

Katherine Semar Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114950
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326098
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alisdair Bovaird
Headteacher	Mrs Rachel Callaghan
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2006
School address	Ross Close Saffron Walden Essex CB11 4DU
Telephone number	01799 521120
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Katherine Semar Juniors is an average sized school. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage and a few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or or disabilities is average, though the proportion of those having statements of special educational needs is double the national average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. There is a breakfast, after-school and holiday club that is managed by the governors. The school has gained Investors in People status and the Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Katherine Semar Juniors is a good school. It has some significant strengths. There have been across-the-board improvements since the previous inspection. Parents are almost unanimous in their support and many commented on how pleased they were to have chosen the school. Parents are particularly supportive of the excellent arrangements for the care of their children including in the breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs.

Pupils achieve well and make good progress in all year groups. They enter the school with standards that are generally above those expected and they make particularly good progress in science and mathematics in all year groups. However, although progress in reading has been good for some time, in writing it has been satisfactory. This has resulted in overall standards in English being at the national average for the past three years. In mathematics, standards are significantly above average. In science, standards are exceptionally high. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels, particularly in mathematics and science is significantly above average. The strong focus on developing writing means that the difference in standards between reading and writing is being closed and progress in writing is now good, particularly for the girls. The school is keenly aware that there is a need to continue to accelerate boys' progress in writing. There are positive indications that achievement in boys' writing is improving because there are good quality improvement projects in place.

The pupils' outstanding personal development is an important contributory factor in the school's effectiveness. There is a highly positive ethos that is characterised by excellent relationships between adults and pupils which are supported by the very caring attitudes that all the staff have. As a result, pupils' behaviour is excellent, and they thoroughly enjoy school and learning.

Teaching is good. There are many strengths, for example, teachers manage pupils exceptionally well and relationships are excellent. Teachers provide interesting tasks that are matched well to pupils' learning needs. The strong focus that has been placed on strengthening pupils' learning is paying dividends because in all classes they have an understanding of what is expected of them. Teachers' marking is inconsistent. There are some excellent examples of marking and helps pupils to know how to improve. However, this is not always the case and, on these occasions particularly in literacy, pupils are not sure about what they have to do to improve. Improvements in the curriculum have resulted in it being outstanding. The provision for physical development has been strengthened with a much wider range of sports activities provided. In addition, the curriculum has been thoroughly reviewed and this has led to literacy and numeracy work being included exceptionally well in topic plans which helps to make learning more meaningful for pupils. In addition, the curriculum for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved and this has resulted in a boosting of achievement.

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher leads the school outstandingly well. She has a clear vision for the future of the school that is shared by all the staff. Since the previous inspection, many new staff members have joined the school, including a very effective deputy head teacher. Teamwork is strong, and staff morale high with all members of staff knowing that they are able to provide their views and opinions about how the school can improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, particularly for boys by ensuring that activities build on the pupils' interests and ideas.
- Developing more consistency in the quality of teachers' marking.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well. They make good progress, though it is stronger in science, mathematics and reading than in writing. However, progress in writing is accelerating. This is the result of the school's focus. This has included the re-vamping of the writing curriculum, and ensured that writing activities are carefully tailored to entice and interest pupils. In consequence, pupils are much more positive about writing. Boys say that they enjoy writing lessons and they are keen to show and share their work. Throughout the school, pupils who find learning hard, and those who are at an early stage of learning English, are supported well and their progress is also good. Pupils' future learning needs are clearly identified by good quality assessments of science, particularly in their investigative skills. In English, although standards in the past have been at the national average because attainment in writing has been lower than reading, current Year 6 pupils are on course to attain above average standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, and so is their spiritual, moral social and cultural development. When asked what they like best about their school, they reply: 'Having really kind and helpful teachers who ensure that no-one is left out. We like working in our pleasant and bright environment and with teaching that makes learning fun.' Pupils visibly enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance and punctuality. Their behaviour is outstanding in and out of lessons. They demonstrate very high levels of self-discipline and excellent attitudes to learning. This is as a result of the rigorous implementation of coherent behaviour management strategies. Consequently, pupils have full confidence in the school's ability to deal with misbehaviour. They feel extremely safe and say that bullying is rare and instances of racism are rarer still. Pupils make lively contributions in class and they have many opportunities to contribute to school life. They lead weekly celebration assemblies very competently. The school council has been actively engaged in collecting computer vouchers to purchase movie cameras and additional computers. Year 6 councillors have begun to prepare for a meeting with the school governors and are very proud to be involved in school improvement. Pupils gain a very good understanding of how to eat healthily and keep themselves and others safe. This is demonstrated in gaining the Healthy Schools award. The good skills they acquire in literacy, numeracy, ICT, team work and independent learning prepare them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There have been considerable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. They are now good and there are some outstanding features, although some teaching is satisfactory.

This is because, on occasions, teachers do not always ensure that pupils are clear about what they have to do to improve and marking is inconsistent. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that work matches pupils' needs well and challenges them, and that pupils know what they need to do to succeed. However, this is not yet consistently the case. The highly effective team of learning support staff provide good quality help for pupils, particularly for those that find learning hard or have emotional or behavioural needs. Teachers use resources well, including the interactive white boards, to introduce tasks and to engage pupils' interest. Pupils benefit from high quality specialist teaching in modern foreign languages and music.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and there have been a number of improvements since the previous inspection. The curriculum is broad and rich and provides an excellent range of stimulating learning experiences which contribute well to the pupils' high levels of enjoyment. Literacy, numeracy and ICT work is very effectively linked with the well-conceived topic themes in order to make learning more interesting. The physical development curriculum is particularly strong. It has been extended both during the school day and in the wide range of sporting activities available after school. There is a strongly-developed arts curriculum of which music is a particular feature, with pupils having the opportunity to learn to play a wide range of instruments from specialist visiting teachers. Very effective arrangements for personal, social, health and citizenship education significantly enhance pupils' overall development and levels of maturity. Residential visits, which are provided for all year groups, also help to develop pupils' social skills. The curriculum for those that have learning difficulties and also pupils at an early stage of learning English has been developed well under the guidance of the new inclusion manager and enables these pupils to achieve well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of pastoral care is excellent. Careful attention ensures that pupils' health and well-being are safeguarded and all legal requirements are met in full. There is a very positive ethos of support because all the adults care for the pupils and ensure that they enjoy school and feel safe. This is confirmed by parents who are unanimous in saying that their children are safe in school. The implementation of consistent behaviour strategies enables all staff to manage pupils' behaviour extremely well and to reduce the need for serious sanctions significantly.

There is high quality breakfast and after-school club provision that benefits from caring and skilled staff that results in the children from both the infant and junior schools saying that they thoroughly enjoy the wide range of excellent activities provided.

Guidance is good. Progress is carefully tracked and the information is used well to set challenging targets for pupils. They are clear about their targets and enjoy talking through what they need to do to improve. Pupils who are in danger of slipping behind are quickly identified and very effective support is provided for them. In addition, these pupils benefit from the good partnerships the school has with outside agencies who also provide support for individual pupils when needed. Pupils are very well prepared for their transition to secondary school through school visits and a programme of lessons taught by secondary teachers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's leadership and management are outstanding. She has a clear focus on improvement and is determined to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to achieve their best. She has been successful in ensuring that all the staff work closely as a team. Her commitment to continuing professional development is demonstrated by the re-awarding of the Investors in People standard. This has resulted in a broad range of training opportunities being made available to support staff and also for almost all subject leaders to attend extended leadership courses. Even though many subject leaders are new to post, they are developing leadership and management skills well. There are good procedures for them to check provision and standards in their areas. They contribute well to the school's accurate and thorough monitoring and evaluation processes and the good quality improvement plan.

There are excellent links with the local community because there is a clear commitment and strategy to secure high quality community cohesion. This has resulted in extended care facilities being made available to all schools in the town. In addition, many local groups use the school premises and some, such as the Semar Players, a local drama group, include many members of staff and former pupils as well as community members. Profits made by the group's performances go to support the school. The school is also developing international links by exchanging pupils with a school in France and also by supporting a school in Uganda. The governing body brings useful expertise and supports the school well. Governors are successful in ensuring that the school continues to develop its effectiveness.

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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 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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

16 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Katherine Semar Junior School, Saffron Walden, CB11 4DU

Thank you for helping us during the inspection. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing what you can do. We particularly enjoyed your celebration assembly. We are not surprised that both you and your parents say that you thoroughly enjoy the breakfast and after-school clubs because you are looked after exceptionally well and the staff take excellent care of you.

You go to a good school. These are the things that we liked the most.

- You learn well because your teachers make sure that lessons are interesting and the work they give you helps you make good progress, particularly in numeracy and science.
- The staff take excellent care of you and make sure that you are safe. Those of you who find learning hard are supported very well.
- Teachers make sure that you have a very wide range of things to do: you enjoy learning many instruments, have lots of chances to play sports and games and also all year groups have the opportunity to have residential visits. The range of activities has been considerably extended since the previous inspection.
- Your headteacher is doing a good job and she is helped by the quality of the staff team who all pull together very well to make sure that you learn well and enjoy school.

All schools want to get better. To achieve this in your school, we have asked your teachers and governors to continue to focus on two things.

- To continue to raise standards in writing, particularly for the boys by making sure the work captures your interest and uses your own ideas.
- Ensure that you all know what you have to do to improve your work especially by making sure that teachers' marking is always of good quality.

You can help by making sure you work as hard as possible, especially with your writing, whilst continuing to enjoy school.

With best wishes for your future

Yours faithfully

Keith Sadler

Lead inspector