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SUMMARY: In this letter written c.1609, the Dowager Countess of Oxford urges the Earl of Sussex, Lord Rich, and Lord Petre, members of a commission which was shortly to begin its deliberations, not to take at face value a number of complaints concerning the administration of the Earls Colne grammar school. The transcript below was made from a photocopy of the original document in Merson, A.D., Earls Colne Grammar School, Essex; A History (Colchester: Benham and Company, 1975), p.25.

My very good Lords. I am informed that where by a late commission you are to examine the state and employment of lands given to charitable uses, and among other lands of that quality are informed that the free school now kept in Earls Colne ought to be kept at Coggeshall and Messing by three years together, what the intent of the founder was or the words of his donation is unknown to me, but in all probability those that first disposed of those lands observed the giver's purpose which hath been ever constantly kept in Earls Colne, where changing or removing the same to any other place which in common reason must needs be inconvenient both to the schoolmaster and to the preferring of the scholars.

Also I must advertise you that the choice and nominating of the schoolmaster is a right invested in my late Lord and his ancestors, and my son interested in the same as it is found in his office, so as I hope in your honourable endeavours you will not impeach or diminish an ancient possessed right, or alien anything belonging to him in his minority.

And whereas some exception, I hear, is taken against the insufficiency of the schoolmaster whom I commended to that place in my son's minority and who in better judgments than mine own is sufficiently learned, honest, and industrious in that office, wherein if upon your just advisements I shall find myself mistaken, I will give such speedy remedy therein as shall testify how far I prefer the public good education of youth before any man's private preferment.

And whereas also, as I hear, it is suggested that the lands given to the maintenance of this school are misgoverned and converted to our particular profit, I do assure you that neither my Lord nor myself have made any advantage thereof, but where we found them rented at 20 nobles a year, have raised them to 20 pounds, the which is yearly paid to the schoolmaster. And I doubt not but that when that grant is ended my son out of his further care will increase the rent for the better maintenance of the school if the time require it and the land will yield it.

Whereupon I presume in your just considerations having no cause to distrust my son's discharge of this charitable trust, you will not upon malicious information of his adversaries call in question during his minority a right sealed in him and his heirs. And so I commit your Lordships to the Almighty.

Your assured friend,

Elizabeth Oxenford

