

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:	09/02/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Leading
Date of last QA Review:	10/02/2025
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	24/05/2022

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels Leading

Quality of provision and outcomes Leading

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs Leading

Area of excellence N/A

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence N/A

Overall peer evaluation estimate Leading

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

Samuel Rhodes School (SRS) is a community special school located within the London borough of Islington for students between in Year 7-14. The school mainly serves the local authority but takes 1 in 8 of its 130 students from neighbouring local authorities. It is increasingly oversubscribed every year. The school shares its dining and some sports facilities with a colocated secondary academy.

All students have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) with at least one learning need. Although registered as a provision for students with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) the cohort profile has become increasingly complex with many students having multiple diagnoses and most with speech, language and communication needs.

Roughly one third of students are girls. 1 in 3 students are known to social care and 7 in 10 students come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds which is nearly triple the national average.

The school vision is to provide students with the life skills, social competencies, practical abilities and qualifications to find a meaningful role in the community as resilient and increasingly independent adults. Students are taught in mixed key stage classes determined by developmental needs and ability.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- From the moment students enter the gates at SRS they are the focal point of a loving and caring ethos that is transmitted in every interaction they have with adults. How they are greeted, supported and triaged if in a state of dysregulation is done in a calm, deliberate, intentional manner that is warm and authentic. This empowers students to have confidence in the development of their self-advocacy with a voice that is heard and valued.
- Leaders foster an unwavering commitment from staff by modelling an approach of relational and responsive support. Combined with evidence based 'trauma informed' research shared through continuous, professional development (CPD) best practise is always seen and lived in everyday school life to a consistently high standard from all adults. This applies to other aspects of CPD such as learning in the classroom where leaders have developed a pedagogical approach that is based on the profile of students and SEND best practice. Leaders quality assure teaching and learning assiduously which informs planning, whole staff and individual CPD.
- The relatively small senior leadership team has allowed for the effective development of middle leadership team. Consequently, they have been able

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to lead subject development and pastoral areas of responsibility securely with senior leaders offering a reassuring second layer of support of discussion and reflection. As a result of this work middle leaders can articulate their areas of responsibility well and can make accurate assessment of teaching in their areas.

- Governors support the school admirably through a combination of relevant experience and commitment of support with regular visits, conferences and meetings. Minutes of meetings show they challenge leaders appropriately about progress towards school goals.
- Character education is heavily focussed on helping students understand and take their place in society as equals. They are encouraged to have a voice and advocate for themselves as much as possible. The student council is an excellent example of this and have influenced the choices leaders have made about the soon to be developed outdoor environment. A sense of belonging, teamwork and enterprise is fostered in tutor groups who 'grow' a starting sum of £100 throughout the year. This helps build confidence and reciprocal communication skills with a tangible practical outcome. With up to quadruple returns on starting amounts class trips and events such as visits to the Post Office Museum and the 'Shrek Experience' have been funded.
- Diversity is celebrated in the school with a community wide acceptance of each other's cultural, social and educational backgrounds. This means that students are kind to each other and incidents of relational conflict are low
- Well-being is central to how the school community acts towards each other. The head teacher is the lead for mental health in the school and regularly seeks the view of all stakeholders to check that well-being is prioritised. The positive response from students in conjunction with parental and staff surveys indicate this is the case with consistently high levels of satisfaction and alignment with the school.
- Careers education is a notable strength of the school. It is a reflection of the vision leaders have for students to become independent, contributors to society when they are 25. Option choices are built around this vision in tandem with student preferences and qualification pathways allow for a rich set of experiences, including a comprehensive and continuous external work experience offer throughout Years 11-14 that prepare students well for sustained progression into college education, supported internships or employment in numbers that are remarkably above the national average for mainstream schools. The tracking of this provision is forensic and enables precise follow up support. Consequently, almost every student remains in sustained placements at least two years after leaving.

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

- ... the school homogenised already embedded assessment systems to communicate the multi-layered approach and impact of the curriculum for all stakeholders.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is highly ambitious for students. A tri-pathway approach to suit different profiles is heavily rooted in research based methodology. All three pathways are aimed at maximising independence in students by providing them with a range of functional skills and knowledge to be successful and happy in adult life. By design there is intentionality in the experiences students have so that they can apply these skills both inside the school and externally. For example, at break time adults and students were served by Key Stage 4 students in the tuck shop. They displayed excellent customer service skills and functional fluency in mental arithmetic to give correct change very quickly in real time.
- Planning in teams led by specialists allow progression of learning to be sequenced appropriately, across all three pathways, in a broad range of academic and holistic subjects which includes employability. Teachers adapt learning for individuals within their classes based on their EHCPs and baseline profiles. Consequently, students receive a broad and balanced curriculum that prepares them well towards endpoints that will help them progress confidently in society whilst providing academic rigour.
- Reading is prioritised and leaders have been agile in adapting the emphasis of teaching to build inference and comprehension skills as students become more proficient with blending pure sounds due to the sustained impact of a well embed approach. In a literacy lesson a Key Stage 3 student was expertly guided by an adult to correct a pure sound and subsequently decode a tricky word successfully with the minimum of support.
- The teaching of self and co-regulation is treated like a subject and enjoys the same level of pedagogical rigour in its everyday application by adults. For example, as part of sure and steady start to the school day zones of regulation are used with adaptation when needed, to pre-empt or identify emerging needs. Well trained teachers and adults respond to antecedents well with a range of shared strategies learned through CPD. This ensures that engagement in lessons is focussed on learning and that re-engagement of students is quick, dignified and kind.
- Teaching is unified as part of a global offer that is tracked well by leaders through their own rigorous quality assurance and external partnerships. The core ideas of engagement, representation, action and expression are delivered using a toolkit of strategies and carefully designed resources. As a result, teachers generally model well using a range of entry points into tasks that allow all to participate. In a Key Stage 4 Art lesson students were learning about the concept about contrast. The teacher recognised the potentially abstract nature of this and provided many examples around the room for students to understand the meaning of what it was.
- Once learned, students retain knowledge securely. One Year 14 student was able to explain the context of the phrase 'the sun never sets on the British empire' through the application of his knowledge of how much territory was

colonised during the Victorian era. In a sixth form employability lesson the teacher encouraged students to build upon previous ideas about team working through scenario based questions.

- Attendance and behaviour tracking is granular so that cohort or individual trends and patterns can be analysed and investigated further. Current attendance is close to the national average for all students. Currently and historically attendance has always exceeded national comparisons for all categories of disadvantaged students.

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

- ... An even greater range of strategies were used to check for understanding in classroom activities and small group work.

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

- There is a graduated response to further support for students that need it. Much of this work is pro-active in nature and responsive to early identification of needs from thorough baseline testing. Groups who receive 'intervention' in fact receive a mix of pre-learning and top up work that matches what is being learned in the classroom. This ensures that the vast majority of students meet their expected targets which are in line with their Year 7 baseline targets. Small group work in classes helps this further with adults being able to provide more targeted and scaffolding learning opportunities within tasks.
- The therapeutic offer for those that need the most support is phenomenal. An in house team provides Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), occupational therapy (OT), speech and language therapy (SALT) that supports students with greatest need. The impact of the work is expertly measured by leaders and continuously developed through expansive and robust multi-agency work.. The cohesive support they get from the school and their partnering external agencies means that the most vulnerable groups such as those known to social services achieve as well as their peers.
- This extends into support for families which is vast. The school looks beyond data categories and understands which families are not quite at threshold to qualify for more support or referral but who need extra help. The school uses this information to provide low intensity support and monitoring to ensure all students who need therapeutic input receive it. In addition, over 200 hampers were delivered to families during the Autumn term to combat food poverty which is widespread in the local area.
- The schools' excellence is widely recognised in the borough and neighbouring local authorities. Subsequently, it has provided outreach services to over 40 schools in the last year ranging from setting up alternative resource provisions

in other schools, to a borough-wide training offer that supporting teachers meet the needs of students with SEN in mainstream schools.

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

... None identified

5. Area of Excellence

The school did not submit an area of excellence for this review.

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 partnership of schools and trusts 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 partnership 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>)