



Heron Cross Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124003
LEA Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 281603
Inspection dates 19 October 2005 to 20 October 2005
Reporting inspector Donald Mason RISP

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Grove Road
School category	Community		Heron Cross
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 4LJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 233565
Number on roll	263	Fax number	01782 234804
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Carol Shaw
Date of previous inspection	7 February 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Carol Burton

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Heron Cross is a medium sized, urban school. The school's socio-economic background is very disadvantaged and standards of attainment on entry to the Nursery are significantly below average. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is more than twice the national average, as is the percentage of pupils with special difficulties and disabilities. A speech and language unit, managed by the local education authority (LEA), is based at the school. Many more pupils than usual leave or join the school between Years 2 and 6. Heron Cross has fewer ethnic minority pupils than most schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that its overall effectiveness is satisfactory and that it provides satisfactory value for money. The school copes well with a number of challenges including the low attainment of pupils on entry and the very high numbers of pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties. Although standards by the end of Year 6 are very low, all pupils make satisfactory progress. The quality of teaching is satisfactory; it is good in the Foundation Stage where children enjoy the interesting, practical activities. Teaching is best where work is varied to match the needs of different groups of pupils.

Behaviour has been improved and the school provides a calm, welcoming, stimulating environment for the pupils. The staff work together very well as a team and support staff speak warmly of the support they receive and how their efforts are valued.

Attendance is not good enough and the number of pupil exclusions has been very high.

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection but inspectors believe there is now good capacity for improvement. The school has successfully dealt with challenges such as integrating pupils from the former learning support unit. In addition, early assessment information, supported by inspection evidence, shows that a number of initiatives introduced to raise pupils' achievement are already having a beneficial effect.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' attainment and progress overall, and particularly in mathematics.
- Improve teaching by ensuring that more work is matched closely to the needs of groups of pupils of different abilities.
- Raise levels of attendance overall and reduce levels of unauthorised absence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards achieved by pupils in English, mathematics and science are very low by the end of Year 6. This is partly because of the high percentage of pupils with learning difficulties, many of whom have statements of special educational need. In 2004, for example, 16 of the 39 Year 6 pupils had statements of need and 3 more had learning difficulties. A significant proportion of this group also joined the school during Years 3 to 6. However, despite these difficulties, national test results for these pupils showed their progress to be average. Test results for pupils from the attached speech and language unit, which is managed by the LEA, are included in the school's results. From a very low base, all groups of children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes although standards are still below average as pupils enter Year 1. Progress is satisfactorily maintained from Years 1 to 6. Overall, teachers have been more successful in improving pupils' results in English and science than they have in mathematics.

However, pupils are responding well to a new, more practical approach to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils in the attached speech and language unit make good progress.

New assessment arrangements, now in their second year, are being used to set challenging but realistic targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils make good progress in their understanding of right and wrong and how to live happily together. They have strong views on racism and put these into practice. As a result, racial incidents are very rare. Spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community through their fund raising activities. The school council has a particularly good effect on pupils' awareness of the importance of staying safe and healthy. For example, older pupils have been trained to help resolve arguments and to encourage play activities at break times. Pupils make satisfactory progress in developing the skills that future employers find useful, particularly the ability to work cooperatively with others.

Attendance is inadequate. One in five pupils currently has an attendance rate of less than 91%. Unauthorised absence is around six times the national average. Nevertheless, the reason for their absence is not because pupils do not enjoy their lessons, which they do, but mainly because parents take their children on holiday during term time.

Behaviour is satisfactory. It is good around the school, but the number of exclusions has been much higher than usually seen. The school has been successful recently in dealing with challenging behaviour and this has improved the 'learning environment' considerably.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are good in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory overall. All classrooms provide stimulating environments, with superbly attractive displays covering a wide range of topics. Pupils say they enjoy working in such motivating rooms. Teachers have imaginative ideas for introducing topics. A game on the interactive whiteboard proved to be particularly popular at the start of one Year 2 lesson, so that pupils enthusiastically tried to work out missing letters and what the word could be.

Support for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties is good. Teaching assistants work with small groups of pupils on tasks well matched to their needs. However, when these pupils return to their classes, too much of the teaching is aimed at the whole class, rather than individual groups of pupils. This leads to occasions when the less able pupils are left behind, or the more able pupils find the work too easy. On other occasions, the teacher spends too long talking to the pupils or carrying on with an activity, especially in science, beyond a point where the pupils are learning anything.

New assessment arrangements are helping teachers to check pupils' progress more thoroughly and to let pupils know more clearly what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is good in the Foundation Stage; in Years 1 and 2 it is good when less formal, more active approaches are used. In Years 3 to 6, the curriculum is satisfactory. The school is working with the local authority on the Primary National Strategy initiative. This strategy is beginning to improve attainment in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

The school makes satisfactory use of enrichment opportunities, such as theatre workshops. Extra curricular activities are adequate. They provide for sporting activities and leisure experiences, such as break dancing. The personal and social education (PSE) programme is effective in helping pupils to stay healthy and safe, through developing awareness about drugs, sex and relationships. One aspect of this programme is particularly successful in developing pupils' self-esteem and social skills. Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Inspection evidence shows this aspect to be satisfactory, rather than good as judged by the school. The school ensures that pupils in its care, are safe, and that they learn about healthy lifestyles. Pupils have targets for improvement and the relatively new assessment arrangements are ensuring that pupils of all abilities are clear about what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Pupils who find difficulty in controlling their behaviour are given good support and pupils who are excluded do not usually re-offend. The school works well with a wide range of agencies to promote pupils' learning. Thorough procedures are in place to support pupils most at risk.

The school is not doing enough to improve attendance. Analysis of attendance is not good enough and letters to parents do not stress the impact of poor attendance on their children's education. When a child fails to arrive at school, the school sometimes takes too long to contact parents. Attendance and exclusion figures for pupils who attend the speech and language unit are included in the school's totals.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior staff know their school well and can describe strengths and weaknesses accurately. Teaching is well monitored, often with the help of local education authority staff. A new system of assessment, now in its second year, tracks pupils' progress in detail and allows support to be given to particular groups of pupils. The most recent analysis of assessment information shows encouraging signs of progress, particularly in mathematics, where a new practical approach to learning is

clearly developing pupils' interest in this subject. A new 'creative learning' approach has paid dividends in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, and this approach is gradually being developed throughout the school. However, the action taken so far has not yet had an impact on raising standards of attainment in the national tests. For this reason, inspectors find leadership and management to be satisfactory rather than good.

The school is committed to inclusion and works closely with outside agencies to support pupils with special needs. The great majority of parents express satisfaction with the school and welcome the information they receive. Governors visit the school regularly, enjoy good relationships with staff and are very supportive in a crisis. The school gives satisfactory value for money. The challenge of integrating a large number of pupils, from the former learning support unit, with statements for learning and behaviour difficulties has been successfully met. There is now good capacity for improvement and the headteacher and governors are focused on ensuring that initiatives currently in place result in improved pupils' achievement.

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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?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	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	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	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	3	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	Yes
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

Thank you for helping to make us feel so welcome in your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons. We know that you have been trying really hard with your teachers to improve behaviour and we found your school to be friendly, welcoming, safe and calm. We thought the displays of your work were super and show the wide range of activities which the teachers ask you to take part in.

We enjoyed talking to your hardworking teachers and teaching assistants. They are setting you targets and making sure that you know how well you are doing and what you have to do to improve. We thought that they were giving you lots of interesting things to do. We hope that you are enjoying your new 'Active Maths' work. We saw many pupils getting really enthusiastic about the practical mathematics activities they were doing.

We have asked Mrs Burton and your teachers to do three things that should help you to make more progress in the future:

- They will be trying even harder to make sure you reach the targets you are set; if you reach these, your results in end of year tests will improve, especially in mathematics.
- We have asked your teachers to vary your work so that it is not too hard or not too easy for different groups of pupils.
- Some of you are absent from school quite a lot, and this does not help your learning, we have asked the school to find ways of encouraging you to come to school as often as possible.

We wish you good luck in school and in your future lives. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.