

James Rennie School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112468
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	357106
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	137
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Pat Byers
Headteacher	Mrs Corinna Cartwright
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2008
School address	California Road Kingstown, Carlisle Cumbria CA3 0BX
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Thirteen part-lessons were observed, which involved a total of 13 teachers. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, and nominated staff. Other informal discussions were held with staff and a significant number of students during lessons and around the school. Inspectors also read 78 inspection questionnaires returned by parents, in addition to considering the views of those students who completed separate questionnaires with the help of their parents or carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The students' achievement by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 6, Year 11 and post-16.
- Exemplification evidence of the self-evaluation grades of outstanding, in particular the attainment, attendance, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and community cohesion areas.
- The effectiveness of assessment information in identifying targets for individual students, and the links to their individual education plans (IEP).
- The robustness and accuracy of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, and its contribution to students' learning and progress.

Information about the school

James Rennie School has specialist status in communication and interaction. All students have a statement of special educational needs because of their severe or profound learning difficulties. The school draws from a large catchment area, with some pupils travelling up to 40 miles to school. Currently there are 137 children on roll, from the Early Years Foundation Stage to post-16. There are fewer girls than boys, with twice the percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals than found nationally. The overwhelming majority of students are of White British heritage. Overall stability is significantly lower than found nationally and is due entirely to some of the students' ongoing medical conditions. The school holds a number of national and local awards, among the most significant of which are Healthy School status 2011, Early Years Kite Mark, Quality in Study Support Advanced status, Activemark, Gold Artsmark, The International Schools Award, and the Academies Trust Future Visions Tour Award for work in the community.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The James Rennie School provides an outstanding quality of education because it very skilfully meets the extensive range of learning needs of all its students. As a result, the students achieve outstanding outcomes in a number of important areas, not least in the progress they achieve in both their personal development and in the more traditional forms of learning during their time at the school.

The students enjoy their learning and they feel very safe. Teachers make lessons fun because they target well-identified learning at individual and whole-class levels, which helps engage the students productively in a range of practical and intellectual tasks. Lessons are typically characterised by strong working relationships which create a positive working ethos within which the students are enabled to learn at an appropriate pace, while also developing many personal, social and emotional attributes that will serve them well as they grow older. The curriculum provides a richness of learning opportunities, which includes appropriate accreditation at Key Stage 4 and post-16 levels. However, the extent to which the individual curricular content is mapped within all subjects to ensure even greater balance and continuity of learning is still at an early stage of development. Teachers treat the students with respect, which is reciprocated fully by the students. The school has achieved an excellent balance of providing a safe, secure and trusting environment where care and support for the students enable them to develop as individuals, without patronisation of the severe or profound learning needs that each student has.

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and improving rapidly. The provision gives the children a good start at school because teachers plan their work thoroughly and regularly record the children's progress in their learning; this ensures that parents and carers are kept informed of the many small steps that the children make during their time in the early years unit. Resources are used well, but developments for extending the outdoor provision to ensure that the children have access at all times is not yet complete.

The post-16 provision continues to build on the excellent work seen in the rest of the school. Further opportunities are extended to the students to gain more nationally recognised, accredited qualifications within a working framework that recognises and supports fully the principle of independent learning.

Senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, have instigated a rigorous yet supportive programme of evaluation and monitoring of provision in order that the school can continue to improve. The school is served by a dedicated and professionally committed group of adults, all of whom share a common purpose and desire to help the students achieve the maximum of which they are capable during their time at the school. Some high-quality work has already been achieved, including community links, equality of

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opportunity and the broader area of promoting community cohesion. However, senior leaders and managers have yet to assess fully the impact of some of its work within the area of community cohesion. Overall, the school has shown that it has outstanding capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop and implement a strategy for mapping the full curriculum entitlement for all students across all subjects, as an aid to ensuring even greater balance, continuity, and progression in their learning.
- Audit and evaluate the impact of the school's provision for promoting greater community cohesion.
- Improve even further the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - – extending the covered areas to ensure that the children have continued access to outdoor accommodation at all times
 - – ensuring that all lesson objectives continue to focus on the intended learning outcomes and assessment processes for the children.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The most recently available published data show that the students are making outstanding progress across the school. Over the past three years there has been an improving upward trend in Key Stage 4 examination outcomes, which marks a significant step in the achievement for the students. The school provides all students with an excellent range of learning opportunities for them to acquire and develop basic communication skills alongside other key aspects of literacy and numeracy as an aid to their continuing personal development. This work is progressively planned across the school and is helping the students to prepare well for each stage of their education. This work is also making a positive contribution to the students' self-esteem and personal confidence. Although the pace of progress typically varies, it remains outstanding overall with almost all students able to gain and consolidate important knowledge, which helps to reinforce their further understanding of essential learning: for example, in understanding the principles of mixing ingredients when making an apple crumble in a Key Stage 4 food technology lesson, or developing knowledge when creating some simple construction models in a Key Stage 2 lesson. The students continue to develop their personal confidence in communicating with teachers and peers, and in working towards clearly defined personal targets that are realistic and challenging in terms of personal development and the more traditional aspects of their learning.

The students' attendance is high overall but is affected by a very small minority whose ongoing medical conditions mean that they have above average levels of absence. Students feel extremely safe in school, which was confirmed both in their positive response to this question in the inspection questionnaire and by inspectors in lessons. The overwhelming majority of students thoroughly enjoy attending school and participating in the range of activities provided. This high level of enjoyment makes a significant contribution to excellent attendance and the outstanding behaviour seen. The school actively promotes the well-being of its students, including eating healthily and engaging in some form of exercise appropriate to the students' physical needs, and their all-round

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health and general well-being. The school's Healthy School status and Activemark are recognition of the quality of provision achieved in these two areas. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding overall, with some exemplary work in its provision for developing a greater range of opportunities for students to engage and link with the community. Students show good social skills when working in whole-class plenary sessions or in smaller groups and most students are keen to share their views or personal experiences with teachers in lessons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and the use of assessment are both good, with some teaching that is outstanding. Lessons are very well planned, and include targeted and well-focused activities for individual students. The pace of learning is almost always good because the students know very clearly what they are expected to learn and, as a result, their interest levels, attitudes and concentration are at least good and, more often, outstanding. Targets are very accurately set at an individual student level, and skilfully combine objectives from their IEP with other aspects of their personal development and learning that will aid their progress in the lessons. All of these characteristics help the students to make outstanding overall progress during their time at the school. In lessons the students show good levels

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of concentration and positive attitudes when working in whole-class discussions, and particularly when tackling new learning tasks. For example, in one Key Stage 2 science lesson the students listened intently to the teacher describing the important scientific and health factors associated with conducting a fair test to establish how to keep water as hot as possible for as long as possible. When it came to the students' turn to begin their own experiment, they did so with gusto and an enthusiasm that showed they were fully immersed in scientific enquiry and investigation. Across the school, students show these characteristics in most of their work. The collection and use of assessment information are good. Teachers know clearly what progress each and every student has made. The school effectively uses this information to monitor progress but the use of this same information to inform lesson planning is still at an early stage of development.

The extent to which the curriculum meets the students' needs is outstanding overall. The curriculum has breadth and balance and identifies individual students' needs exceptionally well, thus making a positive contribution to their personal, social and emotional needs. The provision for the core subjects of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology has progressed well since the previous inspection because of the increased emphasis given to these areas. The school's specialist area of communication and interaction makes a particularly positive contribution to the students' all-round personal development. There is a good balance of time for the range of subjects taught, and although individual teachers know exactly what they will teach, and when, the overall recording of provision across the full curricular range as an aid to ensuring even greater balance, continuity, and progression is, as yet, incomplete.

The effectiveness of the school's provision for the care, guidance and support is outstanding. All adults who work in the school are very sensitive to the varying range of students' personal, social and emotional needs. The personalised learning underpins work in lessons and is embraced fully in the relationships between adults and students throughout the school. Links with external partners, and parents or carers, are also outstanding and reflect the coordinated and effective work that supports the students in all aspects of their lives at the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and managers engender a shared sense of purpose through the school's specialist status in communication and interaction. School development planning is very detailed and encompasses a range of appropriately identified priorities and actions, which are cross-referenced accurately to the improvements sought in the provision for all

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students. The effective governing body enthusiastically shares in the work of the school, and is well-informed and involved in its development. For example, a new skills-based centre, which is being built on the grounds of the school, has been fully supported by the governing body and, in particular, has involved some individual input into its construction concept. There is a high level of staff morale across the school which is evident in the classroom. The work of staff is monitored and evaluated rigorously, which makes a significant contribution to the continuing improvements being made throughout the school; this applies, in particular, to the students' outstanding progress.

The school's engagement with parents and carers is highly effective. There are excellent systems in place to communicate regularly with the students' families, which makes a significant contribution to the high levels of attendance within the school. Links with external partners are outstanding, with the school making a significant contribution as an outreach centre for the development of communication skills for children from other schools.

The school takes all reasonable actions to safeguard its students. Overall provision is outstanding, with some aspects that are good. A small number of staff are very experienced in safeguarding and the school makes good use of them to maintain its high-quality provision in this area. Staff training is of a high standard and there is a thorough working knowledge of child protection practices. The effectiveness with which the school tackles discrimination and promotes equality is outstanding. Clear equalities policies provide a framework for the work of the school, and all staff show great sensitivity and awareness when working with the students, which ensures that they are treated fairly and with respect. The school has an excellent understanding of its developing role with its local and broader community. The policy for community cohesion is clear and well formulated and although some aspects of an audit of current provision have been undertaken, it has yet to include a more precise evaluation of the impact of its actions in promoting all aspects of its community cohesion practice.

The school deploys its staff and resources very effectively, with the result that student outcomes are outstanding. Teachers confidently make use of new technology to help communicate with the students and further develop their learning. There is very good utilisation of mobility and communication aids and devices, which helps ensure that the students engage in their learning and participate as fully as possible. Overall, therefore, the school achieves outstanding value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The children make good progress in their learning, with parents and carers fully involved in their education. The information exchange between the school and parents and carers is of a high standard, and is based on an accurate understanding of the progress that each individual child makes during their time in the early years unit. Teachers' planning is of a good quality and ensures that all children receive a balanced and targeted range of learning experiences that are well directed to challenge the children relative to their identified needs. Teachers have an accurate understanding of how to improve the provision even further, and some aspects such as the use of communication to make choices and express feelings are outstanding. The quality of this communication work has enabled the children to engage, participate and communicate desires and feelings with developing confidence. The children play well, make choices and are curious. Their overall behaviour is good. The provision is well resourced, but plans to enhance the outdoor provision with a more effective covered area are not yet complete.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation	2

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Stage

Sixth form

The students are achieving outstanding outcomes because all those in the post-16 provision gain externally accredited qualifications in excess of those expected for students with severe or profound learning difficulties. The curriculum is very well designed to offer individual progression routes and pathways that ensure all students can succeed in gaining qualifications through externally accredited courses. As a result, the students make outstanding progress from very low starting points at the end of Year 11, with some now gaining GCSE qualifications or their equivalent. The students enjoy a wide range of valuable and productive curricular experiences both on and off site, which includes the opportunities for them to work in a local college and on work placements; these experiences add considerably to their all-round personal development. Teachers plan and deliver high-quality lessons for the students which are well matched to their identified learning needs. The students enjoy their learning and feel very safe. The students contribute very well in lessons and to the life of the school more generally, for example as members of the school council. The leadership and management of the post-16 provision are highly effective. Senior leaders and managers of the provision ensure that the complex arrangements for on-site and off-site education are undertaken with due diligence to the safeguarding of the students' needs. Staff share a common sense of purpose and direction, and work enthusiastically together as a team. Individual student records are well maintained, and support staff are directed to very good effect in order to provide well-targeted support for identified students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The percentage number of questionnaires returned by parents and carers, at 81%, is very high when compared with other school inspections. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very positive about the quality of education provided for their children. A number took the opportunity to write additional comments on their questionnaire return, the vast majority of which were very positive. One comment from a parent encapsulates the general spirit of the very positive relationships which exist between the school and families: the parent wrote, 'Without their amazing dedication, ç.. would not be the delightful young man that he is today'. However, a few parents and carers felt that some aspects of the school's provision, for example, various aspects of ongoing communication such as the use of diaries to keep parents fully informed of their children's daily progress, access to out-of-school activities, and sharing and agreeing a joint approach between

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parents/carers and the school to identify more clearly how individual children could be treated in order to best meet their identified needs, could all be improved further. A general overview of all of these comments was shared with senior leaders and managers during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at James Rennie School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 137 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	68	22	28	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	53	68	23	29	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	47	60	26	33	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	45	58	28	36	2	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	56	72	20	26	0	0	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	50	32	41	4	5	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	54	32	41	1	1	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	47	60	23	29	1	1	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	53	68	22	28	1	1	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	58	25	32	0	0	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	54	29	37	3	4	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	55	71	20	26	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	51	65	24	31	1	1	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



31 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of James Rennie School, Carlisle, CA3 0BX

Thank you for the really lovely welcome that you gave to me and my colleague when we recently visited your school. We both thoroughly enjoyed our two days with you.

Our visit was to see how well the school is helping each and every one of you achieve the best of which you are capable. Overall, we were very impressed with your behaviour, regular attendance, attitudes in lessons and, most of all, the progress you are making in your formal learning and personal development. You, the school staff and your parents or carers should take great pride in your range of outstanding achievements. Well done to you all.

The teachers and other adults who work in the school show great sensitivity in trying to help you, and in lessons they plan their work very carefully so that each of you can make progress in a range of areas, including the ability to communicate and work with others. The curriculum is varied and well suited to your needs. This means that many of you are now able to achieve an impressive range of work as you move from year to year during your time at the school. Particular congratulations must go to the older students who are now achieving some very good results in formal examinations.

The work of the school in helping you to gain greater personal confidence and to contribute to different school activities accounts for the outstanding behaviour that we saw during our visit.

Although we have said that the school is providing you with an outstanding quality of education, we should like senior leaders and managers to consider a few areas so that it could do even better. These include the following.

Develop and implement a way of recording your curriculum entitlement across all subjects, as an aid to ensuring even greater balance, continuity, and progression in your learning.

Audit and evaluate the impact of the school's provision for promoting greater community cohesion, which will help all of you to appreciate and understand how you and others can live together in a harmonious and productive way.

Improve even further the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:

- extending the covered areas to ensure that there is access at all times
- ensuring that all lessons continue to focus on what you should learn and how these can be assessed.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector

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