

Lexden Springs School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115475
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	323068
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Karin Heap

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
Number on roll	
School	80
6th form	30
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Jacky Wood
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2004
School address	Halstead Road Colchester Essex CO3 9AB
Telephone number	01206 563321
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Lexden Springs is a special school, which provides full time day education for pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties. There are a number of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and multi sensory impairments. All pupils in school have a statement of special educational need. The Foundation Stage is used to assess pupils and assist with the formulation of their statement. There are six children in the foundation stage and 30 students in three bases in the sixth form. Pupils come from a wide catchment area with diverse social and economic backgrounds. There is a very small proportion of pupils who are looked after or from ethnic minority groups.

In 2007, the school received Healthy Schools status, the Arts Mark Sports and Active Mark awards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Lexden Springs is a good school with distinctive strengths. Everyone is fully committed to teamwork and high expectations. Relationships between pupils and staff are very strong. This is because of the committed leadership of the headteacher. One parent sums up the school by saying: 'The school is a very happy and friendly environment where children are happy and staff are very approachable and there is good communication between parents and school.'

Outstanding care, guidance and support ensure that all pupils enjoy school very much and they achieve exceptionally high standards in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Regular attendance and good behaviour ensure that pupils learn effectively and are well prepared for when they leave school. The good (and further developing) personal development of pupils is rooted in a strong inclusive and caring ethos, with very effective arrangements in place to monitor and record health and safety and robust safeguarding procedures.

Parents feel they are well informed and supported by the school. The new and active school council makes a positive contribution to the school. For example, they recently got to the regional final for the Sainsbury's 'Get Talking Award' for a grant to extend out-of-school activities.

On entry to school, the knowledge and skills of pupils are exceptionally low in comparison to what is expected nationally. Given their particular and specific needs, however, they achieve well. Pupils make good progress because they are taught well. The best lessons are exciting with a rich variety of resources and many opportunities for independent learning. Some of this good practice however is not yet consistent across the school. Academic and personal guidance is very well developed, most notably through the consistent use of pupil targets, a merit system to celebrate pupil's achievements and the 'reflection of the week' approach to encourage very focussed learning on spiritual, moral and cultural issues in daily life.

The school has very strong links and working partnerships with the community, for example the local church and local schools. Pupils aged 14 to 19 have access to an appropriate range of courses, work experience and accredited qualifications. Nearly all learners successfully move on to, further education or training. The newly refurbished Foundation Stage accommodation provides appropriate education for the youngest learners.

The curriculum is well matched to meet the diverse needs of learners and it is further enhanced through a very good range of exciting enrichment activities. The school has worked hard to develop its learning environment, which is vibrant and stimulating and provides good access for all pupils. This good range of activities is well demonstrated in many inspiring and interactive wall displays, allowing pupils easy access and understanding of the displays.

The school is well led and provides good value for money. The headteacher has a strong and inspiring vision and a firm commitment to bring about school improvement based on effective self-evaluation and creative use of the workforce, for example, the very effective work of the physical and social health (PaSH) team. There is professional pride shared by all staff and delegated leadership to senior and middle leaders to encourage positive teamwork. Staff use assessment information to inform their teaching and improve specific curriculum areas. The school analyses data to identify underperformance and further sharpen school self-evaluation. The work of the governors is outstanding. Overall the school has improved exceptionally well since the last inspection and is in a strong position to develop further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students in the sixth form make at least good progress because the range of activities and courses meets their needs well. All students attain qualifications in appropriately challenging courses and all students who left school in 2007 went on to education, training or employment. The school recognises that the range of courses offered needs to be further refined to include more activities with local schools and colleges and for students that are more able. Students make a good contribution to school and community life through a range of fundraising activities and specific roles and responsibilities within the school. They receive good teaching through individualised learning programmes with outstanding guidance to help them make effective choices and to evaluate their own progress. Work experience and effective transition programmes prepare students well for the world of work. The sixth form is led well; this is demonstrated in the perceptive forward planning which has enabled the expansion to three bases and the very efficient way in which the sixth form - staff and students - work as an integrated team to create a vibrant mix of educational experience.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children receive satisfactory education in the Foundation Stage. To improve this provision further the teaching environment and curriculum are being reorganised to combine the education for children aged three to seven. The new leadership team is now in a position to implement these changes for the beginning of September. Teaching and learning however are variable and do not consistently promote children's independent learning skills. Children receive excellent care and guidance and this means they settle well into learning and enjoy school. However children's' behaviour is not always consistently managed. Teaching assistants are a valuable part of the team and support teachers and pupils in a flexible way. The satisfactory curriculum is now enhanced through the newly refurbished learning environment with plans in place to implement fully the new Foundation Stage curriculum. Children make good progress especially in communication, including speaking, vocalising, signing and the use of symbols.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teaching is consistently good and better in all areas of the school through further sharing of the good and outstanding practice.
- Develop teaching and the curriculum in the Foundation Stage further so that all children can learn independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Relative to their starting points, pupils make good progress overall. This includes pupils in the Foundation Stage and at post-16. In 2007, 79% of pupils who have profound and multiple learning needs met or exceeded their targets; it was 88% for pupils with severe learning difficulties, indicating good progress. Nearly all pupils leave school with successful placements in education or training, having matured into well-rounded and confident young people. This is because staff and pupils have high but realistic expectations. Pupils with additional needs are fully included and make good progress because staff effectively take into account their

individual needs and go the extra mile to deploy creative and flexible approaches to teaching and learning, as was seen for one pupil in Year 2. The setting of challenging, pupil friendly targets is consistent, and effective assessment procedures track the individual progress of pupils and inform teaching. The school now uses this information to analyse the progress made by groups of pupils over time to inform future strategic planning and school development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development is good and parents are very supportive of the school. Supported by the Healthy Schools initiative, children are encouraged to eat well and adopt healthy life-styles through a range of good sporting activities. The newly formed School's Council enthusiastically learn how to make their views known and have implemented several initiatives, for example, the new school council badges for all staff. Pupils concentrate hard in lessons and their attendance is good. Behaviour is nearly always good although some inconsistency in the management of behaviour results in a few occasions when some pupils disrupt others. Pupils make outstanding progress in their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. This is due to the inspiring school-wide weekly focus for reflection, exciting enrichment activities such as the African day and very close links with the local church. There are very strong relationships between pupils and with adults. Pupils make a very positive contribution to the local and wider community through an outstanding range of activities. One example is the creative pantomime performed by senior students last Christmas.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers and their skilled support staff work in effective partnership to support pupils' learning well. High quality relationships and social harmony are evident throughout the school and underpin pupils' very positive approach to their learning. Teachers have high but realistic expectations and use assessment to monitor pupils' progress over time. Planning is thorough and well informed by teachers' in depth knowledge of pupils' individual needs and their previous learning. Most activities are suitably challenging and interesting to effectively engage pupils. In some lessons however, not all pupils are challenged to ensure they make good progress. On the whole, pupils behave well because of effective positive behaviour management strategies; these are used in most classes effectively. A wide range of teaching strategies ensure that most pupils have an equal chance to participate in lessons. Teachers use praise very effectively to reinforce learning and to stimulate and motivate pupils to give their best.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good curriculum matches the needs of learners well. In the primary phase, a published scheme is enriched through stimulating activities such as reflexology, 'tac pac' for sensory work, soundbeam and programmes to assist with pupils' mobility. Where lessons are supported by

switch use and interactive whiteboards they are motivating and exciting. However, some planned activities are less stimulating. The curriculum is exceptionally well supported by the PaSH-team, which provides individually planned experiences for pupils with complex needs. For example, they combine reflexology and physical movement. The school offers stimulating and very creative curriculum enrichment activities such as an African experience, which included drumming and animal masks in addition to a good range of lunchtime clubs for dance, sensory club, PE, art and gardening. There are also activities outside school, such as visiting shops and cafes and attending workshops at the local theatre.

The good 14-19 curriculum offers opportunities to develop work-related learning, for example, through the mini-enterprise scheme to raise funds for earthquake relief in China, using hanging baskets produced in Horticulture lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is outstanding care, guidance and support for all pupils because of the exceptional contribution made by the recently formed PaSH team. This group of teaching assistants take on additional responsibility and training and, working closely with multi-agency staff, provides excellent support for pupils' medical, physical and emotional needs. In addition, the team assists the school in providing rigorous procedures for assessing risks and safeguarding pupils' health and safety. Training for supporting pupils' behaviour is good and the school is developing a school-wide approach for managing those pupils whose behaviour is more challenging. Pupils' own self-evaluation and the use of Communication Passports provide a valuable contribution to the assessment process. Data on pupil progress is analysed and used well to target programmes for individual pupils and to adapt the curriculum. Guidance for academic work is good with consistent use of pupil-friendly targets in all areas of the school. Parents say they are very appreciative of the detailed feedback they receive on the progress their children are making.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has a very clear direction because of the exceptional leadership of the headteacher instils focus and passion to improve learning for all pupils. She has used the workforce remodelling exercise skilfully to create positive teamwork. The new and skilled leadership team provides good support to bring about necessary school improvement at a very effective and quick pace. Leaders have correctly identified areas for improvement; for example, the further development of the Foundation Stage and how to establish better consistency of behaviour and communication. Changes in staff organisation have enabled new subject leaders to acquire good knowledge and understanding of their subjects; they are beginning to become more adept at monitoring and evaluation of their subjects. The school's newly created and very effective PaSH team is an example of outstanding development of the school workforce. Governors offer a very good range of additional skills and know their school well. They provide valuable support and appropriate challenge to the school. The school has very strong links with other partners and is continually developing links to other local schools.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of the Lexden Springs School, Essex CO3 9AB

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our time with you, talking to you about your work. It has been great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and to see how well you behave. You are all very friendly, cheerful and polite and helped us feel at home in your school. Thank you for sharing your work with us.

When we visited your lessons, we were impressed by all the good work that you are doing. We could see that you really enjoy your learning and that you are keen to help each other. One example is the work of your school council to get to the regional final for the Sainsbury's 'Get Talking' Award. We were impressed with the many interesting activities adults were planning for you and the fun you have.

We are very pleased to tell you that you are lucky to go to such a good school. The headteacher, your teachers and all the other adults who work with you take very good care of you and want you to do your best. You are doing very well to learn new things and to become well prepared for when you leave school. You are also doing well in learning how to work together, helping each other and keeping healthy and safe.

I have asked Mrs. Wood and the teachers to make sure that everyone in school can go to exciting and interesting lessons all the time, so that you can learn even better. I have also asked that the youngest children in school can learn some things on their own and from their friends in class. You can help by listening well to your teachers and by working very hard.

We will take away many good memories about your school and have really enjoyed the time we have spent with you. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.

Karin Heap

Lead inspector