

**James McFarlane School
Ardrossan
North Ayrshire Council
5 February 2008**

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1. Background

James McFarlane School was inspected in October 2007 as part of a national sample of provision for pupils with additional support needs. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics and personal and social education.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, and a group of parents¹.

The school provides education for pupils of nursery, primary and secondary age with additional support needs arising from complex learning difficulties, including autism spectrum disorder, and physical and sensory impairments. The school is situated in Ardrossan, and pupils come from across North Ayrshire. At the time of the inspection the roll was 27. There were no pre-school children at the time of the inspection. Six pupils had been or were being assessed for coordinated support plans (CSPs). Due to the complex nature of pupils' needs all pupils received free school meals. Taking account of the significant health needs of some pupils, attendance was good.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' progress in language and communication, personal and social development, and understanding and relating to the environment.
- The school's success in meeting the needs of pupils and preparing them for community life.
- The quality of pastoral care.
- Partnerships with parents and the community.
- Leadership of the headteacher in improving the school.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents were very positive about all aspects of the school. They felt that their children were safe and happy in school and making good progress in their learning. Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder appreciated pupils' progress in learning appropriate social behaviour in the community. Parents were very confident in the care provided by the school, particularly for pupils with significant physical and medical needs. Pupils were motivated and engaged well in school. Their relationships with staff were very positive. Almost all staff enjoyed working in the school. They thought teamwork was very strong and that staff were very sensitive to the individual needs of pupils. Staff were enthusiastic about ongoing improvements in the provision they made for pupils.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The structure of the curriculum was good. The school provided a range of learning experiences for pupils, appropriately based on national guidance. Pupils had made good progress in participating with increasing independence in the enjoyable music lessons provided by the music specialist. All pupils took part in two hours of high quality physical education or functional movement each week. Religious and moral education was well planned to meet the range of learning needs of pupils. The particular needs of individual pupils, including those with visual impairment were met through motivating multi-sensory experiences. At all stages, staff used information and communications technology, including switches and interactive whiteboards, to motivate pupils and enhance their learning. Senior pupils studied a range of National Qualification units at Access level 1. They also achieved well in courses developed from the Awards Scheme and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). The school now needed to ensure that learning experiences were consistent and provided breadth, balance and progression across the school. Teachers made good use of a wide range of communication approaches to ensure pupils understood tasks and activities, including sign, gesture, pictures, visual symbols and communication books. Consistent structures, such as the use of visual or object timetables, ensured pupils were aware of what they were learning. Staff made good use of praise and rewards to motivate pupils and keep them on task. They were skilled at providing time for pupils to think, and to self-correct when necessary. Although there were examples of very good and excellent teaching, the quality of teaching varied across the school. In a few lessons, teachers were not sufficiently clear about the purpose of activities, and at times used language that was too complex for pupils to follow. In the best practice the quality of staff interactions with pupils and their attention to individual pupils' initiations and responses, were very skilled.

Pupils' learning experiences were very good. At the early stages good use was made of play and sensory experiences to promote pupils' understanding of the world around them. At all stages, pupils experienced a very good range of learning experiences in groups or individually. Pupils were motivated by learning in real life settings in the

community, including recycling, visits to the library and café, and shopping. Staff planned learning in the community very well to focus on individual needs, and next steps for each pupil. Pupils worked individually with staff members on a series of well-planned activities to help them achieve learning targets from their individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Throughout the school day, staff ensured that every experience was used to challenge pupils to think, respond and learn new skills. All pupils were alert and motivated to participate in activities throughout the day.

The school took very good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Senior pupils enjoyed enriching residential experiences at the authority's outdoor learning centre on Arran. Pupils developed confidence through challenging outdoor activities including using adapted motor boats. They also learned much from living together and planning and preparing meals while at the centre. Staff, pupils, and pupils from Stanley Primary School worked together very well to prepare for the Burns Brunch. Pupils were very well supported so that their participation was maximised. For example, they joined in the singing, moved or were moved by staff in time to the music, and used alternative augmentative communication systems. Pupils successfully undertook a range of responsibilities across the school, such as preparing for lunch and collecting material for recycling. Pupils were developing an understanding of citizenship through appropriate and carefully planned experiences to help them participate in voting.

Communication and language

Overall, pupils' achievement in communication and language was very good. At all stages, they were making very good progress towards their individual learning targets. Pupils benefited from a wide range of language experiences through the comprehensive support of staff and the speech and language therapist. Almost all pupils were able to convey their understanding of tasks and their feelings with appropriate support from staff. Pupils with more complex learning needs could respond to a given prompt such as a picture by using eye contact or smiling. At all stages, pupils made highly effective and consistent use of alternative forms of communication such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), switches and eye-pointing. They communicated their personal news and indicated appropriate responses to requests from staff. A few pupils could read and write simple words and phrases, put words together to make short phrases and match pictures to words. They used a simple word-processing device to create and copy simple sentences. Pupils responded well to the high expectations of staff.

Understanding and relating to the environment

Across the school, pupils were making very good progress in understanding and relating to the environment. Pupils at the early years were making good progress in matching, sorting and sequencing. Senior pupils made good use of these skills in real-life settings, for example in preparing for home economics lessons. Pupils at all stages were developing a good sense of time, through understanding their visual timetables, and through very skilled approaches to understanding when an activity was finished and what was next. Most pupils had learned the sequence of key events in the day, the days of the week, and a few could use clocks to tell the time. Most pupils were developing an understanding of the use of money in cafes and shops. Senior pupils had made very good progress in identifying appropriate coins to pay for goods

independently. Pupils with more complex needs, including pupils with impaired vision were developing an understanding of the environment around them. Through staff's consistent approaches to signifying where pupils were and what activity they were doing, and consistent reinforcement of cause and effect, pupils were learning to predict and make choices. Senior pupils had made very good progress in learning to use technology in the kitchen, including the safe use of kettles and food mixers.

Personal and social education

Overall, the quality of personal and social development (PSD) was very good. Pupils had developed their personal and social skills to a high level, taking account of their individual additional support needs. Targets for PSD, which were set within pupils' IEPs, were clear, built on previous learning and were developed across the curriculum and in everyday situations. Pupils demonstrated a sound understanding of daily routines and were developing confidence, independence and self-esteem. They were developing a good awareness of aspects of health and personal hygiene through, for example, regularly washing their hands and brushing their teeth after meals. Pupils were successfully encouraged to make choices at lunchtimes and at breaks. At all stages, pupils were acquiring essential skills in appropriate behaviour and in looking after themselves. Senior pupils had successfully achieved or were working towards achieving the ASDAN accredited unit, Independent Living. Across the school, pupils confidently welcomed visitors into their classes. Some pupils had the opportunity to work collaboratively with mainstream peers in confidence building and sharing activities across the curriculum through the school's buddy system. Pupils responded very well to members of the local community while on visits to the library, shops and café, for example, through appropriate greetings.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Pupils' learning needs were very well met. Teachers and instructors worked very effectively together to identify needs, and to develop a very good understanding of each pupil's strengths and support needs. Staff used a range of well-planned and imaginative approaches to overcoming barriers to learning. Staff were able to note any new achievements or changes in support needs through continuous discussion among all staff members including classroom assistants, therapists and promoted staff. Pupils' IEPs identified appropriate learning targets in partnership with parents and therapists. Pupils' progress was well monitored, but staff did not yet record when pupils achieved targets. The school and partner agencies had opened CSPs for pupils whose needs were met by a range of agencies. Where appropriate, pupils also attended their local mainstream school for part of the week. Teachers from mainstream schools worked very well in partnership with James McFarlane School to ensure pupils' needs were well met in such placements. Staff very carefully managed arrangements for pupils when they started at the school. The school had very good arrangements with other agencies to plan transitions for pupils moving to adult services.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The quality of pastoral care was excellent. Staff demonstrated outstanding commitment and consistent attention to the care and welfare of pupils. The school had very effective procedures in place to support pupils and to keep them safe including risk assessment and child protection policies which were applied appropriately by staff. Across the school, staff knew their pupils very well and responded with a high level of sensitivity and professional understanding to the social, emotional, physical and health needs of individual pupils. Staff worked collectively to create a very calm, secure and positive environment for pupils, ensuring the best possible opportunities for pupils to learn and develop. They managed personal intimate care very effectively and respected pupils' rights to dignity and privacy. The visiting school nurse provided very good support for pupils with significant health needs and their families. In partnership with staff, she ensured that these needs, including the administration of medication, were well managed. School staff worked very closely with parents and other agencies to meet the care needs of pupils experiencing periods of ill-health and the needs of pupils who were looked after and accommodated. All staff were aware of the need for health promotion and ensured that pupils were provided with fresh fruit and healthy meals.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the accommodation was very good. Through the authority's Accessibility Strategy considerable improvements had been achieved, in consultation with NHS Arran and Ayrshire. The recent addition of the new hall and upgrading of the home economics area provided significant improvements in the environment for learning.</p> <p>Arrangements for school security were very good. All areas of the school were accessible to all users. Classrooms were bright and well organised for learning, though a few were quite small for the number of pupils. Learning experiences were enhanced by the hydro therapy pool facilities, the sensory garden and the sensory room. The outside play area for younger pupils was well equipped to provide suitable leisure learning opportunities. However, arrangements for senior pupils in their break time did not wholly meet their needs.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff and parents were proud of the school and the achievements of pupils. Staff morale overall was high. Staff worked well as a team, and had responded effectively to the challenge of improving the school and outcomes for pupils. The office staff and janitor made a positive contribution to the welcoming atmosphere within the school. Interactions between staff and pupils was, overall, of a high quality, and ensured pupils felt valued and motivated to communicate. Teachers were developing very skilled approaches to help pupils make choices and decisions and contribute their views about school issues. Staff expectations were high. They consistently challenged each other and pupils to raise expectations. Staff acknowledged and rewarded pupils' achievements frequently and consistently. More formal recognition of pupils' achievements took place through star of the week awards at assemblies and at the annual prize-giving. School staff ensured that all pupils were treated fairly, and were included in all school and community-based activities. They used a range of approaches to raise pupils' awareness of the needs of each other. Pupils had regular opportunities for religious observance.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>Partnerships with parents and the community were very good. Parents were fully involved in all decisions relating to their children, including planning their learning targets within their IEPs. They received regular informative reports on their child's progress. Almost all parents found school staff very approachable and supportive. The newly formed Parent Council took an active interest in all aspects of the work of the school. The school had established very good partnerships with mainstream local schools, to the benefit of pupils in all schools involved. Partnerships with local businesses were being further developed. School staff worked closely with other agencies to support out of school activities for pupils, including drama and arts activities. The school and the authority also worked effectively with parents to provide high quality activities for pupils during the summer school break. The two local chaplains had good relationships with pupils and made a positive contribution to the life of the school.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

James McFarlane School provided very good education and excellent care for its pupils. Teaching was, overall, good with some examples of very good and excellent practice. Staff provided a range of stimulating activities for pupils, ensuring variety and challenge. Pupils were well motivated to learn, and were making very good progress. They were encouraged to make choices and become as independent as possible. A few pupils successfully shared placements at James McFarlane School with placements in their local mainstream schools. They were very well prepared for life in the community.

The headteacher provided very good leadership. She was well respected by almost all parents and staff. She modelled very good practice in her interactions with pupils. She had identified key areas for improvement, and had succeeded in achieving improvements. She had been successful in promoting teamwork among staff, and had involved more staff in taking responsibilities and improving the school. The deputy headteacher carried out his organisational duties in relation to timetabling, staff and health and safety effectively. However, he had not demonstrated sufficient leadership in improving teaching and the curriculum. The principal teacher made a very positive contribution to improving the work of the school through the high standard of her own practice and her support for other staff. She had developed the curriculum for senior pupils effectively. Staff regularly reflected on the quality of pupils' experiences and their progress in learning, through class and departmental meetings. The headteacher monitored pupils' learning through their IEPs and teachers' plans. The headteacher and deputy headteacher had recently started to monitor learning and teaching in classes more formally. However, the school needs to build on the monitoring by the headteacher and develop a whole school approach to self-evaluation and improvement.

Main point for action

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- develop further approaches to monitoring and evaluating the provision made for pupils, to achieve greater consistency in learning and teaching.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Christine Knight
HM Inspector

5 February 2008

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
Structure of the curriculum	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	very good
Pupils' attainment in Communication and language	very good
Pupils' attainment in understanding and relating to the environment	very good
Personal and social development	very good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	very good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	excellent
Accommodation and facilities	very good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Leadership across the school	good
Self-evaluation	adequate

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed being in school. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children, there was mutual respect between staff and pupils, and their children were treated fairly in school. • They had a clear idea of the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all parents were very positive about the quality of education provided by the school and raised no significant issues.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were positive about almost all aspects of the school's work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few staff thought communication could be improved.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Corporate Director (Educational Services), local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of provision for pupils with additional support needs, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI, at the above address.

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEcomplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

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