

Samuel Rhodes MLD School

Address: 11 Highbury New Park, Islington, London, N5 2EG

Unique reference number (URN): 100469

Inspection report: 12 May 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Exceptional

Personal development and wellbeing

Exceptional 

Leaders provide exceptionally effective, insightful and carefully considered leadership for personal development and wellbeing. This work sits firmly at the heart of the school's provision. The programme is coherently planned, ambitious and fully embedded across the school. It is seamlessly woven through lessons and a rich range of wider opportunities.

Leaders ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of fairness, respect and difference. Through well-sequenced lessons and meaningful real-life experiences, pupils extend their cultural and social understanding. Teaching takes into account pupils' varying needs and levels of understanding and uses different techniques to ensure that pupils learn what they need to. Pupils learn about healthy relationships, consent, online and community risks and how to stay safe.

Pupils' lives are greatly enriched through a carefully curated programme of workshops, clubs and visits. They participate in a wide range of sporting events, perform in Shakespeare productions and showcase their talents in various performances. Clubs at breaktime provide valuable opportunities for pupils and students to play, collaborate and socialise. Well-structured activities, such as art, dance, football and library time, enable pupils to make purposeful choices and pursue their interests.

Pastoral support is highly responsive, enhanced by an extensive therapeutic team, including occupational and speech and language therapists.

Leaders have placed preparation for adulthood at the centre of their work. Careers education is a standout feature. Pupils develop practical skills, including cooking, budgeting and travel training. They go on to gain and sustain suitable work, training and college placements. Pupils benefit from extensive work experience opportunities and enterprise projects. Pupils actively shape their future pathways according to their ambitions and interests.

As a result of this exemplary provision, pupils become confident, independent and aspirational individuals. Almost all pupils move on to appropriate education, training or employment. They are extremely well prepared for adult life. They can advocate for themselves with self-belief and maturity.

Strong standard

Achievement

Strong standard 

All pupils are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and face a range of different challenges to success. The school ensures that everyone is able to achieve well and make positive progress from their starting points.

A relentless emphasis on key skills means that pupils develop confidence in speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. These skills improve steadily over time. This supports pupils to access the wider curriculum and participate successfully in social activities. Pupils produce high-quality work and contribute well in lessons. They demonstrate secure knowledge and apply it with increasing independence.

While pupils develop academic skills, they also make considerable progress in their communication, behaviour and independence. Most pupils improve their attendance and ability to manage their emotions, allowing them to engage more fully in learning and life.

Students are very well prepared for their next steps. They move on to suitable college courses, training or supported internships with the skills and confidence needed for adulthood.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders take a highly proactive approach to attendance. They track attendance closely and identify patterns for individuals and groups. Where pupils struggle to attend, staff act quickly. They work supportively with families and external services. As a result, attendance is above that seen in similar schools, despite many pupils having significant medical or social needs. Specialist staff work closely with pupils who have low attendance. For these pupils, support is personalised and persistent, leading to clear improvements over time. Pupils who previously struggled to attend now come into school far more regularly and are better able to engage with learning.

Leaders ensure that behaviour across the school is calm, purposeful and well supported. Staff have high expectations and apply them consistently. Pupils understand routines and follow them well. They show positive attitudes to learning and take pride in their work. Staff support pupils sensitively to manage their emotions. Pupils learn how to recognise their feelings and regulate themselves with increasing independence. Pupils support each other to meet behavioural expectations. Any incidents, including bullying or unkind behaviour, are addressed quickly and fairly so that pupils feel safe. Staff make thoughtful adjustments to meet pupils' needs. As a result, the school remains a respectful and supportive environment where pupils feel secure and able to learn.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a clear and well-established understanding of what pupils need to learn and the quality of teaching. They review this regularly and carefully, making timely and well-considered changes when needed. For example, lessons and classrooms have been adapted to support the increasing numbers of pupils with sensory needs.

The school places an emphasis on helping pupils develop the essential skills for learning and everyday life. These include speaking and listening, reading, writing and basic mathematics. Reading is taught in a systematic and well-structured way through phonics. Pupils who need extra help receive it quickly, helping them build confidence, fluency and accuracy.

The curriculum is well planned and thoughtfully sequenced so that learning builds step by step. Pupils develop knowledge over time by revisiting and extending what they already know. Lessons are carefully linked to real-life situations, making learning meaningful. There is a well-embedded focus on preparing pupils for adulthood, including developing practical and life skills, such as handling money.

Teaching is consistently clear and supportive. Teachers explain ideas carefully and use images, examples and repetition to aid understanding. Pupils are given time to think and practise their learning. Support staff work closely with pupils and make a highly positive contribution to their progress and independence.

Lessons are extremely inclusive. Staff ensure that tasks and resources are adapted thoughtfully so all pupils can take part successfully. Teachers check understanding regularly and adjust teaching where needed. As a result, pupils learn well, gain confidence and develop the skills they need for the future.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders are highly effective in identifying and meeting pupils' needs. They gather detailed information before pupils join the school. This includes input from previous schools and families. During the first weeks, staff assess pupils carefully to ensure that support is matched closely to individual needs.

Leaders ensure that pupils receive carefully adapted provision to help overcome their barriers to learning. Classrooms, resources and routines reflect pupils' communication, sensory and emotional needs. Leaders ensure that staff have the expertise to use well-embedded, research-backed strategies to support pupils' learning and behaviour. Targeted interventions, such as communication groups and sensory support, help pupils access the curriculum successfully.

While all pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, each pupil's needs are highly varied. Leaders ensure that everyone is supported very well. Staff understand individual needs in depth. External professionals, including therapists and health services, work closely with the school to ensure consistent and highly effective support.

Leaders support disadvantaged pupils thoughtfully. Funding is used effectively in order to provide additional resources, wider experiences and targeted support. This helps pupils to participate fully in school life, progress well and gain suitable qualifications.

Pupils known to social care are supported with relentless care. Staff work closely with other agencies and families. Regular meetings and home visits help build trust with families and improve understanding and outcomes.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders provide an extremely clear and purposeful vision for consistent improvement. They accurately understand the school's context and respond well to increasing complexity in pupils' needs. Leaders have identified the right priorities, including adapting the curriculum

and strengthening preparation for adulthood. They take timely and effective action to ensure that pupils receive a high-quality and holistic education.

Leaders have created a culture of care and ambition. Staff understand the school's priorities and contribute positively to them. Leaders listen to staff views and involve them in decisions. This helps to build an embedded sense of teamwork and shared purpose.

Governors are highly committed and have a very secure understanding of the school's work. They fulfil their statutory duties effectively, including overseeing safeguarding and reviewing policies. They provide both support and challenge. For example, they ask for explanations on changes in attendance, curriculum and outcomes data. They also ensure that resources are used wisely to meet pupils' needs.

Staff wellbeing is a clear priority. Leaders provide regular support, flexible arrangements and open communication. Staff feel valued and supported in their roles. Workload is managed carefully, with time provided for planning and collaboration.

Leaders ensure that staff's professional development is extremely well organised and linked to school priorities. Staff receive regular training and coaching. This helps them develop their skills and deliver consistent and effective practice across the school.

Leaders build positive relationships with parents and carers and external partners. They communicate regularly and offer support to families. Strong links with other professionals help to maintain positive wellbeing, security and outcomes for pupils.

Post 16 provision

Strong standard 

Leaders provide very clear and effective leadership of the post-16 programme. They have a sophisticated understanding of students' needs and aspirations. The curriculum is carefully designed to prepare students for adult life. Leaders review provision regularly and make thoughtful improvements, such as expanding qualifications and increasing community access.

Students are successful and achieve well from their starting points. They develop communication, independence and practical skills alongside academic learning. Their work shows steady progress over time. Students gain relevant qualifications and build the confidence needed for their future.

Teaching is highly consistent and purposefully adapted to students' needs. Teachers use clear explanations, careful checks and adaptations to ensure that students have fully understood. Learning is closely linked to real-life situations. This helps students apply what they learn in meaningful ways. Support staff work effectively to promote students' independence.

Preparation for next steps is a key strength. Students take part in work experience and real-life tasks, such as running the café. They develop skills needed for employment and independent living. Leaders maintain extensive links with colleges and employers to support smooth transitions to their next steps.

Post-16 provision is highly inclusive. All students benefit from personalised pathways and specialist pastoral support. As a result, students leave very well prepared for education, training or employment.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils belong to a calm, supportive and purposeful community. They feel safe, understood and ready to learn. The day starts in a highly structured, welcoming way. Staff greet pupils warmly as they arrive. There is a clear sense of purpose as pupils enter the school. Pupils know where they need to be and go there without fuss. This helps pupils settle quickly and feel happy and secure.

Pupils behave very well. They show highly positive attitudes toward each other, staff and their learning. Clear routines and strong relationships underpin daily life. Classrooms and social spaces are orderly and focused. Staff understand pupils' needs very well. They support pupils to manage their emotions effectively. Pupils learn to recognise their feelings and respond appropriately. When difficulties arise, staff remain calm and respectful. This keeps learning positive for everyone.

Pupils trust staff to help them. They know who to talk to if they are worried. Pupils understand how to stay safe online and in the community. They treat each other with respect and kindness. Bullying is rare. When it happens, staff deal with it carefully and quickly.

Pupils enjoy learning and take part in a wide range of activities. Lessons are meaningful and matched to pupils' needs. Pupils develop considerable confidence in speaking and listening. They explain their ideas clearly and take part in group discussions. Learning extends beyond the classroom. Pupils cook, take part in enterprise projects and visits in the community. For example, pupils run the café and tuck shop. They handle money and serve others with confidence. Pupils develop important skills that prepare them for employment, training and for life after school.

Pupils make notable gains from their starting points. They improve in reading, writing and mathematics and develop communication, independence and self-control. Older pupils become increasingly confident. They speak with positivity and optimism about their achievements and future.

Pupils flourish in this setting because leaders and staff have high expectations for what they can achieve in life. Pupils' needs are met through carefully tailored support, so they develop the independence skills necessary to be successful.

Next steps

- Leaders and governors should continue to strengthen how assessment is used by staff to secure consistently exceptional achievement across subjects, and ensure this information

is shared with parents and carers to help them to understand their child's holistic and academic achievement even better.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Alison Khan. However, at the time of this inspection, the vice-chair, David Adams, was acting as chair.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, additional leaders responsible for safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and inclusion, staff and pupils during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

All pupils are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils have moderate learning difficulties and many have autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

The school has had a significant change since the last inspection. The school now no longer operates a provision for primary-aged pupils on another site. This has had an impact on the school capacity, which was 140 pupils.

At the time of inspection, there were 130 pupils on roll. The school's capacity is now 130 pupils.

Headteacher : Cerys Normanton

Lead inspector:

Una Buckley, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Ruth Harding, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 12 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

129

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

School capacity

140

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

70.83%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

100.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school
2023 leavers (revised)	100%
2022 leavers (revised)	100%
2021 leavers (revised)	100%

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	10.5%
2023/24 (3 term)	10.5%
2022/23 (3 term)	13.4%

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	33.7%
2023/24 (3 term)	34.5%
2022/23 (3 term)	47.3%

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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