

Inspection of Lexden Springs School

Winstree Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 0PZ

Inspection dates: 30 January to 2 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are warmly greeted as they arrive at school. They make their way happily to classrooms, eager to start the day. Pupils' happiness is underpinned by caring relationships with staff. However, plans for supporting pupils' health needs are out of date. Essential information has not been sought from expert professionals. Pupils may be at risk where staff are not taking into account the advice given, particularly from medical expertise.

Pupils are attentive in class. They receive close attention to help them engage in their learning and try their best. This makes for a calm environment. However, they do not receive a high enough quality of education. Plans do not guide staff well to securely build pupils' understanding according to their needs. Leaders' checks lack the necessary rigour to ensure all pupils achieve well.

Pupils experience a range of opportunities to interact with the wider community. They take part in trips or make use of local facilities. All pupils go swimming. These activities build pupils' confidence and prepare them for life beyond the school.

Pupils enjoy making friendships. They take every opportunity to share games and be kind to one another. They consider that this makes their school special.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has not acted swiftly to address a decline in the quality of education. There are concerns with the culture and oversight of safeguarding. These have resulted in an interim executive board (IEB) replacing the governing body. This is in the early stages of its work. There has not been sufficient time for the board to act on the weaknesses in the school. The lack of accountability and mistrust between leaders and some staff further hinders the pace of improvement. Consequently, pupils' achievement is inconsistent across the school.

The school has developed curriculum plans for each aspect of learning. Plans start from the early years through to the sixth form. The plans identify broad steps of key knowledge and skills that build towards stated end points. However, these plans are not clear enough. They lack the precision teachers need to plan effective learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Similarly, this is the case in the curriculum plans for early years and the post-16 provision. Where teachers' expertise is strong, they successfully adapt the curriculum to support pupils' achievement. Pupils achieve less well where there are too few opportunities to build their skills step by step.

The information used to assess pupils' progress is not sufficiently clear. Targets are broad and not suited to the small steps of learning pupils need to make. There is no systematic checking of the use of pupils' targets from education, health and care

(EHC) plans. New outcomes specified on these plans do not take enough account of pupils' progress. The school has made recent changes to its assessment approaches. There is not a consistent understanding among staff about how these new systems work. There is no routine checking of the curriculum. As a result, the school does not have a secure picture of what is working well subject by subject.

Teachers typically have strong subject knowledge. Where they use this well, pupils are more successful in their learning. Co-educators (teaching assistants) provide effective care of pupils to support their engagement in learning. Often this well-intended support stifles pupils' independence. Many co-educators have not received training. Their support is not always effective in helping pupils to learn well.

Reading has a high priority in the school. Those pupils who are ready learn to use phonics to read. Staff teach a systematic approach to phonics effectively. They check carefully in each lesson what pupils remember. Staff skilfully use other communication approaches. These include signing and visual clues that help pupils to access phonics. Regular stories, use of the school library, and visiting authors promote a love of reading.

Pupils attend well. The school carries out frequent checks to understand the reasons for pupils' absences. Routines support a well-ordered environment. Pupils are attentive and follow adults' requests. Supportive relationships help pupils to settle. This is particularly evident in the early years, where children confidently make choices about their learning.

Pupils' preparation for adult life is woven through the curriculum. For example, pupils learn important health routines such as how to brush their teeth. Pupils make frequent trips into the local community, for example visiting the shops. This helps to build their knowledge of skills for life. There is a well-established careers programme. It provides pupils with appropriate information about their next steps beyond school. Pupils participate in themed days and events to promote their understanding of life in modern Britain.

Some staff report concerns about the management of their workload. They consider there is a lack of visibility of some leaders. Some staff feel they work in isolation, which is detrimental to their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

There are too many weaknesses in the oversight of safeguarding. Pupils' EHC plans are not fit for purpose. Too much time has elapsed between consultation with clinical professionals and updating of the plans. Essential medical advice is not available to staff. This puts pupils at risk. There are historical shortcomings in the recording and investigation of safeguarding concerns.

Leaders are starting to address these concerns. However, new reporting expectations have led to an increased strain on staff. A weak strategic oversight of safeguarding persists. The current safeguarding practices do not encourage an open and positive culture that puts pupils' interests first.

The checks carried out for the suitability of those who work at the school meet the statutory requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is not an effective oversight of safeguarding. Individual EHC plans are out of date and the safeguarding systems used by leaders are unwieldy, putting pupils at risk. Leaders, and those responsible for governance, must act urgently to tackle the weaknesses and build a positive culture of safeguarding.
- The school's curriculum plans lack the precision required to meet all the needs of pupils with SEND, especially where those needs are highly complex. This creates gaps in the planning sequence. Plans are too reliant on individual teachers' knowledge about how to break down the key knowledge into achievable steps of learning. This means not all pupils achieve the intended ambitions of the curriculum. The school should ensure that the curriculum is well planned and staff are trained to deliver it well.
- Assessment, including checks on pupils' EHC plan targets, is not used methodically to understand how well pupils progress in learning the curriculum. This means that some teachers do not have accurate information regarding pupils' next steps. The school should ensure that teachers understand how to make effective use of all the information about pupils' learning so that pupils make the strongest progress possible.
- Leaders do not routinely check that the curriculum is being learned. Staff do not receive the direction they need to improve their teaching. This means that there is not a clear understanding of the weaknesses in the curriculum or how consistently it is implemented. Leaders need to check more frequently so that weaknesses are tackled, and improvements strengthen pupils' achievements.
- Some staff consider that their workload is not well managed. They do not feel that leaders listen to their views to help make improvements. The culture of the school is not sufficiently inclusive. Leaders must consider ways to support staff in their roles and ensure their workload is manageable.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	115475
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10321717
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	284
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Linda Robinson
Headteacher	Simon Wall
Website	www.lexdensprings.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 December 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with special educational needs of autism, specifically severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Use is made of an additional site at Holly Lodge for post-16 education.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and a range of staff.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the interim executive board, including the chair. The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority and spoke with a leader of the local authority's safeguarding team.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: social interaction and communication including early reading, exploration and discovery, me and my community and physical and self-help. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, spoke to teachers and pupils, and looked at a range of children's work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders and staff; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and parents' free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Daniel Short	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Wilson	His Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Fowler	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Williams	His Majesty's Inspector

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