



**Royal Blind School  
Edinburgh  
11 May 2010**

This report tells you about the quality of care and education at the school. We describe how young people benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents<sup>1</sup> and services which support young people. We also comment on how well staff and young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school and residences, how well young people are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning and care, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns and, where appropriate, details about young people’s examination performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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### **1. The school**

Royal Blind School is a non-denominational, grant-aided special school. It is located on two campuses at Craigmillar Park and Caanan Lane, Edinburgh. The school provides care and education for children and young people aged five to 18 years with additional support needs arising primarily from significant visual impairment. At the time of the inspection, there were 92 children and young people on the school roll. 45 attended Craigmillar Park and 47 Caanan Lane. Young people needing significant additional support are cared for and educated at Caanan Lane. 27 children and young people are on residential placement and care is provided, if needed on a 52 week basis at Caanan Lane. 38 children and young people had a coordinated support plan.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- Confident, motivated and courteous children and young people who are responsive to adults and other young people.
- The care and professionalism of staff and their sensitivity to individual needs.
- The quality of pupils' learning experiences, particularly in expressive arts.
- A learning environment which supports effectively the development of children and young people's communication.
- The impact of specialist support on children and young people's independence and learning, particularly their mobility.
- The very broad range of activities and experiences available for children and young people within and outwith school including enterprise, outdoor education and links with local organisations and businesses.

## **3. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

Almost all children and young people are motivated by their learning and enjoy being at school. Staff adapt learning experiences very well to meet individual needs. Across the school, teachers and care staff make good use of information and communication technology (ICT). For example, young people studying geography make good use of computer software and close circuit television to find and read information from texts, tables and maps. Switches are used well to

support communication and to encourage young people to make choices in their learning. Young people benefit from a wide range of learning activities. For example, they shop locally, participate in the school choir and samba band and benefit from a wide range of healthy activities during outdoor education. Children and young people learn in a caring and nurturing environment where staff give each learner sufficient time to respond to questions. Most staff have well established routines to enable those with complex needs to anticipate what is about to happen.

Children and young people are making very good progress in personal and social development. Those with complex needs are developing their sense of self awareness, skills in eating and drinking, dressing and personal hygiene. Their work experience and skills in planning the senior prom are recognised by Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Young people are developing skills of living independently. Those who receive the school's high quality mobility training are very successful in moving around the campus and further afield. Their work in home economics is helping them to prepare and cook food safely. Many have achieved awards in athletics, bowls, judo, music, outdoor education, speech and drama, and swimming. Children and young people use appropriate technology well to access resources. Some are skilled at using a range of general purpose software to create documents, presentations and record and manipulate information. The majority of seniors can use the World Wide Web to research topics. They are responsible and show an interest in environmental issues such as recycling resources in the school. In some classes, they check the accuracy of each others' work. In science they work in groups to carry out experiments and in the café they work well together in a team.

Most young people in the Craigmillar Park campus achieve success in a range of qualifications. Many receive Access awards for their broad range of attainments including literacy and numeracy. Most of those presented at Standard Grade attained a General award or better. At Intermediate 1 and 2 and Higher, most presented gained an A to C award. In music, young people's attainments are of a very high

standard. Pupils demonstrate a very wide range of abilities. For example, in mathematics some have a deep understanding of quadratic functions, whereas others are challenged by recognising coins by their shape and value. Most young people are developing their understanding of number, money and measurement through a range of practical and mental activities. Children and young people with complex needs are making good progress in achieving relevant and challenging targets. Many are improving their communication through, for example gestures and interaction with the environment. Young people had very good opportunities to read for enjoyment through, for example, a wide range of story bags, talking books, Braille texts and enlarged print texts. Senior classes are developing their writing skills for a range of practical purposes such as reading and writing email, post cards, letters, shopping lists and recipes.

## **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

The curriculum takes very good account of the personal, social and physical needs of all young people. It offers opportunities for choice and is providing very good opportunities for young people to be as independent as possible and participate to the best of their ability in their own and the school community. Staff are making good progress towards putting in place *Curriculum for Excellence*. However, they do not yet share a clear vision for children and young people across the service in implementing the new curriculum. Young people on both campuses develop citizenship skills through, for example making and selling clay hearts to raise money for the British Heart Foundation and making items to sell at their Christmas Fayre. Most young people have access to two hours of quality physical education depending on their physical abilities. All pupils at Caanan Lane benefit from the very good programme of hydrotherapy. Many leavers experience college placements prior to leaving school. Those due to leave would benefit from clearer arrangements with local authorities to ensure better planning to meet their needs when moving to adult services.

At both campuses, almost all children and young people's learning needs are met very effectively through appropriate tasks, activities and

resources. Staff use a range of assessments, including video to identify needs and understand communication and behaviour. Class teams and care staff meet regularly to discuss learning needs and appropriate strategies to support individual young people. Therapists work well with education and care staff during lessons and in the residences to promote consistent approaches to learning and teaching. In most cases, the pace of learning is very appropriate. However, a few young people at Craigmillar and Caanan Lane would benefit from more challenging activities. A few children and young people attend mainstream schools in order to extend their learning. All young people have an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) which provides helpful, comprehensive information about learners' strengths, health and educational needs. Staff recognise the need to make the IEPs more focused in order to have more impact on learning.

#### **4. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?**

The school has a range of strong partnerships to support young people. Staff provide valuable outreach support to young people attending mainstream schools. They work in partnership with Birmingham and Edinburgh universities to deliver courses to teachers undertaking post graduate qualifications in visual impairment. Staff also offer direct professional support and advice to schools and host visits from other professionals to the Royal Blind School. A weekly playgroup for parents and children with visual impairment provides very good opportunities for children to become familiar with specialist equipment and parents to learn about services for children with a visual impairment. Young people due to leave school access a wide range of work experience placements with several local schools and businesses. The school has notable partnerships with national and international professional bodies concerned with visual impairment. The mobility team informs government policy on visual impairment issues related to public facilities, transport and roads. Other key partnership links include those with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), Scottish Sensory Centre at Edinburgh University, and

the International Council of Educators in Visual Impairment. While the school has good links with its Parent Consultative Committee, staff plan to further develop communication through improving its website and family support programmes.

## **5. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?**

Through house meetings, key worker meetings and informal discussion, young people are listened to and their views acted upon. They actively improve the school through participation in the Pupil Council, Eco-Schools Committee, residential pupils' meetings and the Food Committee. Their views influence the activities available in the residences. Staff and parents' views are well represented on consultative committees and the Education Executive Committee. Parents and young people are closely involved in personal planning. Many young people contribute well to the school and its local community through the Vera Café, growing vegetables, cooking and undertaking responsibilities according to their abilities. Young people are courteous and many are caring and supportive of each other. Administrative staff participate fully in supporting children and young people to achieve learning, personal, social and development targets. Staff have identified the school's strengths and prioritised areas for development in an action plan. As a result of these actions, they have made a number of improvements such as introducing Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), sports leadership courses and preparing for introducing *Curriculum for Excellence*. Most teachers now reflect more on their work. Although the head of care helpfully supervises nursing staff, the school is continuing its efforts to appoint a lead nurse to ensure clinical supervision for nursing staff. (See Requirement)

## **6. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?**

Young people are very well behaved, respectful and considerate of staff, visitors and each other. They have high expectations of each other and check inappropriate behaviour in others. Young people are supported very effectively to develop skills for independent living and given a range of certificates for achievement and effort in sport, music and life skills. They feel safe and know who to talk to if they are worried. Pupils at all stages participate in summer and Christmas shows and gain confidence and improved self esteem from the experience. High quality teaching of drama provides rich opportunities to improve self esteem, communication and literacy skills. Staff organise appropriate opportunities for religious observance and regularly celebrate other cultures. They are sensitive to individual needs and treat young people with respect.

## **7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?**

The recently appointed Principal is open, responsive and fair. She has a clear vision to develop all young people's independence and sense of responsibility and encourage them to participate at all levels to the best of their ability. The chair of the Education Committee takes a close interest in school. She supports and challenges managers on the running of the school and knows the school and young people very well. Senior leaders regularly monitor progress towards improving the school and encourage staff involvement. Professional development is well linked to priorities for improvement. A review of the roles of senior and middle managers would more effectively support the school's vision, improve communication and encourage more consistent approaches to supporting young people.

## **8. What happens next?**

As a result of the very good quality of care and education provided by the service, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The Board of Governors will inform parents about the

service's progress as part of the arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its service.

## **Requirement**

Continued from the December 2009 inspection: The interim nursing management and support arrangements put in place in response to Requirement 1 from the inspection of 13.03.09 should remain in place until a permanent solution is implemented. The school should complete its current review of nursing arrangements, including the appointment of a 'Lead Nurse' or 'Nursing Manager' and implement findings as soon as possible.

This is to comply with Scottish Statutory Instruments 2002/114-13 (a) NCS 7 School Care Accommodation Services – Management and Staffing.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and Education Committee.

- Continue to use self evaluation to share good practice, improve the consistency of learning and teaching across the school and ensure that all pupils are challenged appropriately.
- Clarify the roles of senior and middle managers to support the schools vision more effectively and ensure consistent approaches to meeting the needs of children and young people across care and education.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?* Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for the Royal Blind School.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>very good</b>

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>very good</b>

**Kate Hannah**  
**HM Inspector**

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**Care Commission Officer**

11 May 2010

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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
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses