

Dean Gibson Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112341
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	295381
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2007
Reporting inspector	George Crowther

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	157
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maureen Calnan
Headteacher	Mrs Norah Mercer
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Hawesmead Avenue Kendal Cumbria LA9 5HB
Telephone number	01539 773630
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Dean Gibson is a smaller than average school. Over the past four years, the number of pupils has fallen. It serves a wide area because it is the only Catholic primary school in Kendal. Its social and economic context is relatively advantaged and very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. Children's attainment when they start school is broadly average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of those from minority ethnic backgrounds, none is at the early stage of learning English. Following the last inspection, an Interim Executive Board (IEB) took over the governing body's responsibilities for the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Dean Gibson is a good school that has come through a period of challenge and change with flying colours. The last inspection found that many pupils were not making enough progress, particularly the more able and those in Key Stage 1. In a relatively short period of time, the headteacher's outstanding leadership has improved the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils are now achieving well and the standard of their work is much higher. Systems for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are now firmly in place. As a result, teachers have a far clearer picture of how well pupils are doing, so work in lessons is better matched to pupils' needs. There are clear signs that the school is continuing to improve steadily. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Children achieve well in the Reception year. Good teaching and a wide range of interesting, practical activities enable them to build their skills rapidly. Pupils now are making much better progress during Key Stage 1 and, by Year 2, achievement is good. Carefully planned lessons and lively teaching ensure that pupils can take the next step in their learning. By Year 6, pupils' achievement is good. The improvement in pupils' progress is clear in higher standards in mathematics and science. Standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are now average. Across the school however, the more able pupils are still not always challenged sufficiently by the work they are given. The use of targets to focus and support pupils' learning is inconsistent.

Pupils' personal development is good with outstanding features. The school is a very positive place where good care, guidance and support help pupils to be happy, confident learners. Parents say this is a key strength. As a result, pupils gain great enjoyment from their learning, try hard in lessons and behave impeccably. They have a good grasp of how to make healthy choices. They feel safe in school and know how to stay safe out of school. Pupils contribute well to the school community, for example, acting as buddies to make sure that everyone has a friend. Improvements have led to a good curriculum that meets pupils' needs successfully and is enriched by a wide range of activities outside lessons. There has been a strong focus on boosting pupils' skills in English and mathematics but, as yet, these skills are not being used and developed sufficiently through work in other subjects.

Good leadership and management have been key factors in the school's success. The headteacher, well supported by senior staff, the IEB and the local authority, has been firmly focused on raising standards. Self-evaluation is understandably cautious and not quite as positive as the inspection findings, but leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and are clear about the way forward. Parents' confidence has been restored. They are very positive about the strengths of leadership and recognise how much the school has improved. The rapid progress already made gives the school a good capacity to improve further and it provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the progress made by the more able pupils.
- Improve the ways in which pupils use and develop their English and mathematics skills through work in other subjects.
- Support pupils' progress by consistently setting specific, individual targets that help them to know what they are aiming to learn next.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Both achievement and standards are good. Pupils' achievement has improved significantly since the last inspection. They make good progress in the Reception year because a well planned range of tasks captures their interest, such as the Windy Day activities that stimulated much learning in the outdoor area. By the time children join Year 1, standards are above those usually reached by pupils of this age. Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 1 and 2, responding to good teaching and building their basic skills well. Lessons have a strong focus on what pupils need to learn next and are fun, which contributes greatly to pupils' enjoyment of learning. Current standards in Year 2 are average because the year group contains fewer high attaining pupils than is usual for the school. By Year 6, achievement is good because teachers are targeting lessons more effectively on improving pupils' skills. As a result, standards in Year 6 are well above average in English, mathematics and science and much higher than at the last inspection. In 2006, targets were exceeded in English but not met in mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported, fully involved in lessons and make good progress. Whilst more able pupils are making good progress in many lessons, the work they are given is not always challenging enough to encourage even higher achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils thoroughly enjoy school and, by Year 6, are confident, articulate and have positive attitudes to learning. A typical comment was, 'I like lessons because they are always interesting so you want to learn new things.' Around the school, pupils are friendly and exceptionally well behaved. Relationships are positive. Everyone agreed when one child said, 'I like the other children because everyone's friendly and we all work well together.' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Events such as Citizenship Week, when pupils explored a range of moral and social issues, encourage pupils' understanding of themselves and their place in the wider world. Pupils have a good understanding of looking after themselves. They make healthy choices in the food they eat and the exercise they take. They say school is a safe place and they know they can talk to the staff if they have a concern. Pupils are involved well with the local community, such as when they broadcast on Kendal Youth Radio. Pupils do lots of jobs in school, such as acting as buddies, so they make a good contribution to the community. The school council gives pupils a valuable voice in school matters. The good levels of academic and personal skills seen in Year 6 equip pupils well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching and learning has improved considerably and is now good. Lessons are invariably lively and interesting, which captures and holds the pupils' attention and makes them keen to learn. Teachers make lessons enjoyable by using a good variety of activities to encourage learning. Good relationships and plenty of praise for success are strong features of most lessons. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, often supporting individuals or a small group. Teachers have clear information about pupils' current attainment which is enabling them to plan learning that builds quickly upon

existing skills. As a result, lessons are usually suitably challenging for all pupils. Occasionally, particularly in mathematics lessons, the more able pupils are not challenged sufficiently. Sometimes the task is too easy or does not allow for a variety of approaches to enable the most able pupils to show what they can do. Good systems for assessment and tracking pupils' progress have helped the school to improve achievement. For example, the school identifies groups of pupils for extra, targeted support, which has been effective in raising standards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and adjusted well to suit pupils' differing learning requirements. For example, pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities have clear plans to show which skills need to improve. Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities both in lessons and in the many extra-curricular clubs. The Foundation Stage curriculum covers all the required areas of learning and the school is currently enhancing the outdoor area. A strong focus on improving pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics is not yet matched by enough work that uses and develops these skills through activities in other subjects. There is now greater use of ICT in the curriculum. Pupils enjoy lessons because the teachers develop the fun aspect of the curriculum. For example, Year 5 pupils' persuasive writing was all the more convincing because they had to make a simple product before advertising it for sale. Pupils' very good personal development owes much to the effective programme of personal, social and health education. Visitors to the school, and good links with other schools and the community, enrich the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Levels of pastoral care are outstanding and academic guidance and support are good. Very positive relationships between staff, pupils and parents ensure that each child is happy and ready to learn. Pupils say they feel safe because of the trusting relationships they have with each other and the staff. The school's appropriate procedures for child protection are in place and arrangements to keep pupils safe follow national guidelines. The school is conscientious in addressing risks both at school and when pupils are out on activities. The school provides first-rate advice and guidance to pupils to secure their welfare and promote their personal development.

The school has made a start in setting learning targets for pupils to improve their work but there is some inconsistency between classes in its use and effectiveness. Parents are well informed about what their children are learning and there are good links with outside agencies to help ensure that every pupil makes good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's outstanding leadership and strong support from senior staff have ensured that, since the last inspection, many aspects of the school's work have improved significantly. Staff, members of the IEB and parents speak highly of the headteacher's enthusiasm and commitment, which encourage everyone to share her clear vision for the future of the school. The staff work effectively as a team and morale is high. This is recognised by parents and the

standing of the school in the community has risen. A Year 4 parent wrote, 'There's a real sense of everyone working together to make Dean Gibson an exciting place for children to enjoy learning and make friends.' The school's self-evaluation procedures are effective. Whilst the most recent evaluation was modest, the school does have an accurate view of the progress it has made and what remains to be done. Governance is good. The temporary arrangements for overseeing the school have worked well in supporting the headteacher in the drive for improvements. The school is well staffed and there is an appropriate range of good quality resources to support pupils' learning. The school is not complacent. It has already shown it has the ability to improve aspects of its work considerably and it is striving to be even better.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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	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

12 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Dean Gibson Catholic Primary School, Cumbria, LA9 5HB

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your school to find out how well you are doing. There are lots of good things about your school, but we also found a few ways in which it could be even better.

Your school has improved a lot during the past year and you are doing much better with your work. In particular, the progress of children in Year 1 and Year 2 and the more able children has improved considerably. The standards of work in Year 6 are much higher, particularly in science and mathematics. Your teachers are doing a good job and so you are learning more quickly than in the past, but you must keep working hard. We were particularly impressed with the confident way you express your views, the enjoyment you get from lessons and your excellent behaviour. These strengths are supporting your learning well. You say there are lots of interesting things to do in lessons, and we agree. The tasks your teachers are giving you are making you work hard but it is usually good fun and you are keen to learn. You know a lot about making healthy choices in the food you eat and the exercise you take. The jobs you do in class and the school jobs the older children undertake help you to make a good contribution to your school. All the staff look after you very well and make sure you are happy and ready to learn. Your headteacher is doing a good job in helping your school to get better and all the staff are working hard to help her.

We would like you to work with your teachers to improve the way you learn.

- We have asked your school to make sure you have work that is challenging and really makes you think. You must try your best to rise to the challenge.
- You do not use and develop your English and mathematics skills enough when you do work in subjects such as science, history and geography. We have asked that you have more chances to do this.
- Many of you have learning targets. We have asked your school to make more use of these, consistently, so that each of you has individual targets for which you can aim.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school.

Yours sincerely

George Crowther

Lead Inspector