

Katherine Semar Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114966
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357661
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Sault
Headteacher	Jane Gilmour
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons and seven teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff and pupils and talked informally to a number of parents and carers. They observed the school's work, and looked at assessment data about pupils' progress, a range of policies, local authority reports and planning, as well as samples of pupils' work. In addition, 95 parental questionnaires were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How is the school improving boys' writing?
- What are the staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage doing to improve children's knowledge and understanding of the world?
- What is the impact of new systems for tracking pupils' progress?
- What is the impact of the engagement with parents and carers on pupils' learning?
- How well does the school promote pupils' understanding of other people's lives?

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average infant school. A below average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. Although few in number, there are pupils representing a wide range of different minority ethnic backgrounds, some of whom are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.

There is a privately run nursery sharing the school's site which is inspected separately. The school has an Activemark award and Investors in People status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. Staff have raised standards and improved the provision significantly since the last inspection. The school is successful because the excellent leadership and management provided by the headteacher and senior staff create a climate of continuous improvement and ensure a lack of complacency. Extremely accurate self-evaluation highlights strengths and weaknesses and is used to develop teachers' skills further. The improvements since the last inspection and the use of self-evaluation to make the provision even better shows the school has an outstanding capacity to improve.

Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points and reach high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Children get an excellent start to their school life in the Reception classes where they develop outstanding attitudes towards school. They make progress that is well above that expected. Throughout the school, writing skills, and especially those of the boys, have improved significantly. This is due in part to curricular improvements, such as practical activities that encourage boys to see a purpose for their writing. However, the curriculum provides limited opportunities for pupils to use their knowledge and skills in more creative ways to, for example, solve problems, or to learn about art and music in their own or other cultures, especially those represented in the school.

Pupils are extremely happy at the school and, together with their parents and carers, they say how safe they are and how well looked after. Care, guidance and support are excellent. Pupils' behaviour in school and in the outdoor areas is exceptional even when working without direct adult supervision, and this has a major impact on their learning. The teaching is outstanding and this results in the pupils' rapid progress. Lessons are very well planned and delivered and teachers are very effectively supported by other staff.

The effectiveness of the governing body has improved since the last inspection and governors are now offering good support and challenge to the work of the school. They are aware that their strategy to promote community cohesion, whilst meeting basic requirements, lacks detailed analysis and is patchy in its results. The excellent level of engagement with parents and carers has an outstanding impact on pupils' learning. Communication between home and school is much improved and parents and carers are more knowledgeable about the curriculum and their children's work. As one said 'I feel the school aids my child in all the necessary learning activities and I am up-to-date with all of his learning progression.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their cultural knowledge and understanding and to develop their creative capabilities.

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- Revisit its analysis of the way it promotes pupils' understanding of how others live and develop a sharper action plan to improve this work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The school ensures all pupils make excellent progress and learn successfully. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who receive a range of excellent support and make outstanding progress. Those who speak English as an additional language are also very well supported and included in all school activities. They make very rapid progress. A very high proportion of the pupils as a whole reach the higher levels of attainment, showing how well the school supports the most able.

In lessons observed, pupils' achievement and enjoyment were often outstanding. They talk very excitedly and articulately about how much they enjoy school. In Year 1 pupils made great strides in understanding what makes them special as people through some challenging discussion and thinking. As well as in literacy, numeracy and science, standards are high in information and communication technology. For example, Year 2 pupils very confidently and ably programmed a screen robot to draw shapes of different sizes and colours. However, there is less evidence of such high standards in art and design, music or other creative activities as the school provides fewer opportunities in these areas.

The school is working towards achieving Healthy School status but pupils do not yet show consistent awareness of healthy choices when eating. They make a good contribution to the school when given responsibility. Although lacking some awareness of how others live, they are still well prepared for their future education and lives. They have a well-developed spiritual, moral and social understanding, although their cultural knowledge remains satisfactory.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is outstanding because the teachers continually strive to improve their practice, try new ideas and share their expertise. Excellent use is made of specialist skills such as those of the drama teacher. The teaching assistants provide high quality support, especially for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and this is reflected in their excellent progress. The school is well resourced and teachers use new technology very effectively to support their lessons. The policy for marking of pupils' work and the system of feedback provided for them has been revamped. Whilst the new methods are very well thought through, they are not yet sufficiently embedded to have had the excellent impact on assessment that the school is aiming for.

The curriculum is enriched with a range of visits and interesting activities. The staff are working to develop links between subjects so that pupils can use their skills in different ways. The curriculum in English and mathematics is highly tailored to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities, so is having a very positive impact on pupils' standards in basic skills. The excellent levels of care, guidance and support are appreciated by pupils and by their families. As one parent wrote 'Teaching staff are kind and always at hand for advice.' Any vulnerable pupils are exceptionally well looked after and supported.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

All staff who were spoken to demonstrated a real ambition to improve further and to do the best possible for their pupils. For example, a system where teachers observe each other's work has led to the spread of excellent practice, mutual support and the overcoming of some staffing difficulties. The emphasis on helping all the pupils achieve also shows excellent focus on equal opportunities so no pupil is left behind. The headteacher challenges teachers to show the progress every pupil in their class has made on a half termly basis, and this quickly highlights any underachievement, and the need for extra support or interventions, as well as showing those who are doing well. The governing body also maintains a good challenge to the headteacher and senior managers. Governors discharge their duties effectively. Safeguarding procedures are followed well and these support the parents' and carers' confidence in their children's safety. All required checks on staff, on first aid and on health and safety matters are made. The school's work to promote community cohesion is satisfactory. The school itself is cohesive, and links with the immediate community are effective in supporting some aspects of the curriculum. However, there remain missed opportunities to celebrate the cultures that are represented in the school as well as to teach pupils about other people's cultures, faiths and lives.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The children in the Reception classes have an excellent foundation for their future learning. Outstanding leadership by the co-ordinator is ensuring that the curriculum is very well planned and takes full account of children's own interests. Children's attainment on entry is broadly in line with that expected, although it is lower in the area of knowledge and understanding of the world. They make excellent progress in all areas of learning, including this. Staff provide many activities that help develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world very effectively, such as role play in a post office area and activities related to building workers, while the new Nursery building was being created. The quality of teaching is excellent and very well assisted by high quality support staff. The accommodation, especially the outdoor areas, is outstanding and is extremely effectively used to promote learning through a range of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Resources, including new technology, are used extremely well to support the delivery of high quality and very enjoyable learning. The staff all take part in assessing the children, using a range of observations, both formal and informal. These are then used to build up a clear picture of each child's progress. The engagement with parents and carers is excellent and they speak very highly of the staff and the progress their children make.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

All of the parents and carers who sent in questionnaires say they are happy with their children's experience at the school. They make very positive comments about the leadership and the teaching and say especially that their children are safe and happy. The inspection evidence supports this picture.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Katherine Semar Infant School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 95 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 169 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	71	75	21	22	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	71	75	24	25	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	52	55	42	44	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	48	51	44	46	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	58	61	34	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	64	32	34	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	64	67	29	31	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	40	42	45	47	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	51	54	40	42	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	47	38	40	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	41	43	44	46	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	52	55	41	43	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	68	72	27	28	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 October 2010

Dear Pupils

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

I am writing to thank you for the way you welcomed us to your school recently. You were very helpful and happy to talk to us and we learned a lot about how good the school is from you.

Like you, we think your school is excellent! Here are some of the things we especially liked.

You learn a lot of new things because your teachers teach you outstandingly well.

You reach high standards in your work, especially reading, writing and mathematics. You are also making excellent progress.

Your behaviour is exceptionally good and this helps you learn.

The children in Reception have an excellent start to school and make fantastic progress.

You feel very safe and enjoy school a lot, and the school cares for you and looks after you very well.

The school is exceptionally well led and managed by the headteacher and senior teachers.

The school works extremely well with your parents and carers.

We have asked the school to do two things to help make it even better. They need to give you more time to do creative activities and learn about music, art, dance and drama. We have also asked them to help you learn more about how other people live in this country and in other parts of the world.

Enjoy your time at Katherine Semar Infant School and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead inspector

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