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well and is strength of the school. The student council offers pupils the opportunity to make decisions about the school. The excellent progress pupils make in their personal development, behaviour, interaction and communication helps to prepare them for life in modern Britain as they learn to make choices, play well and work well together, and begin to recognise and respect individual differences.
- The primary school physical education and sport premium funding is used well. The school has employed external coaches to work alongside teachers to improve their sports teaching and to offer pupils more sporting activities. As a result, pupils with more complex needs, such as profound and multiple learning difficulties, have increased their participation, enjoyment and confidence in sport and their physical well-being is improving.
- The school website provides extensive information for parents and others.
- The sixth form leader keeps detailed records of the attendance, behaviour and progress of students on work experience placements and those attending Colchester Institute. The very positive relationships that

school staff have with employers and the Institute staff support students' personal development and confidence. Students gain hugely from these placements.

- High priority is given to keeping pupils safe; the measures leaders take to safeguard pupils both in school and when taking part in activities in the community are outstanding and meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority has given good support to senior leaders and governors. This has contributed directly to the improvements in pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching since the previous inspection.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have completely reviewed and revised their working practices since the previous inspection and are now extremely effective in shaping the strategic direction of the school. Every governor has taken on a specific area of responsibility and all make focused monthly visits to the school. They report to the full governing body on their visits. The reports they receive from the headteacher, together with their own observations and the conversations they have with staff, ensure that they are very well informed about every aspect of the school's work.
- Governors are now a very strong team, working closely with the senior leadership team to improve the outcomes for all pupils.
- Governors have benefited from attending training courses and are very appreciative of the support they have received from the local authority. They are now very confident in challenging and supporting the leadership team. This is because they have a very clear understanding of pupil achievement data and the quality of teaching. They monitor the use of the school's finances to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' achievements.
- Governors are fully involved in the management of teachers' performance. They use the information effectively to reward good teaching and to react quickly to tackle any underperformance.
- Governors ensure that all safeguarding regulations are met. They are vigilant in ensuring that the health, safety and well-being of every pupil are given the highest priority.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils enjoy lessons because activities are so well adapted to their learning and always challenge them to make progress. There is a very calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school.
- Behaviour in the early years is outstanding. As a result of well established routines, excellent use of communication using pictures and signs, and carefully structured conversations, pupils quickly understand what is expected of them,
- Pupils receive a high level of adult support which helps them to understand what is required of them. They display very enthusiastic and positive attitudes to learning, which have a significant impact on their achievement.
- Integrating sensory activities into classroom tasks and close working with therapists has led to a significant reduction in inappropriate behaviours as pupils are increasingly more able to control and manage their own behaviour.
- Every pupil has a personalised and detailed behaviour management plan, which is continuously revised to ensure pupils' needs are met effectively. Where, on occasion, pupils become distressed, the matter is dealt with quietly and effectively without disrupting the learning of others and invariably pupils return to their activities. The school's exemplary record keeping confirms that these incidents have diminished rapidly since the previous inspection and are now very rarely seen. New staff, however, are not consistent in their application of behaviour management policies and procedures.
- Pupils are extremely proud of their work and were keen to show inspector their books, folders and learning journals. These are very well presented and annotated. In lessons, pupils work well together,

taking turns, listening to each other and often enthusiastically celebrating each other's achievements.

- Behaviour in the sixth form is excellent because the students respond very positively to taking part in a range of work-related activities that prepare them extremely well for life after school.
- Attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is now broadly in line with that found nationally. When pupils are absent, it is usually linked to serious medical conditions and their need for ongoing treatment.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Classes are organised on the basis of the pupils' needs and staff become experts in managing the areas of need that they most often deal with. The school provides exemplary care for all its pupils and every pupil is treated with dignity and respect.
- The school council recently carried out a survey to see if pupils felt safe in school. Each class presented their findings in different ways and it was very clear that the vast majority of pupils have a very good understanding of what being safe means. This ranged from knowing that only trained staff should help them with feeding and moving, being taught how to use tools and kitchen equipment safely, and knowing not to talk to strangers on the internet or in the street. Pupils told inspectors that they felt very safe in school because there was no bullying, everyone was kind to each other, and that staff would always help them if they have any concerns.
- All staff, including the headteacher and the mealtime supervisors, wear the same uniform which very clearly identifies them as a staff member. Pupils quickly learn that it is safe to talk to any adult wearing the uniform if they have any concerns or worries. They are also very aware of the adults in the school who are not staff members but know that, because they are wearing a visitor badge, it is safe to talk to them.
- All staff are trained in safeguarding pupils and are experts in supporting pupils' well-being. The very good relationships pupils have with staff and their excellent behaviour ensure that they feel safe and secure both when in school or taking part in activities outside of school. School staff accompany and work with the sixth form students at Colchester Institute. Students told the inspectors that they learn how to keep themselves safe in the workshops and how important it is to follow safety rules when at work.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection because of rigorous monitoring procedures that have been put in place. It is now consistently good and often outstanding. Best practice is particularly evident in the sixth form and the early years provision. Senior leaders video all lesson observations. These are shared and discussed with teachers and co-educators to reflect, develop and improve their practice.
- In every classroom, including in the early years and the sixth form, the primary focus is on developing the skills of communication. Signing, symbols and pictures are used frequently to help pupils' understanding and extend their learning. In addition, appropriate technological aids are used to help pupils communicate and make choices.
- Good support in literacy helps pupils to improve their skills so that they can complete their tasks and make progress. The teaching of reading is effective because of the regular teaching of sounds and letters (phonics) and reading practice. As a result, the most-able pupils achieve well and can read simple stories. The teaching of writing benefits from the good use of resources and clear guidance to help pupils gain the confidence to write or explain their ideas.
- The teaching of mathematics typically engages pupils. This is because tasks are practical, motivating and capture their interest. The use of specialist resources has challenged the more able to improve their counting and basic addition skills. Computers, interactive whiteboards and tablet computers are used well to stimulate pupils' desire to learn.

- Teachers and co-educators know their pupils extremely well and work exceptionally closely together in order to meet their complex behavioural and learning needs. Adults share high expectations for the progress of the pupils. Effective teamwork and planning is apparent in all classrooms. This results in pupils' increased enjoyment of learning, which reflects in their outstanding attitudes and behaviour.
- Communication with parents on the work and learning for their children is good. Homework is set throughout the school and pupils take great pride in completing it. Most parents agree that it helps pupils to practise skills and increase their rates of progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- There has been a significant improvement in the rate that pupils' progress since the previous inspection. This is a result of better management of pupils' behaviour and better teaching.
- Achievement is good overall, with an increasing amount that is outstanding. Assessment is focused very much on the progress pupils make against their own individual targets. The removal of National Curriculum levels has had little impact on the school as the majority of the pupils are working at P levels (performance scales for pupils working below Level 1 of the national curriculum).
- The rigorous systems that have been developed to track achievement help the teachers to know how well the pupils are progressing. Any pupil at risk of falling behind is very quickly identified and additional support is put in place to help the pupil succeed. Teachers are also becoming more skilled at knowing how to adapt their teaching part way through a lesson if they can see that pupils needs either simpler or more challenging work.
- Well-targeted support for individual pupils ensures that most groups make equally good progress in English and mathematics. Pupils with additional needs, such as those with an autistic spectrum disorder, make good progress because of the well-thought-out individual curriculum that supports every pupil. Disadvantaged pupils make similar or better progress to others in the school. This demonstrates the effective use of pupil premium funding, which the school uses to provide extra support to boost pupils' achievements in a variety of different ways, including one-to-one support and small group sessions.
- Continuing improvement in attendance has raised the proportion of pupils making expected and better than expected progress from their starting points.
- Pupils' complex learning difficulties mean that children entering the early years provision, and those who join the school at other times, usually come to the school with skills and knowledge that are below those found typically for their age. However, children make rapid and outstanding progress in developing their communication and personal and social development skills.
- Pupils throughout the school make outstanding progress in learning to communicate by the most appropriate means. From their starting points, most learn the meaning of signs and symbols, providing them with the ability to make choices, to know and follow routines, and start to meet teachers' expectations. Speaking and listening, together with the use of symbols and electronic communication aids, develop rapidly over time and impact strongly on pupils' thinking and understanding.
- Every pupil in the school, including the sixth form, has a learning journal with annotated photographs that show the progress they make over time in a wide range of curriculum areas. These journals are very well presented and demonstrate very clearly their achievements over time. They are particularly valued by parents as they provide a visual record of their child's journey through the school.
- Students in the sixth form gain qualifications in functional literacy and numeracy, basic skills and life skills reaching entry levels 1, 2 and 3 in a range of vocational and practical courses. They also make great gains in their independence skills. Students told inspectors how they like learning to travel independently to Holly Lodge and to Colchester Institute where they are learning about gardening and building things.
- The more-able pupils read with expression by the time they are in Key Stage 3. They label pictures using

symbols and text, and can write a series of short sentences, forming their letters correctly. In mathematics, the more-able pupils can draw and label three dimensional shapes, write the correct number for a group of objects and work out the correct coins they need to buy certain goods. This demonstrates the excellent progress they have made from their low starting points when joining the school.

- Current school data shows that pupils across the school are set to make greater gains than last year. Lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils' books and staff records support this.
- The achievement that pupils make in their personal and social development is highly valued by pupils' families. One parent expressed his delight when his son was able to ride a bike for the first time, another when her daughter took her first steps. Pupils also told inspectors how proud they were to travel on a bus by themselves, and to be able to choose their own clothes when they go to the shops.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- Leadership and management of the early years provision is outstanding. Children settle very quickly because the staff team already know them exceptionally well. There are excellent transition arrangements in place; school staff visit the children in their homes and in their previous setting, and parents and children visit the school at least three times before children start at the school. This means that children are familiar with their surroundings when they start and that staff have a very good idea of their individual needs and abilities. They use this information effectively to tailor activities around the strengths and interests of the child.
- Teaching is outstanding. Clear and consistent modelling by all adults, the use of highly effective communication strategies, and the rich and stimulating activities both in the classroom and the outside areas engage children extremely well.
- Planning is very detailed and is led by building on the interests and abilities of the children. Detailed plans are sent home fortnightly so that parents are aware of the activities their child will be taking part in. Parents are encouraged to make any suggestions or amendments if they know their child has a particular liking or disliking for an activity.
- The achievement of the children in the early years is outstanding. They make consistently high rates of progress academically, socially and personally in relation to their low starting points. They rapidly settle into routines and make excellent progress in communication through the consistent use of signing, symbols and communication aids. This prepares all children, including those with autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties, those for whom the school receives additional funding and the relatively more able, extremely well for their transition to Year 1.
- The staff have very thorough systems for assessing what children can do. Small steps of progress are recorded and shared with parents through home-school diaries and learning journals. All children are given weekly homework tasks and parents are very appreciative of the help they are given to support learning at home.
- Children enjoy stories and some can anticipate what is going to happen next. They are taught phonics daily, providing opportunities for the most able to learn how to match sounds and letters. They are exposed to a wide range of experiences and a range of textures, aromas and sounds, and are beginning to be able to describe these. Children are very happy and eager to join in their activities and display very positive attitudes to learning, working and playing collaboratively together. Weekly Forest School sessions help to develop a range of skills as children learn how to cooperate and work together in a challenging outdoor environment.
- Strong team work and high levels of support throughout the school day ensure that children are safe. Children's emotional health and well-being, including their spiritual, moral social and cultural development, are effectively promoted through well-established routines, assemblies and visits to places of interest.

The sixth form provision is outstanding

- Highly effective leadership of the sixth form ensures that staff have high aspirations in developing students' independence skills and building their confidence so that they can actively contribute to the community.
- There are currently three classes in the sixth form. All Year 12 students and some of those in Years 13 and 14 are taught in the main school. Other students from Years 13 and 14 are based at Holly Lodge, a converted residential building belonging to the school about half a mile away from the main building. The house provides excellent opportunities for the students to practise daily living skills such as budgeting for, preparing and cooking meals. The curriculum ensures students gain basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics and across a range of academic and work-related activities. The school ensures that parents are fully involved when students make choices about what courses they wish to follow.
- The focus throughout the sixth form is very much on becoming more independent, developing life skills and moving on. Students are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain and there is a strong emphasis on work-related learning and careers education. Very careful consideration is given to each student's individual educational, social and emotional development when placing them across the department so that they can all be helped to do their very best. As a result, students make sustained and outstanding progress academically, personally and socially.
- Students for whom it is appropriate benefit from spending time at Colchester Institute where they use the vocational areas and resources to support their work-related learning. This prepares them well for the next stage in their education and provides them with independent careers guidance. All students, including those with autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties, benefit from work experience placements that are tailored to meet their aspirations, interests and strengths.
- There is an increased range of relevant accredited courses on offer since the previous inspection. The curriculum has real relevance and meaning for students so that they are motivated, eager to learn and able to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in a variety of settings.
- The achievement of students is outstanding because of the outstanding teaching over time. Teaching and the experiences provided build on the strengths, interests and aspirations of each student. Students take great pride in their achievements and confidently discussed their plans for the future with the inspectors.
- The transition team supports the students exceptionally well to make realistic and achievable choices for the next stage in their education. The destinations of students leaving the school are carefully tracked and monitored and show that all students over the last three years have successfully remained in further education or adult-supported placements.
- Behaviour for learning is outstanding. Students say that they feel very safe and are guided and supported well when they are in school or on work placements. Students are increasingly encouraged to be independent, for instance through travelling independently to Colchester Institute or their work placements. They have a very strong awareness of personal risk and e-safety. They discuss dangers with staff and know what to do and who to talk to if they have any concerns.

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

Unique reference number	115475
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	461329

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	137
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wendy Crocket
Headteacher	Simon Wall
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2014
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