

St Dominic's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115706
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312038
Inspection date	5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	John Carnaghan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	106
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Margaret Smith
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	St Mary's Hill Inchbrook Stroud GL5 5HP
Telephone number	01453 832682
Fax number	01453 833422

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Dominic's Catholic School is smaller than average and has a below-average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. There are fewer-than-average pupils from minority ethnic groups and none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average. There are currently no pupils with disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Dominic's Catholic Primary School offers a good standard of education. It lies at the heart of the local and church community and serves them both very well. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One summed up their positive views: 'I think St Dominic's is a lovely school which has a caring, family atmosphere... the focus is not only on academic subjects, but on the child as a whole.'

Allowing pupils to 'grow towards their individual potential' is central to the school's ethos, and their personal development is good. Their enjoyment of school is outstanding. They greatly appreciate the kindness of their teachers and have very few criticisms.

Lessons are interesting, well planned and good overall. Pupils learn well and this is further promoted by their good behaviour. Consistently good teaching and learning means that achievement from children's earliest days in the Reception class until they leave Year 6 is good. Those with learning difficulties are well catered for and make similar progress to other pupils. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average by the end of Year 6.

Pupils are engaged and enthused by the good and interesting curriculum on offer. They particularly appreciate the splendid opportunities offered by trips, visitors and after-school clubs. Teachers demonstrate outstanding care for pupils' welfare and pupils report there is always someone to turn to if they need help. There are very thorough systems to ensure all pupils are kept safe. However, academic support and guidance could give pupils better advice. Pupils' work is regularly marked, but comments do not always offer advice on how they can improve. Pupils do not always have a clear enough view of how well they are doing and are not always given precise enough targets for improvement.

The headteacher provides committed and intelligent leadership. The school's self-evaluation, led by the headteacher, is thorough and analytical. The results feed into setting the priorities identified in the school's clearly focused development planning. Governors offer support for the school and are starting to develop their monitoring activities, but they do not yet contribute to the formulation of plans for the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Children enter the Reception class with lower-than-expected skills. An imaginative curriculum and effective teaching ensure good progress and almost all children reach the expected learning goals by the time they enter Year 1. Staff understand the learning needs of young children and plan stimulating activities, utilising the new outdoor learning area well. Careful planning encourages children to develop independence and they work and play happily together, readily participating in all activities. The school has effective induction procedures and strong links with parents, so children settle in quickly. Staff are rightly reviewing the way they track and assess learning in order to meet children's needs even more accurately.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' academic guidance and support through a more individualised approach to marking and setting targets for improvement.
- Involve governors in planning for the school's future.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start at the school with skills that are below those expected. They make good progress so by the end of Year 6 they reach above-average standards. The achievement of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties, is good.

Effective teaching helps the youngest children settle quickly into school and they soon develop good learning habits. By the time they are ready to start Year 1, standards are similar to those seen nationally, demonstrating good progress.

Careful planning ensures pupils make a smooth transition into Year 1. The well-organised teaching and curriculum and strong intervention programmes ensure continuing good achievement. Standards at the end of the Year 2 have improved in the last two years and are now above average, although those in writing lag a little behind reading and mathematics. The school is acting vigorously to improve pupils' writing.

Pupils achieve well in Years 3 to 6, largely because they are well taught and are willing to learn. There are no significant differences between the standards and achievement of boys and girls.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and say they are happy and confident that adults keep them safe and deal with any problems. One said, 'We can talk to the teachers and they sort things out.' Pupils behave well, knowing that rare instances of bullying are quickly dealt with. Throughout the school, warmth and mutual respect are evident in all relationships. Attendance is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; they show a strong respect for others, particularly those less fortunate than themselves. However, their knowledge of multicultural Britain is limited.

Pupils understand how to live healthy lives and, in discussion, were keen to stress how much healthier the school lunches have become. They understand the need to exercise, appreciating the opportunities offered through the curriculum and in after-school activities. The school council is developing well and members are proud of its achievements in improving play equipment. Pupils contribute well to the wider community through the school's links with the church and parish, with other nearby schools and through strong support for charities. They are prepared well for future economic well-being through the acquisition of good literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and the recent introduction of lessons on financial awareness.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn well because of their very constructive attitudes and because they are consistently well taught. Classrooms are a positive environment and teachers are invariably encouraging and helpful. Pupils receive strong support from teaching assistants, who are both pro-active and well informed.

Lessons are usually well planned to build carefully on earlier learning. They include a variety of activities to maintain pupils' interest and are enlivened by the interesting use of varied resources. Pupils know the objectives of the lesson and work consistently to meet their teachers' expectations. They are given frequent opportunities to demonstrate how effectively they are able to organise their work together or independently, as required. Teachers manage pupils with calm assurance and rarely have to admonish them for bad behaviour.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, usually offering kindly advice. However, marking too rarely indicates to pupils what level they are working at or how much they are improving.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned to offer an interesting combination of activities. This ensures pupils' continuing engagement with their learning and their good progress. The school sensibly adapts planning to meet the varying needs of each year group. Provision for the arts is very strong and is recognised nationally through the award of the Artsmark. Personal, social and health education makes a good contribution to the pupils' care and personal development. Computers are being used more and more now that the school has a stack of modern laptop computers that can easily be transferred between classrooms. However, planning to deliver ICT across a range of subjects is underdeveloped. This is being addressed as a priority in the school development plan.

Pupils speak happily about the trips the school offers. They also like the variety of interesting visitors who enliven their studies, such as a well-known poet who contributed to raising standards in writing, inspiring pupils to produce their own high quality poems. The school offers a wide range of sporting and other activities at the end of the day, and pupils participate enthusiastically and in large numbers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a warm, caring, family atmosphere in school. All pupils are well known and valued by staff and their pastoral care is outstanding. As relationships are very good, pupils are confident in approaching adults should they have a problem. Parents are positive about the care shown to their children. Safeguarding and health and safety systems are robust. Good support is in place for vulnerable pupils, and teaching assistants are well deployed to support individuals and groups. There are strong links with local agencies to supplement this support. Simple targets in English and mathematics are set for groups of pupils and are regularly revised. These are not as effective as they should be because they are not specific to individuals.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Clear vision and strong teamwork enable senior staff to give clear direction, leading to school improvement and ensuring good standards and achievement. All staff share a sincere commitment to promote the school's caring ethos. There have been good improvements since the last inspection in a number of areas such as attendance, the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage, and the accommodation. This demonstrates the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Staff work as a close team and all are firmly committed to raising standards. Self-evaluation is carried out regularly and rigorously; this has a relevant focus and has led to improved learning and achievement. The school development plan sets challenging targets and is clearly structured, indicating the direction for the future. All staff contribute to the plan but the governing body does not yet have a significant input. Governors are supportive and very committed and ensure that the school gives good value for money. However, they do not always offer sufficient challenge to the school.

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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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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 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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

6 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School, Stroud, GL5 5HP

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently. It was lovely talking to you. Many of you told us how good the school is and how much you enjoy attending. We agree that St Dominic's is a good school and we think it cares for you all extremely well. This helps ensure that your personal development is good, and you certainly enjoy school tremendously. You make good progress from the time you start to when you leave and your work in English, maths and science is good.

Teaching is good, lessons are lively and you always join in keenly so that you learn well. The mixture of topics and subjects that you can study is good and we know how much you like all those after-school clubs. The headteacher and her staff lead and manage the school well. Like all schools, there are a few things that could be better. We think there are two important areas where the school could improve.

- You should get better advice about the level you are working at and how to improve your work. You could help by asking your teachers for clearer guidance on what to concentrate on next.
- Governors are keen to support the school but need to improve the way they help it plan for the future.

Once again, thank you for all your help and I wish you a very happy Christmas.

With all good wishes

John Carnaghan Lead inspector

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Once again, thank you for all your help and I wish you a very happy Christmas.

With all good wishes

John Carnaghan
Lead inspector