

Inspection of an outstanding school: Samuel Rhodes MLD School

11 Highbury New Park, Islington, London N5 2EG

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 May 2022

Outcome

Samuel Rhodes MLD School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in this uplifting and nurturing school community. Leaders and staff are highly aspirational for all pupils. Pupils experience success and achieve very well in both academic and vocational training.

Leaders and staff clearly want the best for all pupils. This shows through every skilful and thoughtful interaction they have with pupils. Developing warm and caring relationships with pupils is prioritised. Staff are firm but fair in their approach. Pupils like this. They trust, respect and appreciate all that staff do for them. As one pupil put it, 'the teachers here boost us'.

Staff manage pupils' behaviour exceptionally well. This is because they know and understand the needs and circumstances of every individual pupil. Pupils feel safe and happy at school. When they find things difficult, there is always someone to lend a hand. If bullying occasionally occurs, leaders tackle it swiftly and sensitively.

Leaders and staff think very carefully about how to motivate and interest pupils in their learning, while developing life skills at the same time. For example, primary pupils run a fruit stall and secondary pupils run a café. Pupils have many opportunities to gain life and work experiences outside of the school environment. These experiences are designed to build pupils' confidence and equip them admirably for their future lives.

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

Leaders have carefully constructed a curriculum to meet the diverse and increasingly complex needs of pupils who attend the school. Curriculum 'pathways' are carefully sequenced, with communication and life skills prioritised. Leaders and staff are experts in tailoring each pathway to every pupil's specific needs and circumstances. This enables all pupils to achieve exceptionally well. Staff ensure that each pupil achieves qualifications by the time they leave school. This includes, for example, recognised qualifications in arts, food technology and hair and beauty.

All national curriculum subjects are taught. The curriculum thinking behind each subject is well considered. Leaders and staff regularly review their curriculum offer. They make sure that high expectations for all are maintained and that pupils' needs and interests are fully catered for. Mathematics is an example of leaders' strong curriculum thinking. Learning is grounded in practical, useful application of important mathematical ideas. Pupils enjoy applying what they know and see the purpose and benefit of developing their mathematical knowledge.

Reading is given the highest priority, right from the start. Staff have strong subject knowledge and receive regular training. Pupils develop phonics skills very well and read books which are matched to the sounds they are learning. As they move through the school, pupils develop fluency and a love of reading. They talk animatedly about the books they have read and enjoyed. They also understand the importance of reading, and say that 'reading is vital'. Secondary-age pupils who are at the earliest stages of reading are well supported. They also practise reading at home with books which match the sounds they are learning.

Pupils' wider development, including their health and emotional well-being, is exceptionally well supported. Pupils talk with confidence about their understanding of keeping themselves healthy. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is carefully thought out. Pupils spoke candidly and maturely about what they know and have been taught. Pupils learn to be tolerant and respectful of each other.

Throughout the day, pupils across the school are encouraged to explore their feelings. Staff work hard to develop pupils' social skills and respect for each other. Pupils behave well and are extremely polite and respectful to staff, visitors and each other. In 'the hub', the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorder are very well catered for. They receive high-quality support to develop their social skills and learn how to share feelings and communicate with each other.

Pupils are well supported to think about their next steps and future careers. Leaders were highly creative in devising work experiences for pupils when the pandemic disrupted the school's usual offer. Pupils enjoy a wide range of trips and experiences, such as visits to the National Youth Theatre. Leaders think carefully about each individual pupil and the experiences that would help them. For example, they seek work experience in laboratories for students who are enthusiastic about biology. Sixth-form students spoke enthusiastically about their aspirations for the future. Most students go on to colleges or apprenticeships for further study or training.

Governors are highly committed to the school and are part of the community. They challenge and support the work of leaders well. They are relentless in their drive to involve parents more fully in the life of the school. They have recently recruited parent governors to move this important work forward.

Staff are extremely proud to work at the school. They feel well supported by leaders and know that any concerns they have will be dealt with. Leaders and governors are mindful of workload issues and committed to supporting staff's well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained and vigilant in identifying any concerns they have about pupils. Reporting systems are clear and thorough. The safeguarding team discusses any concerns daily and takes swift, effective action to safeguard pupils when needed. Leaders ensure that pupils and families receive the help and support that they are entitled to.

Governors maintain clear oversight of safeguarding across the school. Policies and procedures are developed carefully to take account of pupils' needs.

Staff make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and online.

Background

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

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2017.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	100469
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	10212475
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	133
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Khan
Headteacher	Cerys Normanton
Website	www.samuelrhodes.islington.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Samuel Rhodes MLD School caters for pupils aged from four to 19 years with moderate learning difficulties. The school also caters for an increasing number of pupils with autism spectrum disorder as well as a range of other complex special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The headteacher took up her post in 2019.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff. They also met with three governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and the curriculum for pupils' personal, social and emotional development. This includes life skills and RSE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders to consider and review the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and support staff, spoke to pupils about their learning, heard pupils reading with a familiar adult and looked at samples of work.
- Inspectors looked at the single central record of checks on staff suitability. They met with safeguarding leaders to discuss their work. Inspectors looked at records relating to safeguarding and spoke to pupils about how the school keeps them safe.
- Leaders met with the lead inspector to discuss their records and analysis of pupils' behaviour and emotional well-being. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about pupils' range of experiences in and beyond school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted surveys from staff and parents.

Inspection team

Ruth Dollner, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sara Morgan

Ofsted Inspector

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