

James Rennie School

California Road, Kingstown, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 0BU

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- It is a joyful place. It makes students' lives better.
- Parents love this school. They praise the way it looks after their children, gives them dignity and makes them happy. They are unanimous in saying that they would recommend this school to other parents in similar circumstances.
- Staff are proud to work here and students love attending whenever they can.
- Achievement is outstanding across the school.
- The excellence that was recognised at the time of its last inspection has been used as a stepping stone for further improvement. As a result, there is every reason to recognise that the school will keep on improving.
- Teaching is outstanding. It has improved since the last inspection. It is highly effective in helping students to communicate by whatever means they can and to develop essential skills that help them move on successfully through significant changes in their lives.
- Students are exceptionally keen to learn. They respond well to outstanding teaching and show great enthusiasm for learning, behave exceptionally well and show great pride in what they achieve.
- Students are kept very safe and learn a lot about how to keep themselves safe in and out of school.
- Leaders, managers and governors have a passion to keep making the school better. They fully understand that for this to happen teaching has to keep improving and that they can keep speeding this up. They have been very successful in making this happen and also realise that more can still be done to accelerate the process.
- Improvement targets for teachers are not always sufficiently challenging.
- Teachers manage large classroom teams of staff exceptionally well.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage has been transformed over the past two years. It is now outstanding rather than merely good.
- The sixth form is outstanding. This is particularly the case in the way it so successfully prepares students for adulthood.

Information about this inspection

- Parts of 19 lessons were observed, each taught by a different member of staff. Another eight learning situations were visited in the company of the headteacher on the second day of the inspection.
- Many informal conversations were held with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors met with three governors and a representative of the local authority. They spoke to a few parents and took account of the views of 18 who responded to Ofsted’s on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also took account of the greater number of parental views expressed through the school’s own paper questionnaire.
- Wherever possible, samples of pupils’ work were checked. For the younger or least able, teachers’ records of their progress were carefully checked.
- The environment in which pupils learn and play was explored and evaluated.
- The way that staff and governors make sure that pupils are kept safe and free from bullying or harassment was given particular attention.
- Systems for keeping check on the effectiveness of staff performance were reviewed.

Inspection team

Alastair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Angela James

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Most students have severe, profound, multiple and complex learning difficulties. A few have life limiting or deteriorating medical conditions. All have a statement of special educational needs.
- There is a trend for more and more students to be admitted with an increasingly complex degree of need. There is a rapidly increasing proportion of pupils with autism. Many students need personal care in all situations.
- Nearly all students are White British.
- A higher than average proportion of students is known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding provided by the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after children). There are currently seven looked after children.
- Boys outnumber girls.
- A long serving headteacher has left since the last inspection. There is also a new Chair of the Governing Body. Five teachers have either retired or resigned since the last inspection.
- The school has a catchment area of about 3,000 square miles. This means that many students travel considerable distances each day to get there.
- The school has advanced plans for extending what it can do to help students who currently have to leave at the age of 19.
- Some sixth-form students attend alternate provision at local colleges; the main ones being Carlisle College, Lindeth College and Newton Rigg.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the targets for improvement set for teachers are at least as demanding as those set for students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Parents have every reason to celebrate how this school helps their children to achieve as much as possible. Many of their greatest achievements have little to do with measurable targets for improvements in numeracy and literacy. For parents and their children the most important measures of achievement are an increasing ability to communicate need and choice and to become more independent. In this, the school excels.
- Attainment on entry is always very low. By the time they leave, students' attainment is still very low but the progress they have made is exceptional. Students leave Year 11 with qualifications that set them up for moving into the sixth form. Every student leaves the sixth form with added qualifications that help them to move on to further education or training.
- Children joining the Early Years Foundation Stage are quickly welcomed into the school and given a wonderful range of opportunities to learn and develop inside and outdoors. They achieve outstandingly because every tiny, yet often hugely significant development is noted and recorded before being shared with parents.
- Many students far exceed early expectations and very few fail to meet them. Those who do not meet earlier expectations nearly always have deteriorating or life-limiting circumstances.
- Many pupils never reach the level of attainment recognised by the national curriculum but a few go on to gain qualifications representing attainment at its lower levels. There are occasionally students with tremendous talents, such as in art. The school is very good at recognising this and seeking extra support to make sure that these pupils have all the help they need to make the best of their individual gifts or talents.
- Students make great strides in learning how to make choices and how to communicate with other people. By being able to answer a yes/no question by the blink of an eye or the movement of a finger, the most profoundly disabled students can start to express their wishes and take more control of their lives. The most able students, meanwhile, learn how to express themselves through speech and writing. A great moment during the inspection was being shown around the exhibition of students' artwork by those who had produced it. They had huge pride in their work, had done their best to write about what had motivated them and talked happily about their inspirations.
- Some children can be as young as three when they join the school and some may still be there at the age of 19. About a half of students arrive somewhere in between, often in Year 7 when transfer from small primary school to big secondary school is recognised as a step too far. Every change in pupils' lives and circumstances is outstandingly well managed to make sure that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Older students develop exceptionally well, particularly in terms of their personal and social skills when they attend one of the large alternate provisions after 17 years in much smaller schools.
- The extra funding made available through the pupil premium is very effectively used. A little of it is used for extra support for individuals but a lot of it is used to open up opportunities for these students to join in with after-school activities by subsidising transport home after them. Some is also used to subsidise residential experiences and visits to events that they would almost certainly never attend without extra support. This support for broadening experiences is proving invaluable in helping students to live more fulfilled lives. This is clearly evident in the enthusiasm with which students try to articulate what fun and enjoyment they have had in being involved.
- Extra funding for sport is used particularly well. Some is used for extra, specialist coaching but most is spent on trying to enthuse students to become more involved in exercise. An initiative to try to get more students interested in cycling is greatly helped by involving their parents alongside them.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- There has been a highly effective drive to improve teaching since the last inspection. Then it was judged good but now much of it is leading to students learning exceptionally well and making outstanding progress.
- Teachers show a great understanding of the complexity of students' needs and how to meet them. All students meet with equal degrees of success in all activities according to their needs because tasks are varied adeptly. Just the right level of support is offered to students. Sometimes adults can outnumber students in classrooms. These large staff teams are exceptionally well managed by teachers to make sure that they are nearly always highly effectively deployed to support students' comfort, dignity and learning.
- Staff are especially skilled in supporting communication. Many students have little or no ability to speak but students are shown many different ways to express themselves. This is often by means of using signs, pictures and familiar symbols; sometimes by a facial gesture or the movement of a finger. Those who can speak are not allowed to be lazy about it and are constantly encouraged to develop their vocabulary and use it properly. Every development is acknowledged and celebrated.
- Excellent attention is paid to little details such as expecting older students to organise their work and take good care of it.
- Potential upheaval or personal crises are spotted adeptly before they erupt into disruption. Because of this, lessons flow smoothly with little interruption in students' learning. This skill reassures other students and contributes enormously to them feeling safe.
- There is a high level of knowledge about what students can do for themselves, and the expectation is for them to do it. When someone is struggling and needs more help or support, this is also spotted quickly.
- Parents are extremely happy about the way teachers keep them in touch with what their children are doing in school. This is of huge importance in those instances where the students cannot explain to their parents for themselves. These excellent relationships greatly help parents to contribute effectively to their children's learning.
- There are rare instances when the most able students could be expected to do more or harder work. The targets teachers are set for improvement do not always reflect the expectation of every student being fully challenged in every lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Parents, their children and the staff are unanimous in saying this and inspectors fully agree.
- Students' consideration for one another and the way they celebrate each others' achievements make this a very happy school.
- Students recognise that every so often other students have moments of difficulty and can behave unpredictably because of their special needs. Whenever this happens, they have justified faith in the fact that staff will deal with these moments quickly and effectively.
- One of the most important things about managing behaviour is the progress students make in being able to communicate with adults when they realise that something is not quite right. Being able to do this gives them some control over their behaviour.
- Behaviour in lessons is excellent and students have a tremendous appetite for learning. They take as much pleasure from other students' successes as from their own and always try hard to contribute as much as possible and never to hide behind their difficulties.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students are given a tremendous amount of guidance about how to keep themselves safe. Great care is taken to do this sensitively so as not to make them fearful. There is good attention to detail so, for instance, when students learn about travelling independently on public transport they know what to do if their bus does not turn up or they get off at the wrong stop.

- A hugely important and highly effective element of the school's work to keep students safe is the attention paid to looking after their physical and mental health. Many students have some very complex difficulties that can be life threatening if not dealt with promptly and correctly. Students are taught to recognise when things are not quite right and staff are highly skilled at spotting when this might be the case and getting skilled help quickly.
- Great care is taken to make sure that when older students go out to college or on work experience, they are given all the support they need to help them keep safe and healthy.
- Students attend whenever they can and many choose to stay on for extra activities after school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Staff share a huge sense of optimism and pride. The senior leadership team have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and execute them outstandingly well. The Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form are led with exceptional success. Teachers manage large classroom teams with great skill. The headteacher is an outstanding leader whose only fault, as his governors point out, is confusing excellence with perfection.
- Underpinning the excellence of leadership and management is clarity of vision. This is greatly supported through constant analysis of the effectiveness of everything the school does. There is a wonderful simplicity behind this: if it works, do more of it; if it does not work, drop it. In this, leaders and managers do not just trust to their own judgement. They eagerly seek the views of others with a broader view of education rather than becoming self-congratulatory. They constantly compare the progress of their students with those in similar schools and they regularly invite other professionals into school to share in the observation and judgement of teaching.
- Planning for improvement is concise and exceptionally effective. Leaders and managers recognise that making constant small changes is far more effective than trying to change big things all at once. In this they are greatly helped by middle leaders who contribute enormously to evaluating their areas of responsibility and planning for improvement.
- Checks of teachers' performance are thorough and perceptive. Some targets for improvement are difficult to evaluate precisely and sometimes they are not sufficiently challenging. There could be more clarity in statements of expectation and how expectations will be evaluated. At the moment, all teachers meet all of their targets but not all students meet all of theirs.
- Statutory safeguarding requirements are met. Pupil premium funding is used innovatively and effectively. A special aspect of this is the way it supports transport costs to allow eligible students from outlying areas to join in with after-school activities. In a school with such a vast catchment area, this is hugely important.
- The excellent curriculum focuses strongly on promoting communication by whatever means possible. Staff are highly skilled in doing this in every lesson. They fully recognise that students may not make much distinction between different subjects in the curriculum but they know when they are learning something that interests them and that they enjoy.
- This is a school that causes the local authority no concern. The local authority offers appropriate support when it is requested.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are keen supporters of the school. They have a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses because they visit regularly and keep in close touch with parents, students and staff. They make sure that students are kept safe and are well taught. They ensure that the headteacher is set challenging targets to keep the school improving. Governors are kept well informed about the progress students are making. They are quick to spot through the recorded data when individuals' achievement seems to be slipping and they ask why and what is being done about it. Governors keep a close check on finances, how extra money coming into the school is being spent and to what effect.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112468
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	439644

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 sixth form	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Eaton
Headteacher	Kris Williams
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2011
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