

Inspection of an outstanding school: James Rennie School

California Road, Kingstown, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0BU

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 January 2023

Outcome

James Rennie School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' happy faces show how much they love their school. From the moment they arrive until they leave for home, their best interests are at the heart of every aspect of school life. Warm, trusting relationships with staff make pupils feel safe and secure here. A greeting from Mr Nibbles, the school therapy dog, is their ideal start to the day.

Expectations for pupils are exceptionally high. Pupils who come to James Rennie School face many and complex barriers to their learning. Regardless of these barriers, pupils are motivated to try their very best at all times. Their pride in their own success shines out. Pupils achieve extremely well, no matter how challenging their starting points.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. There are plenty of useful reminders to help them remember the rules and routines. For example, in the early years, children know that they always sit on the green chairs at snack time. Pupils of all ages pay attention when their teacher tells them to be 'ready for learning'. Leaders and staff are vigilant for any bullying behaviour. Should it occur, they take swift action.

The programme for pupils' wider development is inspiring. Older pupils are encouraged to strive for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, including at gold level. Students in sixth form learn how to run their own catering business. Children in the early years begin to learn about the world of work through stories and play. Everyone is aspirational, encouraging pupils to live successfully as independent adults.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum that leaders have designed reflects their extremely high ambition for pupils. Leaders have drawn upon a wide range of research and practice to inform their thinking. This has enabled them to develop an inspiring curriculum, which prepares pupils

for an adult life that is as fulfilling and independent as possible. Pupils thrive and achieve in this aspirational environment.

The curriculum is broad, exciting and engaging. In designing this curriculum, leaders have taken account of the complex needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). At the same time, leaders have a very clear vision for what they want pupils to know and to be able to do by the time they leave the school. Leaders have carefully broken down important learning into small, well-ordered steps, from the early years to the end of sixth form. They have worked with staff to ensure that all pupils learn in ways that are most appropriate to their developmental needs. This ensures that pupils of all ages build a secure foundation of knowledge in preparation for the next stage in their education.

Leaders know that communication is key to success in other learning, including reading. Communication is therefore at the heart of the curriculum. Staff are experts in developing pupils' communication and language. They support pupils to communicate in a range of ways. For example, some pupils use assistive technology to communicate their needs and views. Other pupils use sign language. Regardless of which method is used, pupils develop the strong communication skills they need to participate fully in school life.

Leaders have made reading a priority. Children in the early years are introduced to carefully selected stories, books and rhymes. If it is appropriate, pupils learn about letters and sounds through the phonics curriculum. Well-trained staff use their expertise to match reading books to the letters and sounds that pupils have learned. This enables pupils to read their books successfully.

Older pupils have opportunities to apply their reading knowledge in functional situations; for example, they shop for resources for craft work. Pupils enjoy listening to the class novels that their teachers read to them, such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In ways that are appropriate for their development, pupils in all classes are supported to develop a love of reading.

Staff across the school deliver the curriculum consistently well. Leaders provide staff with important training, enabling them to develop strong subject knowledge. Staff make effective decisions about how much knowledge to include in each lesson so that pupils' working memories do not become overloaded. Staff check regularly to make sure that pupils understand learning. They make sure that pupils do not move on unless their learning is secure. Leaders and staff use a range of information from assessments to check that pupils are learning well over time. This helps them to adjust teaching if necessary.

All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC). Leaders and staff work together to ensure that these plans are fully enacted. Leaders have excellent working relationships with parents, carers and a wide range of professionals, such as those from health services. This enables leaders to secure prompt additional support for pupils who need it.

Leaders have forged strong links with local businesses and colleges to provide meaningful contexts for older pupils to experience the world of work and adult life. For example,

through partnership with a local bank, pupils experience using debit cards to pay for resources. Pupils learn about life at college when they visit local settings. Pupils are supported to recognise and appreciate peoples' differences and similarities. Adults teach them to use humour kindly and respectfully. These important skills prepare pupils well for life beyond school.

Expectations for pupils' behaviour are high. Pupils try their best to live up to these expectations every day. They learn to manage their own behaviour exceptionally well. This enables lessons to run smoothly, ensuring that learning is not disrupted.

Leaders and trustees are mindful of staff's workload and well-being when they make decisions about the school. Staff appreciate this concern and are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular training in a range of safeguarding matters. They are confident to report any concerns they have about a pupil's welfare.

Leaders gather a wide range of information about pupils' welfare in order to understand their needs. They work effectively with agencies, such as the local authority, to ensure that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need. Leaders are not afraid to challenge decision-makers in order to improve outcomes for pupils.

In ways that are appropriate to their needs, pupils learn important lessons about keeping themselves safe when using the internet. Strong communication between home and school means that parents and staff work together to keep pupils safe online.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually, this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, James Rennie School, to be outstanding in May 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	146250
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10256106
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	167
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Barry Nolan
Headteacher	Kris Williams
Website	www.jamesrennie.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- James Rennie School converted to become an academy school in September 2018. When its predecessor school, James Rennie School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. The school caters mainly for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, and autistic spectrum disorder.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the headteacher, head of school and members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector also spoke remotely with members of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the trust, and members of the local advisory body.
- The lead inspector spoke remotely to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and literacy, numeracy and thinking skills, and creative development. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding. They also spoke with staff to understand how they keep pupils safe.
- The inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in their responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. The lead inspector also chatted to a few parents at the start of the school day.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to the online survey for pupils.
- The lead inspector spoke to a few pupils about school life. An adult was present when the inspector spoke with pupils. This had no impact on the quality of evidence gathered or on the inspection outcome.
- The inspectors spoke with staff to discuss leaders' support for their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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