



Dean Gibson Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112341
LEA Cumbria
Inspection number 278911
Inspection dates 2 February 2006 to 3 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Barbara Hollingworth

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hawesmead Avenue
School category	Community		Kendal
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Cumbria, LA9 5HB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01539 773630
Number on roll	167	Fax number	01539 737224
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Sister Anne Darwin
Date of previous inspection	1 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Norah Mercer

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	2 February 2006 - 3 February 2006	278911

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Dean Gibson Catholic School is an average sized primary school situated in the South Lakeland town of Kendal. The school draws its pupils from a wide area as it is the only Catholic primary school in the locality. Almost all the pupils are from white British backgrounds. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals and the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Most pupils have benefited from nursery education and their attainment on entry to the Reception year is above average. Since January 2005, the school has had several acting headteachers and the substantive headteacher has been in post for only a few weeks at the time of the inspection. A separate inspection report is available on the private provision of after school care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it might reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to governance which has had an adverse impact on the school's improvement.

Although results of national tests show that standards in English and mathematics are above average at the end of Key Stage 2, too many pupils underachieve. At the end of Key Stage 1, standards have declined in recent years and, throughout the school, pupils who have the potential for high attainment underachieve. Standards in science and information and communication technology (ICT) are below average. The governing body has lost the confidence of staff and parents, hampering the school's improvement. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. While it is improving and helping to increase the rate of pupils' progress, a lack of professional development has resulted in weaknesses in some teachers' knowledge and in subject leadership skills. After a period of turbulence, the headteacher is providing a steadying hand and good leadership to restore confidence among staff and parents and to build successfully on the work done by the previous acting headteacher. Systems for setting pupils' targets and tracking their progress have yet to be established. Despite progress being inadequate since the last inspection, the school has demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve. It does not, however, provide value for money.

The school provided an accurate view of itself. Good care and pastoral support ensure that the pupils feel safe and secure. The pupils enjoy school, attendance is good, and they work well together and appreciate a wide range of interesting learning experiences, in and out of school. A strong spiritual ethos is evident in the care the pupils show for each other and in their concerns for other less fortunate than themselves. Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- urgently restore the confidence of staff and parents in the governance of the school
- establish systems for setting challenging targets and monitoring pupils' progress, prioritising English, mathematics, science and ICT
- ensure that teachers receive the appropriate professional development to improve the teaching and enable them to lead subjects effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

While standards overall are similar to those found nationally, many pupils, especially those capable of high attainment, underachieve. Most pupils have benefited from nursery education before they start school and their attainment is above that normally

expected for children of their age. Throughout the school, most pupils are now making satisfactory progress, including those in the Foundation Stage, and the underachievement is being eradicated. This has not always been the case and standards should be higher, particularly by the end of Key Stage 1, where there has been a history of underachievement in recent years.

The results of the Year 2 national tests over the past three years have declined and standards in 2005 were similar to the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. The trend in the Year 6 national test results over the past three years has been more inconsistent, although standards in 2005 were above the national averages in English and mathematics and below average in science. English has shown a slight but steady improvement over the past three years, but the results in mathematics and science have been erratic. The school met its targets in English but fell short of them in mathematics. More able pupils at the end of both key stages should have done better.

Standards in ICT are below average and insufficient progress has been made in improving standards in science and ICT since the last inspection. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds do as well as other pupils in their age group.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy school, demonstrated through their good attendance, and all those spoken to showed delightful, positive attitudes towards their work. However, their awareness of how well they are learning and what they are aiming for is limited. Their behaviour is often exemplary and good relationships pervade throughout the whole school. Minority ethnic pupils are welcomed and all pupils have a good awareness of other religions and cultures. There is an excellent spiritual ethos, most apparent in the reflective way in which pupils approach collective worship and discuss the changes in the world around them. Pupils feel safe and secure and are confident that the extremely rare incidences of bullying are dealt with effectively. They feel that their views are listened to, and acted upon, through the elected members of the school council who take their role very seriously. Pupils participate enthusiastically in community events, often through links with the church. They support the healthy tuck shop but their awareness of the contribution of physical activity to a healthy lifestyle is limited. Pupils develop the attributes of teamwork, perseverance and co-operation in preparation for their future life, but their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills should be better, if their economic well-being is to be promoted successfully.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning was good at the last inspection; it is now satisfactory. Despite most teachers being hard working and committed they have not had the benefit of structured professional development until recently, and the pupils' learning has also been affected by staff absence. However, the impact of recent support is clearly evident in, for example, the organisation of learning in the Foundation Stage.

Where lessons provide the pupils with a variety of interesting activities, they participated enthusiastically. In some lessons, pupils had useful opportunities to discuss their learning with each other and applied themselves to tasks with sustained levels of concentration. Support staff and students were deployed effectively and often made a good contribution to the lesson. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities received appropriate support and they are making good progress with their reading.

Weaknesses in the teaching are mainly related to a lack of subject knowledge and an understanding of assessment levels. The school has started to assess and record pupils' progress systematically. However, pupils do not have learning targets and their progress is not monitored sufficiently, particularly that of the more able pupils. Consequently, pupils are not always challenged or given appropriate guidance on how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of most learners and statutory requirements are met. Recent improvements to curricular planning ensure that all pupils receive a broad curriculum over the year, including those in the Foundation Stage. However, the weekly experiences for some can be dull and there is not enough variety to stimulate their already evident enjoyment of learning through, for example, subjects such as investigative work in science, ICT and physical education. There are rich and varied experiences for all pupils through extracurricular activities, theme weeks and visitors into school. An awareness of a responsibility to the community and others less fortunate than themselves is promoted well. Wherever possible, the school takes opportunities to link with local businesses to promote learning and a recent project involved a local building firm helping to teach the pupils about health and safety on a construction site.

Procedures for identifying pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were identified as an issue at the last inspection. This has recently improved and there are effective systems for identification and support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care and support for pupils. The atmosphere in school is calm and supportive, helping the youngest pupils settle quickly into the school's routines. Staff are fully committed to pupils' welfare which contributes to pupils' satisfactory achievement. The school has inadequate systems to set individual targets, to monitor pupils' progress or to give them the guidance that they need. The Year 6 pupils speak highly of the arrangements which help them know what to expect from the new demands and challenges when they move to the local secondary schools. The school gives good support to the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children say they feel safe and have trusting relationships with adults. Child protection requirements and procedures are clear and understood by all staff. Links with outside agencies ensure that pupils at risk receive special support. Pupils feel that their views are listened to and respected, and that they can discuss concerns with staff. The health and safety procedures are properly underpinned by risk assessments, enabling pupils to undertake activities safely both on and off the school premises.

Grade: 3

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school have been affected by the absence of a substantive headteacher, staff absence and a loss of confidence in governance by the staff and parents. The breakdown in communication has been a significant factor in distracting the main focus of the school's work on raising standards. The school has been identified by the local authority as being in need of considerable external support to halt its decline. Although this has been successful, the school continues to receive much needed help. Additional governors have strengthened the governing body, but its role in school self-evaluation is limited. From a high number of returned parents' questionnaires, a third still expressed their concerns about governance. Staff absence and a falling school roll have also contributed to a deficit budget, and there are still issues to be resolved before a staffing structure can be agreed for the next academic year.

The headteacher provides good leadership and management. She is building upon the good work of the previous acting headteacher; teaching is improving, staff absence is being managed effectively, the budget deficit is under control and pupils are now making satisfactory progress. Data has begun to be used more effectively and evaluation by the headteacher and external partners is good. Effective work has started on the most relevant improvement priorities so that resources can be targeted where they are needed most. Subject leadership is developing, but it is still in its early stages. The headteacher has also established good links with parents and gained the support of the staff. The school has the capacity to improve but currently provides unsatisfactory value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	No
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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The School Council

Dean Gibson Catholic Primary School

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LA9 5HB

2 February 2006

Dear Children

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we came to visit your school. We enjoyed our visit very much. We told some of you that we would write to you all to tell you what we found about your school, and we thought the best way of doing this would be through your school council. These are the things we liked about your school.

Your new headteacher, Mrs Mercer, wants the very best for you all.

You are well-behaved at school and told us that you feel safe there.

You are very friendly and polite. You were especially helpful to us when we were in school.

You concentrate and work hard.

You think of others and raise funds to help them.

Your teachers work hard too and they often plan fun events, such as the art week.

We know that you will want to make your school become better. Some of you told us that sometimes the work you do is too easy and we agree with you. We have asked your teachers to make sure that you all know what your learning targets are so that they can make sure you are making enough progress. Some of you may also know that the inspection report says that your school needs a lot of improvement. This means that your school will receive extra help to get back on its feet again to become one of the best. To do this, we have asked that your teachers, parents, and the governing body, who help to manage your school, work together as a team.

Thank you again for talking to us and answering questions. Good luck in the future!

Best wishes

The inspection team