

Katherine Semar Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114966
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311773
Inspection date	6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sonia Sault
Headteacher	Ms Jane Gilmour
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Ross Close Saffron Walden Essex CB11 4DU
Telephone number	01799 521720
Fax number	01799 523565

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the achievement and standards of boys and girls in the Foundation Stage in their personal and social development
- the effectiveness of the recent focus on involving pupils in the assessment of their learning
- the provision for pupils to develop investigative and experimental skills, with particular emphasis on design and technology.

Evidence was gathered from observing lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and the school's documentation, discussions with pupils and staff, and noting communications from parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Katherine Semar Infant School is smaller than average. The majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds but more pupils speak English as an additional language than is usual. Broadly average proportions of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average. Mobility of families within the area is low. Attainment on entry is in line with that expected for children's ages. The school has been awarded Investors in People and the Activemark. It is also part of the e-Twinning initiative organised by the British Council.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good education for all its pupils. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school effectively and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. These areas have been accurately identified and are already in the school development plan. The school's evaluation matches that of the inspection in all respects.

As a result of the effective way the school is run, pupils from all groups make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Standards by the end of Year 2 are above those expected for pupils' ages overall. They are above the expected standards in reading, and in writing. In mathematics, standards are particularly good. In the Reception classes, children make good progress and achieve well. Their personal and social development, which has been an area for focus, is now good.

A significant factor in the good progress and achievement made by pupils in all parts of the school is the quality of teaching and learning, which is good. Teachers and support staff work together effectively to make lessons interesting. Lessons are well planned to follow on from previous work. Teachers' questioning is good and draws all pupils into discussions effectively. The curriculum is varied and is supplemented by a very good range of extra activities, including good links with other schools, both locally and also internationally. There are a good number of clubs and other activities, such as French and computer club, which pupils talk about enthusiastically. As a result, boys and girls from all groups, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are interested in lessons, enjoy their work and make a good effort to concentrate on what they are taught. However, opportunities for pupils to develop investigative and experimental skills in subjects such as design and technology, whilst satisfactory, are not as frequent as they could be. The school has identified that opportunities for pupils to research, experiment and evaluate their handiwork systematically are sometimes missed and training to improve teachers' confidence and understanding is underway.

The care, support and welfare of pupils are good. All safeguarding requirements are met. Assessment is regular and detailed information is kept in the core areas of reading, writing and mathematics. The form in which it is collated makes it easy to analyse the progress of different groups. Information gained is used effectively to target specific groups and improve their progress. The school rightly plans to refine and develop assessment of non-core subjects further as these subjects are reviewed as part of on-going improvement of the curriculum. Teachers are starting to involve pupils more in understanding what work they are doing, why they are doing it and evaluating how successful they are doing it. As yet, however, not all pupils have a clear idea of what they need to do next to improve. In part this is because targets and lesson objectives are sometimes phrased in quite complex language, but also because they are not always referred to as pupils settle to their tasks. The school development plan shows that providing more opportunities for pupils to become actively involved in evaluating their own work has been identified as an area for improvement and is a focus for this current academic year.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils are courteous and well behaved. Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils make good progress in learning to be healthy and stay safe. They learn to develop positive relationships and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

There has been a good level of improvement since the previous inspection. The school provides good value for money and is in a good position to maintain and improve standards still further. Parents are largely very pleased with the school and the support it provides for their children. There are particularly pleased with the work of the Foundation Stage, and the good start it provides for all of the children. A significant minority feel they would like to be more involved in decisions that the school makes. Governance is sound even though a significant proportion of the governors are relatively new to their roles. More than half of the teachers are in the early stages of their careers and some have taken on coordinators roles only recently as a result. Nevertheless, under the good guidance of the headteacher challenging targets are set to bring about needed change and move the school forward.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and it is well led and managed. There are effective links with a number of local nurseries and playgroups and induction procedures are good. These good arrangements have a positive impact on the way children come into school and settle contentedly. They get a good start to their education. Teachers and support staff plan together effectively to support boys and girls from all groups and give them a good and happy start to their school lives. Children make good gains in their learning and achieve well. In the recent past, the progress children made was satisfactory and they were in line to attain the standards expected for their age by the time they start in Year 1. Currently, the good progress made by boys and girls means that most children are likely to exceed the standards expected for their ages in all six areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve pupils more in understanding what they are learning, why they are learning it and what they need to do next to improve their work still further.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to improve their skills of investigation and evaluation.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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
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
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	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

7 February 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Katherine Semar Infant School, Saffron Waldon, Essex CB11 4DU

Thank you for welcoming me to your school when I visited recently and for being so polite and friendly. I really enjoyed meeting you all and talking to you. Here are the things that are especially good about your school.

- You like school and enjoy working and playing together so that you learn to get on with each other well.
- Your behaviour is good.
- Your teachers teach you well so that you make good progress and standards are good.
- You are taught a lot of interesting and exciting things.
- You learn a lot about staying safe and staying healthy and how to make healthy choices in what you eat.
- Your headteacher works hard and knows what to do to make your school even better.

The things I have asked your school to do next are:

- to help you learn more about how you are getting on and what you can do next to make your work even better
- for teachers to give you more opportunities to try things out for yourselves, especially in design and technology.

I really enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Barnes

Lead inspector