

St Katherine's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118312
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312881
Inspection date	26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	471
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	R Kingsbury
Headteacher	Allan Adams
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	St Katherine's Lane Snodland ME6 5EJ
Telephone number	01634 240061
Fax number	01634 243683

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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: • standards and pupils' achievements • pupils' attitudes to learning • the impact of all levels of leadership and management in contributing to school improvement. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, analysis of school and nationally published data, pupils' work, teachers' planning and the views of parents, and discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of the governing body. 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 in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average-sized primary school serves a predominantly White British population and has a small percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. These relate mainly to speech and language, and specific and moderate learning difficulties. The school has recently broadened its provision to include a nursery and breakfast club. The school holds Investors in People and Healthy School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Katherine's is a good school where parents are overwhelmingly supportive; they appreciate that staff work hard to give children a good quality education. The school successfully meets its aim to 'create a safe, healthy, stimulating and caring environment in which to foster investigative, creative, independent learners'. Children flourish and grow in confidence within a friendly, warm ethos. One comment from the parent of a girl about to leave the school sums up the views expressed by many parents, 'I have nothing but praise for this school. I feel my daughter has been challenged and guided brilliantly by all her teachers.' Many parents also attribute the school's success to the strength of the headteacher's leadership and his 'obvious pride and enthusiasm' in ensuring the best possible education and first-rate facilities.

The headteacher's commitment is shared by staff who work very well together in teams to plan and evaluate the school's work. Together with the governing body, senior managers and staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to make sure that the school continues to improve. The success of this understanding and the actions already taken are shown by the steady rise in standards and achievement, giving the school good potential for continued improvements.

Pupils achieve well and are prepared well for the next stage of their education because of good teaching. They enter the school in the Nursery or Reception classes with skills, knowledge and understanding that are generally below those expected for their age and get off to a good start. By the end of Years 2 and 6, standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science are consistently above national averages. About half of the pupils in the current Year 6 are reaching the higher levels in these subjects and the school is likely to exceed its challenging target significantly. The school has used new national guidance well to focus on improving pupils' writing and this has been successful. Currently the school is bringing the same rigour to developing new approaches to teaching mathematics, and standards have also risen. However, the school is not complacent and recognises that it has not yet identified those approaches in mathematics that are having the greatest impact on pupils' achievements. It intends to do this so that these can be used more consistently across the school.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons which capture pupils' interest. Pupils say, 'we enjoy lessons because teachers make them fun' and 'teachers encourage you to do your best and help you when you need it.' Pupils know what they have to do to improve their work because teachers discuss this with them. However, sometimes teachers miss opportunities to give all pupils a clear idea of what has to be done next when they mark pupils' work. Other recent improvements in helping pupils to understand their successes, such as highlighting how successfully the learning objective has been achieved and trialling an approach in Year 5 for pupils to do this for themselves, are proving successful. Teachers plan to use these more consistently across the school. Pupils appreciate that teachers use a variety of approaches and resources in lessons. The curriculum is good and enriches pupils' learning well. Visits to places of interest, including the recent Year 6 residential trip, and visitors to the school make learning relevant and meaningful. During the inspection, the whole school was involved in 'Creative Week' when teachers were making very effective links between subjects, bringing learning to life in many ways. For example, some pupils were developing their information and communication skills by filming backgrounds to the 'river' poems they were writing.

The school has improved well since the last inspection, particularly in how it encourages pupils to be independent and understand their own learning. As a result of high quality care, guidance and support, pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. The extensive personal, social and health education programme ensures that pupils have an excellent understanding of the impact of their actions on others and of how to lead healthy lifestyles and stay safe. Pupils know that there is always an adult to turn to if they have problems. They respond very well to the school's reward system and initiatives such as 'Walk on Wednesday'. They particularly enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, many of which contribute well to keeping pupils fit and healthy. The calm and purposeful ethos and sense of community throughout the school go a long way towards helping pupils to develop very positive attitudes, because they feel safe and valued. Attendance is good, although unauthorised absence is above average because some parents take their children on holiday during term time. Pupils are enthusiastic about taking on responsibility and many make a valuable contribution to school life by helping others, for example as 'play leaders' or school council members, fulfilling a school aim for pupils to become 'accountable, contributing citizens'. Pupils are keen to participate in school productions and to represent the school, for example when the choir regularly sings at Rochester Cathedral.

Leadership and management are good throughout the school. Leaders research initiatives carefully before introduction to ensure that they address identified needs accurately. The school manages its resources very carefully to ensure financial viability for the future, giving a high priority to staffing levels so that pupils benefit from small group work and specialist teaching, for example in music and French. Professional development has been targeted well so that staff have developed the necessary expertise to meet pupils' needs well. Pupils' progress is tracked closely and, because pupils are known well as individuals, action is taken quickly if anyone is not making the expected progress. As a result, all groups of pupils make similarly good progress throughout the school, including higher attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The strengths of the rest of the school are reflected in the Foundation Stage. About half of the children entering the Reception class have attended the Nursery, with others joining the school from a variety of pre-school settings. Children are looked after very well and effective induction arrangements mean that children settle quickly. On entry, children's skills vary considerably, but taken together are below those expected for their age, particularly in language development. The introduction of a phonics programme has proved very successful this year and the children have developed the necessary early skills of reading, writing and number for Year 1 work. The Foundation Stage classrooms are exciting places to learn and children are actively involved in a good balance of activities, learning to communicate and socialise well. Children already enjoy a good range of resources outside and the school has plans to improve this further by adding a sensory garden and riding circuit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all marking helps pupils to identify their next steps and implement plans to give pupils more opportunities to assess their own understanding of what they have learned.
- Evaluate the recent changes made to the teaching of mathematics to identify those approaches that have the greatest impact on improving pupils' achievements and apply them more.

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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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
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
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?	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
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

27 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Katherine's School, Snodland ME6 5EJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you and hearing about the things that happen in the school. You are right; St Katherine's is a good school.

- I looked at a great many things in your school and this is what I found.
- You, your parents and the staff are very proud of your school.
- Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Your behaviour is excellent so that the school is a very calm and friendly place, and this helps you to enjoy school a great deal.
- You are looked after very well. The school is a safe place and you know that you have an adult to turn to if you have a problem.
- You enjoy a lot of extra-curricular clubs and many of these help you to keep fit.
- You have excellent attitudes to your work and this helps you to do well.
- You find learning interesting because teachers plan exciting things for you to do.
- Your headteacher runs the school very well and makes sure that everyone works together effectively. The staff know just what to do to make the school even better.
- Many of you help each other and help the school to run smoothly by taking on a variety of responsibilities.
- I agree with your teachers about the most important things that need to be done to help you make even faster progress and reach higher standards.
- Make sure that when they mark your work, they are clear about what you have to do next to improve further, and spread the system used in Year 5 to assess the quality of your own work.
- Share the approaches that help you to make the most progress in mathematics.

Please thank your parents for returning the questionnaires. It was helpful to hear what they think about the school. I wish you all the best for the future and that you all continue to enjoy coming to St Katherine's and working hard. I hope that Year 6 pupils do well in their new schools in September.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings Lead inspector