

Name of School:	Samuel Rhodes School
Headteacher/Principal:	Cerys Normanton
Hub:	London AP Special
School type:	Special
MAT (if applicable):	Not applicable

Date of this visit:	16/06/2021
Estimate at last QA Review:	Effective
Date of last QA Review:	07/10/2019
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	07/03/2017

1. Information about the visit

In place of a QA Review, Samuel Rhodes School was visited by a lead reviewer on a virtual platform for two days. There were meetings with the senior leaders, middle leaders, parents, pupils, teaching assistants and governors. The consultancy focussed on:

- Effectiveness of leadership
- Impact of remote learning
- Re-joining the learning journey.

2. Information about the school

Samuel Rhodes School caters for pupils aged 4– 19 with a range of learning difficulties from moderate to severe. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Its provision is based on two sites (primary and secondary) one mile apart. Both sites are co-located with mainstream provisions. There are 124 pupils on roll, including 24 in the primary department and 23 in the sixth form. Pupils are from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnicities. Three-quarters of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding and many families receive high levels of multi-agency support.

In September 2020, the school has started a satellite class for the youngest children next to classes in the mainstream primary school. There are reciprocal arrangements for pupils to share sensory resources, play areas and dining facilities.

Over recent years the special educational needs of the pupils have become more complex. The school is reorganising provision to accommodate this, and a 'hub' class is used in Key Stage 3 to provide specialised provision for autism and support these strategies throughout the school. The school groups pupils by stage not age.

During the lockdowns in the pandemic, the 'bubbles' of staff and pupils who were attending were accommodated on the secondary site.

3.1 Effectiveness of leadership – What went well

- Leaders understand and know the families in their community really well. They have worked to create even closer links with all its members during the pandemic. They have maintained their clear priorities of safety and well-being for all to guide their decisions.
- Leaders have quickly adapted and improved their practice to ensure the pupils and their families are supported as well as possible. They have worked highly effectively and doggedly with other professionals and agencies, holding them to account to ensure the support for families was holistic and timely throughout the pandemic. They enabled a food bank to be set up at school, for example.
- Leaders communicated expectations clearly and consistently to staff during lockdowns. They compiled a comprehensive staff handbook that collated all the

information staff needed on new practice, new systems, risk assessments and well-being support.

- There is a highly effective and established relationship between child and adolescent mental health (CAMHS) practitioners and the school because of the high levels of need and complexity of the pupils. Leaders commissioned more time from these practitioners. This supported leaders to maintain focus and look after their own mental safety whilst negotiating the unprecedented amount of work that needed to be done during the pandemic. CAMHS staff commented that leaders were willing to be open and honest in supervision sessions they ran. This enabled leaders to reflect and be resilient to support the rest of the school community.
- Leaders used data and guidance to make access to the on-site provision as safe as possible. This meant parents felt increasingly reassured in sending their children to school and numbers attending increased during the lockdowns.
- Teaching assistants (TAs), including those who are new to the school during the last year, are inducted well and receive all the training they need to work successfully with pupils especially those with more complex needs. They know that senior leaders are approachable and understanding. TAs feel they are a highly valued part of the team.
- Middle leaders say that senior leaders have given them very clear expectations and vision for the development of the curriculum. Middle leaders are clear about their responsibilities, which helps them to be effective. This was very evident in lockdown when they supported teachers, pupils and families to adapt the curriculum for the 'bubbles' created for safe return of pupils. The mathematics leader has written a clear curriculum and programmes of study that focus on the mathematics skills needed in daily life.
- The middle leader teaching the 'hub' class has expertise in using and modelling techniques and methods for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. She trains and supports other staff to use these in their own classes when appropriate. The life skills lead has completed surveys with staff and learning walks to establish strengths and to create an action plan. This is supporting an ambitious life skills curriculum.
- Governors say that school leaders welcome challenge and the senior leaders are excellent at keeping them well informed so that they perform their role as 'critical friend' effectively. Parent governors feel valued and engage in governance effectively. Governors work in close partnership with the headteacher and senior team and know that they are purposefully and passionately focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for the pupils.

3.2 Effectiveness of leadership – Even better if...

...senior leaders continued to develop the skills of middle leaders, especially those new to the role.

...senior leaders ensured that the foci of the school development plan for 2021– 2022 are closely defined and set a realistic pace.

4.1 Impact of remote learning- What went well

- As soon as the first lockdown occurred in March 2020, leaders made decisions to rapidly introduce and implement two new information technology (IT) based platforms. These replaced existing school-based paper systems. CPOMS (a child protection management system) enabled secure sharing of information for safeguarding purposes and Class Dojo gave all staff, pupils, parents and governors a platform for communication and learning. The member of staff who ran Class Dojo provided training and support for all staff to make this transition as seamless as possible.
- Leaders ensured there were enough electronic devices and access to the internet to enable all pupils to be able to log on at home and have access to the two platforms that were used, Class Dojo and Microsoft Teams, to continue learning at home. Staff provided learning packs for pupils and parents for whom virtual interaction was less successful.
- Pupils were already familiar with the interactive online programmes for mathematics and reading used at school. Remote learning was embedded quickly so pupils could access learning and communication with their class teams. Learning tasks and class interactions were on the systems from April 2020.
- Staff provided excellent support for parents during the lockdowns. This strong partnership with parents is a fundamental part of how the school operates. Parents really appreciated that they could call staff with any concerns. Staff called all families weekly or daily and even more frequently to families with more vulnerabilities. This meant families could easily share worries or ask for support they needed. For example, many parents needed support with the food vouchers, and the pastoral team provided support for benefits and form filling.
- Communication between all the staff teams during the pandemic, both from home and on site, worked fluidly and positively to enable staff to support families' individual needs. No information was lost, and all staff felt really well supported by senior leaders and the leadership of the headteacher.
- The mathematics leader has written schemes of work that focus on mathematics as a life skill. This continued throughout this academic year and pupils' progress has been maintained. Parents are now much more confident in understanding what their children are learning and how to support them.
- Pupils engaged well with online reading during lockdowns, encouraged by staff in the weekly calls. This maintained pupils' reading for pleasure. Staff provided videos and work linked to the phonics and reading programme the school uses so that pupils' progress in reading has been maintained.
- Staff continued to provide online support for parents, providing workshops through the Class Dojo platform. This made it easy to communicate and provide support and information for toilet-training, emotional-regulation and social stories. Parents really appreciated these.
- The effective leadership and established systems enabled minimal loss of learning for pupils when they reverted to remote learning due to positive case/s and isolation, for example when the primary 'bubble' needed to close.
- Staff feel empowered and speak confidently about their achievements during lockdown. They have learnt many things about using technology, delivering live to

camera and adapting their practice rapidly. This has enabled them to develop further specific strategies for particular special educational needs. 'Technology confidence' has enabled communication with pupils, for example, this week a class had a virtual video call with their peer who was recovering from an operation.

4.2 Impact of remote learning – Even better if...

...staff further developed the use of IT across the curriculum to deliver skills for life such as online forms, using maps, and music editing.

5.1 Re-joining with the learning journey – What went well

- Remote access, live lessons and all the communication facilities in the virtual learning platform kept pupils very much in touch with school during the lockdowns. Parents say that this supported smooth transitions back into full-time school and learning. The Class Dojo platform is being used well for homework tasks and continuing a highly positive dialogue with parents.
- Staff provide individualised bespoke support from their excellent knowledge of students and their families. This has resulted in students being able to attend school, overcoming their anxieties and making friendships, which is having significant impact on their lives and ability to engage with learning as they return to school. Staff provide bespoke trauma-informed practice to support the most vulnerable pupils to return to school and re-join with learning.
- The structuring of the school in 'bubbles', both for pupils attending during the lockdowns and when everyone has returned to school, has meant far fewer transitions during the school day. This has resulted in less incidents of 'behaviour' that has required any intervention. Also, the CPOMS email alerts have meant that staff are directed to where any support is needed far more rapidly than was possible before. Leaders are keeping these arrangements in place, and subject specialists move to classes, which is working well.
- The leader for personal, social and health education has supported the whole school with the recovery curriculum. The impact of this has been seen across the school every day with pupils' high level of engagement in learning. Pupils are really pleased to be back in school and working with their friends again.
- Leaders effectively use a wide range of reliable data to assess gaps in learning. Leaders work with intervention staff to identify any students who are not making the progress expected in reading. They identify the best strategies for the students and provide the support so that they gain confidence and begin to make much more progress. Recent training for support staff in identifying any gaps in early mathematical concepts is already showing results.
- The focus staff maintained on reading during the lockdown has enabled pupils to continue making effective progress. Pupils enthusiastically explained how much they enjoyed reading and one had learnt to read after gaining confidence rapidly during an individual bespoke programme.

5.2 Re-joining with the learning journey – Even better if...

- ...staff continued to develop the range of programmes offered for developing pupils reading and communication skills to meet the changing needs of the cohort.
- ...leaders continued to work on curriculum documentation to ensure that it is explicit and purposeful.

6. What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

- The headteacher has highly valued the weekly meetings within the hub that have been so supportive during the pandemic.

This visit will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.

Schools can also 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.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.