

Heron Cross Primary School

Address: Grove Road, Heron Cross, Stoke-on-Trent, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 4LJ

Unique reference number (URN): 124003

Inspection report: 20 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ● ●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✔ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders prioritise attendance very successfully. They promote the importance of regular attendance and establish positive attitudes from Nursery onwards. As a result, attendance rates are high and above the national average. Attendance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils is particularly impressive. Due to leaders' highly effective work in addressing barriers to attendance, very few pupils are persistently absent.

The school is a harmonious place because relationships are warm and positive. Pupils are polite and courteous. Staff follow the school's behaviour policy consistently well and celebrate pupils' achievements regularly through 'bravo boards' in classrooms. Leaders have established a culture in which pupils take responsibility for, and reflect on, their behaviour. This work is well embedded. Leaders put highly effective support in place for pupils who need help to manage their feelings and actions in a calm and safe way. Pupils' thirst for learning is evident in their high levels of engagement and sustained concentration in lessons.

When behaviour incidents or bullying occur, leaders act swiftly and effectively. As a result of leaders' rigorous approach, incidents have reduced significantly over time.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have developed a highly inclusive ethos. They identify and support pupils facing barriers to their learning and wellbeing swiftly. Leaders ensure that staff receive specific training on how to accurately identify the specific needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Ongoing professional learning enhances staff expertise in meeting pupils' needs. Staff use 'pupil passports' consistently well in order to ensure pupils' needs are routinely met. As a result of this highly effective support, pupils progress well and secure the knowledge they need for their next steps.

Leaders base the systems and support for pupils firmly on high-quality educational research. Rigorous systems are in place to check pupils' progress and ensure that pupils with SEND and disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils fulfil their potential. Leaders ensure pupil premium funding is used carefully to support pupils' achievement and help them take part successfully in school activities.

Leaders work closely with other professionals to ensure pupils receive specialist support if they need it. Staff respond promptly to the expert guidance they receive so that pupils benefit from it. Where pupils' needs change, or new needs emerge, leaders support staff to adapt to these swiftly and effectively. As a result, staff support pupils to overcome the barriers they face consistently well.

Leaders have developed a comprehensive and well-considered personal development programme that responds closely to pupils' needs. Pupils learn how to make safe and sensible choices. For example, in Year 1, the personal, social, health and economic curriculum teaches pupils what to do if they become lost. Across the school, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. They learn to treat others with respect and cooperate highly effectively with others. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of different types of relationships.

Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from highly effective pastoral care that supports pupils' mental health and wellbeing very well. Pupils have opportunities to take part in activities such as 'chill and chat' and 'knit and natter', which help them to talk openly about how they feel. Leaders have created a safe and supportive culture where pupils feel comfortable sharing their worries and talking about their emotions. Skilled staff provide timely and effective support for pupils who need help to manage their emotions, and these needs are met well.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment opportunities. 'Enrichment passports' record the creative, cultural and artistic experiences pupils take part in. Pupils take part in drama, music and dance. They perform publicly and this helps to build their confidence. Pupils also enjoy sports such as football, netball and athletics. Leaders ensure that all pupils make the most of these opportunities. Carefully planned trips and visits enhance pupils' learning. For example, pupils speak enthusiastically about how a visit to a Victorian town helped them understand life in Victorian times. Trips to different places of worship help pupils to learn about various faiths and beliefs. This supports them to appreciate diversity and equality.

Leaders ensure that all pupils are fully involved in school life, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The personal development offer is inclusive and makes a significant difference to broadening pupils' horizons. There is something for everyone.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils achieve well and are prepared effectively for their next stages of education. They tend to learn the curriculum securely and generally build the essential knowledge they need in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who join the school at different points, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, progress well from their starting points. A well-implemented phonics programme ensures that pupils learn to read effectively. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check are in line with the national average. Leaders' improvements to the key stage 2 mathematics curriculum support pupils to increase their fluency in number and secure their understanding of mathematical concepts such as scale.

Pupils' outcomes in key stage 2 national tests are broadly in line with the national average. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well, and gaps between their achievement and that of other pupils nationally are closing.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate overview of the quality of the school's curriculum. They have designed it well. They have identified the important knowledge that pupils should learn over time in each subject, from the early years onwards. Teaching is typically effective.

Leaders prioritise pupils' development of the foundational skills of reading, writing and mathematics. They identify gaps in pupils' knowledge accurately and continue to embed recent changes to strengthen pupils' transcription skills in writing and reasoning in mathematics. Staff teach early reading effectively, ensuring that pupils develop secure phonics knowledge so they can recognise letters and blend their sounds with increasing fluency to read words. Staff provide targeted support for pupils who need it, enabling them to catch up quickly. However, in a small number of subjects, teachers do not focus consistently on the key knowledge pupils need to learn. Where this happens, pupils' understanding is not as secure as it should be.

Teachers adapt the curriculum and make appropriate adjustments so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils receive the support they need to learn alongside their peers and achieve well.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise the early years. They have designed a well-structured curriculum that enables children to build the knowledge and skills they need to be well prepared for Year 1. Effective teaching supports children to develop their vocabulary from Nursery onwards. For example, staff introduce ambitious words such as 'enormous' and encourage children to use this language meaningfully as they learn through their play. Staff plan physical development activities carefully to help children gain confidence and dexterity in handling small objects. Children develop an effective pencil grip, which supports them to form letters accurately in Reception.

Staff teach phonics effectively. Children use their phonics knowledge to read words and books that are well matched to their stage of learning. When children need additional help to keep up with phonics, staff provide timely and targeted support in small-group sessions.

Children practise and revisit what they have learned through purposeful play. Typically, staff interact constructively with children to support their learning and identify any gaps in knowledge. When staff spot gaps, they put additional support in place promptly, so children continue to make progress.

Staff build positive relationships with parents and carers and communicate clearly through regular updates, 'stay and play' sessions and workshops.

Leaders energise the school community. They know the school well and identify areas for improvement quickly. They take effective action, which has led to rapid improvements in attendance, behaviour, and aspects of pupils' personal development and wellbeing. Leaders have developed a highly inclusive ethos that supports all pupils to succeed and thrive, especially pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders continue to focus on embedding recent changes and refining areas of the school's work further, particularly in aspects of the writing and mathematics curriculums.

Leaders place pupils' needs at the centre of their decision-making. Staff and those responsible for governance share this commitment. Staff reflect that meaningful changes are made in the best interests of pupils and have a positive impact on them.

Leaders provide staff with effective professional learning that supports them to carry out their roles well and develop their work in line with school priorities. Staff who are new to the profession, or the school, receive tailored and timely support.

Governors have an effective overview of the school and understand its strengths and priorities for further improvement. They support and challenge leaders appropriately, using a range of information that leaders provide and that governors scrutinise carefully. Governors take proactive steps to assure themselves that staff wellbeing is managed well. Staff appreciate that leaders prioritise their workload and wellbeing. They feel well supported.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Heron Cross Primary School is a welcoming and inclusive school where pupils thrive. From the moment pupils join the school, including those who start at different points in their education, staff take time to get to know them well. As a result, pupils feel safe, valued and well cared for. Pupils are confident that there is always a trusted adult available to support them if they need it.

Behaviour across the school is exemplary. Pupils enjoy learning and work hard in lessons. Disruption to learning is rare because pupils understand leaders' high expectations and respond positively to them. Pupils know and follow the 'Heron Cross way' and consistently show that they are 'ready, respectful and safe'. This work begins in the early years. Children are taught to follow routines well. They listen attentively during story time and learn to sustain their concentration.

Pupils enjoy being in school with their friends. They are keen to be part of school life. Pupils describe the school as a friendly place to be. Bullying is rare, and pupils trust staff to deal with any concerns quickly and effectively. Pupils' positive attitudes to school are reflected in high rates of attendance. If attendance begins to fall, pupils receive appropriate and timely support.

Pupils who model the school's values such as courage, resilience and kindness are recognised in school as 'influencers'. Other pupils aspire to demonstrate these values in their own behaviour.

Pupils play an active role in the life of the school. They take on a wide range of leadership roles, including positions on the pupil leadership team and eco-team and as librarians. Older pupils are proud of, and committed to, their responsibilities in roles such as office helpers, playground monitors and lunchtime supervisors.

Parents are highly positive about the school. One parent, typical of many, stated: 'This school has provided a supportive, nurturing and engaging environment for our children to thrive in.'

Next steps

- Leaders should further support staff in ensuring curriculum developments in writing and mathematics are embedded so that pupils learn important foundational knowledge in these subjects securely and consistently.
 - Leaders should ensure that teaching focuses consistently on the important knowledge that has been identified across curriculum subjects and that pupils embed and remember this core knowledge securely over time.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Suzie Evans.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with school leaders, including the headteacher, assistant headteachers and other leaders during the inspection. The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school uses no alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2022.

Headteacher: Gemma Willdigg

Lead inspector:

Barry Yeardsley, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Niall Gallagher, Ofsted Inspector

Azizan Kabil, Ofsted Inspector

Justine Lomas, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 20 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

411

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

472

Well above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

46.41%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

1.22%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

20.68%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	53%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	59%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	44%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	55%	60%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	65%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	69%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	65%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	61%	73%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	74%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	76%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	73%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	68%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	54%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	80%	73%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	51%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	54%	47%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	46%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	50%	44%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	63%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	63%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	68%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	55%	60%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	71%	59%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	71%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	71%	58%	Above
2022/23 (final)	70%	58%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	67%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	69%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	57%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	80%	59%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	51%	68%	-17 pp
2024/25 (revised)	54%	69%	-15 pp
2023/24 (final)	46%	67%	-21 pp
2022/23 (final)	50%	66%	-16 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	63%	80%	-17 pp
2024/25 (revised)	63%	81%	-18 pp
2023/24 (final)	68%	80%	-12 pp
2022/23 (final)	55%	78%	-23 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	71%	78%	-7 pp
2024/25 (revised)	71%	78%	-7 pp
2023/24 (final)	71%	78%	-6 pp
2022/23 (final)	70%	77%	-7 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	67%	80%	-12 pp
2024/25 (revised)	69%	81%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	57%	79%	-22 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	80%	79%	1 pp

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	4.6%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.3%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.0%	5.9%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	10.8%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	13.7%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	17.5%	16.2%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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