

Heron Cross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124003
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	328027
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Cook HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	206
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Whitehead
Headteacher	Dorrie Shenton
Date of previous school inspection	19 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Grove Road Heron Cross Stoke-on-Trent ST4 4LJ
Telephone number	01782 233565
Fax number	01782 234804

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Inspection number	328027

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

There has been a high turnover of staff since the previous inspection with only one teacher remaining. A new headteacher took up post in September 2008. The school has an attached provision for children across the city of Stoke-on-Trent with speech and language difficulties which is managed by the local authority. A number of Key Stage 2 pupils with statements of special educational need, who are on the roll of the school, attend this provision. There is also an Early Years Speech and Language Service on the site which is managed jointly by the local authority and the Health Authority.

Most of the pupils who attend the school come from Heron Cross and Blurton. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. Also well above average is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below average. The school has a Nursery and Reception class which form the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school where standards have risen at the end of Key Stage 2 for the last three years. In September, a new headteacher joined the team and has brought a vibrancy and enthusiasm that has quickly rubbed off onto pupils and staff. There is a buzz of excitement that is seen in classrooms and the excellent displays of art throughout the school. As one parent commented, 'The appointment of a new headteacher has brought a new lease of life to the school.' Governors and staff know that there is still more to do to ensure that teaching becomes consistently good and that standards continue to rise.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 have been improving. Having said this, the school recognises that it has not helped the more able pupils achieve well in English. The amount of progress pupils make from their starting points is only satisfactory overall because in the past there has been a lot of catching up to do in Key Stage 2. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. They often receive good support in class from teaching assistants. The picture of pupils' progress matches the quality of teaching which is satisfactory overall, with more good teaching taking place in Key Stage 2. When teaching is good, it inspires pupils to become involved and learn quickly. The good teaching clearly identifies what pupils of different abilities need to learn next and so makes sure that activities provide the right amount of challenge. When teaching is only satisfactory, not enough is expected of all pupils, especially those that are more able.

The level of care and support for pupils is good, often helping them overcome barriers to learning. The pupils' personal development is good overall. Their behaviour is good. Attendance has significantly improved since the previous inspection and reflects pupils' enthusiasm to go to school each day as they enjoy lessons and other activities on offer. The school is helping to prepare pupils for their next stage of education but they are not given enough opportunities to explore the world of work and what they could aspire to in the future. There are also few opportunities for pupils to get involved in issues both locally and in the wider community that would give them a chance to have an impact on their world.

The curriculum is good and has been injected with a creative input that has brought increased enjoyment to learning. Adding to the good curriculum is a range of extra-curricular clubs which parents welcome.

The new headteacher is encouraging all staff, as well as governors, to become involved in leading the school forward. This is proving effective as staff are rising to the challenge to improve teaching and build on recently improved standards. There is still some way to go to gain a cohesive view of what should happen over the next few years and have plans that capture a vision for the school in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

When children join the Nursery, the skills and abilities they have are below those expected for their age. Some of the past checks and assessments on children's progress are confusing but, taking into account what is currently taking place, children make satisfactory progress and start Key Stage 1 with skills and abilities that are still below what is expected. There is a good level of care for children in the EYFS and all children are looked after and their needs are met well. As a result, the children's personal development is good and children thrive on the very good

relationships they have with adults. Teaching is satisfactory and, as elsewhere in the school, new staff are working hard to get to know the children and the way the school works. The EYFS leader is also new to the post since September and has made a satisfactory start to finding out what needs to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the good practice in teaching and learning across the school, especially in ensuring teaching matches the full range of pupils' abilities, particularly the more able.
- Improve pupils' chances for success in the future by improving the standards they attain and raising their aspirations.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local and wider communities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When children join the school in the Nursery, their skills and abilities are below those expected for their age. Children in the EYFS and pupils in Key Stage 1 make satisfactory progress. Standards at the end of Year 2 have risen but remain below average in reading and mathematics. Standards at the end of Year 6 have also risen over the last three years and are now broadly average as a result of the good progress pupils make in Key Stage 2. Standards have risen because there has been effective work to ensure more pupils are attaining the average Level 4 by the end of Year 6. However, few pupils attain the above average Level 5, especially in English, where the proportion reaching above average standards is very low. Standards in English are rising mainly because writing standards are improving. Most pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. The progress pupils make in lessons is always at least satisfactory and often good in Key Stage 2. More able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils enjoy school. Many of them spoke to the inspectors, explaining that the recent changes to make learning more fun and the extra-curricular clubs are making a big difference. Evidence of pupils' enthusiasm for school can be seen in the much improved attendance, which is now good. The pupils' behaviour is good and reflects the careful and sensitive way in which staff support and encourage pupils, who also support and encourage each other in lessons and around school which helps make the school a very safe place. Some pupils act as peer mediators and play leaders and their roles contribute to the very positive atmosphere around school. Pupils' understanding of how to stay healthy and safe is good. The pupils' social and moral development is good. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, for example through a dance session seen when the pupils captured everyone's attention as they danced as angels and brought the Christmas story alive. The pupils' understanding of different cultures is limited. There are a number of opportunities for pupils to raise money for charities but not always to find out about and become involved in issues affecting the local and wider community. Improving standards are giving pupils better chances to do well in the future. However, the pupils' understanding of the world of work and what they could aspire to do later on in life is not explored.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is always satisfactory and often good. Most of the good teaching takes place in Key Stage 2. When teaching is good, work given to the pupils is matched carefully to their needs and challenges them effectively. Teachers make clear what they expect pupils to learn and do, and support them throughout the lesson, reminding them of their targets and how they can show that they have been successful learners. In the best lessons, teachers are very creative in how they present the work given, which sparks off high levels of enthusiasm, with pupils quickly getting involved in activities that make them think and work things out.

Where teaching is only satisfactory, expectations of what pupils should learn in a lesson are not always high enough. Opportunities are missed by teachers to help pupils learn by showing them what to do. There are also times when pupils are not given enough feedback throughout the lesson so that they can make sense of what they are doing and understand whether they have learnt what was expected.

Teaching assistants are a valuable part of the teaching team and often very effectively support pupils in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The new headteacher has brought a fresh enthusiasm to make the curriculum more creative. Impressive artwork covers many of the walls of the school, most of it done by the pupils but some also by parents and pupils or by the staff themselves. A recent initiative to link literacy work to a story has improved pupils' literacy skills and led to impressive displays in classrooms and some excellent 'Story Topic Books', where pupils present some of their best work. Adding to a broad and balanced curriculum is a good range of visits through which learning becomes first-hand, for example to the Lord Mayor's Parlour. There is now a much wider range of extra-curricular activities, including dance, football, drama and choir. Many of the pupils talk enthusiastically about the clubs they can go to and parents echo their appreciation. These new features of the curriculum have built on work that has ensured that teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is better focused on pupils' needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All checks and procedures to keep the pupils safe are in place and work carried out by a new administrative team has brought about a number of improvements. The home-school link worker has improved the way the school works in partnership with parents and is a key member of staff in liaising with other agencies to ensure the needs of pupils are met. The support for pupils with learning difficulties is good, especially in helping them develop social skills. The lack of clear roles between the school and the speech and language resource means that school staff are not contributing enough to the guidance of pupils who experience this provision. Improved standards in English and mathematics are good evidence that the school has effective systems in place to track pupils' progress and use this to set targets. Most pupils know their targets and can explain them. The best use of targets was seen in Key Stage 2, where teachers referred to them throughout the lesson.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

It is very clear that the new headteacher has made a successful start to her time at Heron Cross and quickly enthused pupils, staff and governors, especially through her impact on the curriculum. She has joined a school where leaders over the last three years have led changes that have improved standards. With standards more in line with the national average, the headteacher has introduced a different style of leadership. The staff now work more closely together on projects and are looking more closely at how to improve teaching generally. Plans for improvement written by subject leaders are satisfactory. Some of these plans, for example in mathematics, are more robust because they are based on regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. Although each plan is useful, they do not all fit together to form a cohesive strategic overview to spell out what staff and governors want their school to be like in the future. As part of this strategic overview, the headteacher has rightly identified that the school needs to improve the way in which it helps pupils engage in the community both locally and wider.

The governors really appreciate the creative charisma of the new headteacher. They are involved in checking how well the school is doing and provide satisfactory support and challenge. An ongoing issue that governors are aware of is the lack of clarity as to who is responsible for quality assurance of the speech and language resource, which hinders good partnership arrangements with this provision. Improved standards, the quality of teaching and the impact of the new leadership so far demonstrate the school's satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

11 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heron Cross Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 4LJ

I am writing to tell you about what we found out when we visited your school recently. First of all, I would like to thank you all for being so friendly, talking with us and showing us some of your work. We were very impressed with your story topic books and so many of you wanted me to see the work you had done. The artwork, clubs and story work you are doing are obviously making learning more fun. Your school has really come alive recently and we hope that this continues.

When we visited your classrooms, we found that you enjoy your lessons and your behaviour is good. The teachers and teaching assistants are making sure this happens. Your attendance has improved – well done! Many of you do important jobs around the school like play leaders and peer mediators, which are making the school a safer and better place.

We have asked your school to make sure that you achieve high standards by having lots of good teaching. We have also asked your teachers to help you have big plans for the future. Finally, we have asked if you could have more opportunities to find about and become involved in things happening in Heron Cross and other places so that you can have your say and help other people.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector