



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR SAMUEL RHODES SCHOOL

Name of School:	Samuel Rhodes School
Headteacher/Principal:	Cerys Normanton
Hub:	Shared Horizon Hub
School phase:	Secondary Special
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	10/02/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Leading
Date of last QA Review	01/02/2023
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	24/05/2022

1 Context and character of the school

Samuel Rhodes School is a growing, maintained, special school for pupils aged from 11 to 19 years. Its primary phase, accommodated in a nearby primary school, closed in July 2024, when its host school shut due to a drop in pupil numbers. It shares a site with a secondary academy. Pupils in the sixth form use a purpose built classroom, a life skills area and a common room within this mainstream school.

All pupils are disadvantaged due to their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), as well as other protected characteristics. They all have education, health and care plans (EHCPs) for their learning needs. The school is designated for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) but a growing number have a variety of complex needs, including autism. The proportion of pupils from economically disadvantaged families is much higher than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL). Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes across three year groups on the basis of their development and ability.

Leaders share, and hone, their provision and skills with colleagues in the wider area through participating in 'Future Zone Networks' comprising local primary schools and special schools.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- 'Community is our strength' is a poster in one of the school leader's office. This sums up just one of Samuel Rhodes School's many strengths. Highly supportive, respectful relationships and frequent, very well-focused communication are at the heart of extremely effective teamwork. All staff contribute to pupils' excellent progress and development, each playing a key part in this. For example, all staff help greet and welcome pupils in the mornings.
- Leaders, particularly the inspirational headteacher, are exceedingly ambitious. Weekly and ongoing continuous professional development (CPD) enables staff to understand and deliver the school's global offer. The programme is well planned, detailed and effectively broad. It includes coverage of pedagogy, subject knowledge as well as pupil health and well-being, ensuring that staff are kept well informed and up-to-date. Coaching is embedded, providing frequent bespoke opportunities for staff at all levels, including leaders, teachers and teaching assistants.

- Leaders are outward looking, continually seeking to extend and improve practice and provision for all pupils. They meet regularly with their local Future Zone, their Challenge Partner hub and invite a range of consultants and school improvement officers into the school. This ensures that leaders contribute to other schools as well as having frequent up-to-date input which they then cascade to staff.
- Accommodation is used well for lessons, work experience, self-regulation and interventions. Plans to reorganise outdoor areas are in place to make this even more suitable for pupils' relaxation and learning.
- Well-being and enjoyment of school is high among pupils and staff. Leaders know, value and respect all their pupils, families and colleagues. Staff sensitively give pupils time for self or supported regulation so that they are settled and ready to learn.
- Leaders have diligently rearranged the school week to provide time for all pupils to attend clubs during the school day. Along with a range of frequent trips, these effectively promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The diverse range of clubs include dance, choir, trains (where pupils gather to discuss different trains) and chess.
- Attendance is above the national average for special schools. A pastoral team meets every week to discuss pupils' needs and challenges including attendance. Leaders have close contacts with parents and work closely with them if there are any concerns.
- The school has a very positive reputation locally for the impact it has on its pupils. Experienced professionals who work with a range of provision refer to the school as a 'golden ticket' for pupils, particularly those with the most complex needs.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

... leaders tracked the impact of accelerated groups even more closely and frequently.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, providing key skills and knowledge for pupils now, as well as in adult life and employment. It provides holistically for pupils' learning, development and well-being. Literacy and mathematics, rooted in real-life, are central. Pupils in all key stages use mathematics to

work out costs and change in independence café, tuck shop and 'fruit shop' in lessons and at break times.

- The climate for learning is very positive and calm. Lessons are quiet and purposeful. Staff ensure that pupils' needs are met well providing breaks, further explanations and adapted resources as needed. Pupils in Key Stage 3 were engrossed in learning how to pour liquids in a practical science lesson.
- Pupils are further motivated by their class enterprise where they are given £100 to use and invest in projects to make money. At the end of the year they use this money towards a class trip, for example, to a London theme park.
- Teachers successfully build on prior learning to motivate pupils, extend their skills and sustain their interest. Pupils in Key Stage 5 had previously tried on and photographed each other in the 'work' clothes of a nurse, a builder and a chef. In the next lesson they looked at the photographs and all wrote independently about jobs which they would choose.
- Oracy has been a big focus for school development. Pupils are encouraged to communicate clearly and confidently in speech or by using Makaton or symbols. During the daily morning routine pupils in Key Stage 4 made excellent progress learning the reciprocity of questions and responses about how they were feeling and what their favourite film was.
- Pupils use a range of resources to help learning, concentration and regulation. During class discussion pupils in a Key Stage 3 class fetched and used a squeazy cushion whilst another jumped on a trampette at the back of the class whilst fully engaged in learning.
- Literacy, both reading and writing, have high priority across the school. Pupils learn and use phonics well. Those in Key Stage 3 spoke with confidence and understanding about the characters in the story 'The Weaving Tree', which they were reading. One pupil said, 'We take books home from the library every week'. Another spoke about reading novels independently.
- Staff and pupils follow regular, embedded routines which help pupils' learning and preparation for later life. Pupils in Key Stage 4 confidently reported the correct date and used the BBC weather App to report that it was 'cloudy today'.
- Pupils develop confidence and pride in their school. One pupil eagerly greeted visitors saying 'Hello and welcome to our class', quickly followed by, 'I feel happy because we have visitors'. One girl in the girls' group said, 'School is AMAZING!'.

- Teachers plan lessons and opportunities which are 'low threat and high challenge', helping pupils develop confidence and character. All Key Stage 3 pupils work with the National Youth Theatre (NYT) and the whole school have performed Oliver at the Shaw theatre in London.
- There is a very strong emphasis on preparing pupils for employment. Leaders have appointed an administrator to develop provision for careers. This colleague has doubled the number of work experience placements from seven to 14. All the Gatsby bench marks are met and all pupils undertake work experience with local providers or within the school.
- British values are promoted throughout the school. Relationships are extremely positive and supportive showing respect and understanding of equality and diversity. Pupils learn about democracy through electing the school council and school representative for Islington Youth Parliament.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

- ... teachers supported their teaching assistants to provide even more effective help for pupils in small group and one to one instructions in the classrooms.
- ... the quality of questioning in all classes was consistently effective to ensure that the learning of all pupils is maximised.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well

- Leaders of pupils who have further disadvantages such as economic challenges, early stages of English, highly complex SEND or medical conditions are experienced and insightful. They share their skills with others through CPD and ongoing discussions and advice. All staff have had training on diabetes and managing challenging behaviour.
- The bespoke needs of pupils, particularly those who are most disadvantaged due to their highly complex special educational needs, are met extremely well. Pupils are given highly appropriate specialist equipment to support their needs and increase access to learning. Some with visual impairments, dyslexia or dyspraxia use large, coloured keyboards and voice to text technology to operate their computers.

- Leaders prioritise provision for pupils who are even more disadvantaged. Consequently these pupils make huge strides in their learning and development even though significant challenges remain. Pupils who are highly anxious now spend more time settled and engaged in lessons with their class.
- As the complexity and severity of pupils' needs has increased, provision for them has expanded so that individual needs are met well. For example, the school now uses four sensory rooms, a movement room and several 'quiet tents' which help calm and stimulate pupils where necessary.
- The use of visual time tables and Makaton successfully helps pupils who are disadvantaged by complex communication challenges. In a mathematics lesson comprising pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5, the teacher used Makaton particularly well to help pupils settle and engage in their learning.
- Exceedingly well planned, but highly flexible, morning routines help all pupils, especially those whose families have additional challenges. Some of these pupils have time under weighted blankets at the beginning of the school day to become calm and settled, ready for lessons. Pupils in Key Stage 3 started the day with close support and were then seen participating eagerly and calmly in class discussion.
- All pupils, including those who are from the most economically challenged families, have nutritious breakfast if they want or need it. They eat this in class so that time for learning is not reduced. Pupils calmly and sensibly ate cereal as they joined a morning discussion in Key Stage 4.
- A team of pastoral support workers and therapists are integral to the global offer for all pupils. These include those who are even more disadvantaged, helping leaders to extend their knowledge, understanding and skills to provide the best for the most disadvantaged pupils.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if....

... areas for development above applied to all pupils, including those who are most disadvantaged. There were no other EBIs for these pupils.

Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse content reports from across the hub networks including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)