

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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4 June 2015

Ms Julie Keylock
Headteacher
Samuel Rhodes MLD School
11 Highbury New Park
London
N5 2EG

Dear Ms Keylock

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Samuel Rhodes MLD School

Following my visit to your school on 3 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence including:

- observations of students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of students' behaviour throughout the day, including at the start and end of the school day, break time and lunchtime
- discussion with students about their experiences in the school
- documentary evidence about behaviour, including information about attendance and exclusions
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

Context

Samuel Rhodes School caters for students with moderate learning difficulties. Since the last inspection in 2012, the school has extended its provision to include a sixth form. There are now 85 students on roll aged between five and 18. Around two thirds of these are boys. The school is on two sites. The primary school is co-located on the top floor of a mainstream primary school while the secondary provision is co-located with a mainstream secondary school. Around two thirds of the students are in the secondary or sixth form phases of their education. Over half of the students are from a range of minority ethnic groups, and just under half speak English as an additional language. More than three quarters are eligible for free school meals. All students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of students both within lessons and around school is of a very high standard. The students' attitudes towards their work are impressive as they demonstrate an eagerness to learn and develop new skills. Members of staff at all levels demonstrate an excellent understanding of the individual needs of students and adapt their approach accordingly.

Firmly embedded routines, which are implemented consistently, support students very well. For example, students are greeted by familiar staff at the start of the day and enter the school relaxed, happy and ready to learn. They leave any belongings in lockers before moving on to their classrooms. If any student appears unsettled or unhappy they are given time to share anxieties with a member of staff before entering the classroom. Similar routines are in place for break times and at the end of the day. This reduces anxiety and enables students to develop their independence skills as, over time, the familiar routine reduces the need for close staff support.

Staff members are vigilant in their supervision of students at less formal times such as break times and during changes between lessons. They stand at key points so that all areas can be viewed, and provide a supportive presence rather than a disciplinary stance. This enables students to develop their independence in moving from one activity to another and in interacting with their peers appropriately.

As at the time of the last inspection, students engage in learning activities well. Teachers and support staff use praise well and communicate with students as appropriate to their need using visual supports or basic sign language if needed.

During this inspection, students were observed to work effectively in a variety of ways, either individually, in small groups or with intensive adult support.

Staff members use the school systems consistently to reward positive behaviour. They have also set up individualised reward systems which motivate students. For example, if one student wears her glasses throughout the day, then on Tuesdays and Thursdays she is appropriately rewarded. Reminders of expected behaviour, such as 'good listening', are visually displayed in classrooms, and students respond positively to these.

Members of staff at all levels act as excellent role models for students. They remain calm and relaxed when challenged by pupils. They do not raise their voices but provide quiet supportive words or actions. Their consistency and fairness are recognised by the students.

At the primary site, pupils and staff face the considerable challenge of negotiating numerous stairs as they move from the classrooms at the top of their shared building, down to the shared dining room, down again to the playground, and then back up again at the end of the lunch break. This is managed well. On returning to the top floor, all pupils returned immediately to their classrooms and very swiftly engaged in learning without any fuss or stragglers.

At both sites, a variety of activities is available for students during break times. These include football, basketball and 'quiet' areas on the secondary site, where some older students also run a tuck shop. Primary-aged pupils enjoy riding bikes, playing cricket and using the climbing frame. Students choose their preferred activity and staff facilitate their involvement in it. At the secondary site, outdoor space is very limited, however, for those who do not wish to play football. This resulted in some boisterous chasing games taking place in the 'quiet' area and overflowing into the building. School leaders are working with leaders from the co-located school in order to extend the space available at less formal times. This will involve the removal of fences and secure greater freedom of movement for students.

The school has an established system for rewarding positive behaviour and sanctions where behaviour falls short of the expected high standards. Students talk proudly of receiving 'purple slips' for doing something well. They understand and can explain the points system which results in their attaining a bronze, silver or gold certificate each week based on the total number of points gained. The majority of students gain gold certificates each week. School information shows that this system has improved behaviour over time, as the number of students gaining gold certificates each week has increased. Parents and carers receive weekly reports informing them of their child's achievements in terms of both learning and behaviour. The school has recently extended the system to make points available for positive behaviour at break times in addition to lesson times. Leaders recognise that further extension of the range of strategies used to monitor behaviour at less formal times would enable them to pinpoint exactly where any issues occur and address them rapidly.

Similarly, poor behaviour is dealt with in a structured and graduated manner. Students who display inappropriate behaviour receive green, amber or red report cards which may result in a detention or missed break times. School information shows that use of these report cards is decreasing, with only one student receiving two red report cards in a term. The number of serious incidents requiring the use of physical intervention has also decreased considerably from 95 in the 2012/13 year to 69 in 2013/14.

The school has comprehensive systems to track and monitor the behaviour of students. Any incident is logged, recorded and analysed to identify any patterns. This information shows that, term by term, the number of incidents is decreasing. In the 2013/14 year, only four incidents of bullying were recorded. Students confirm that bullying is extremely rare, and that any incidents are followed up rigorously by staff who make sure that it does not happen again. Students spoken to during the inspection were adamant that racist and homophobic language has been eliminated because staff have 'come down hard on it'.

An effective system for calling senior staff to support teachers when incidents occur minimises the disruption to learning for other students. The senior leader attending makes careful notes of why they were called, what actions they took and how long the student was out of class. They also record whether or not the student is required to make up lost learning time through a detention and how this will be done. The majority of these instances result in students returning to class within 10 minutes. The school has a small 'reflection room' where students who need a short time away from the class can be supported in order to return to their learning or continue their work away from others for a short time.

As a result of the very successful strategies employed to improve behaviour, the number of fixed-term exclusions has significantly decreased. From very high levels in 2012/13 when 24 fixed-term exclusions were imposed, there were only 17 in 2013/14 and 11 in the 2014/15 year to date. Students who had been excluded in the past were able to explain to me how the school systems have taught them to control their behaviour. One student, now in the sixth form, told the inspector that when younger, his behaviour was poor, but the school has helped him to understand why it is important to treat people with respect, 'whoever they are'. He could also reflect on the importance of this as he moves on to college next year.

The attendance of students has remained at around 92% since the last inspection. School leaders have identified a target group of students whose attendance is poor, and work with them to improve this. Governors receive information about attendance and exclusions regularly. They are aware that while attendance is low compared with secondary schools nationally, it compares well with that in other special schools. The school analyses information about exclusions and attendance carefully, identifying repeat offenders and ensuring that those who struggle with their behaviour make good progress over time in this regard.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school should take steps to extend the range of activities undertaken to check that behaviour at less formal times, such as break times, is always of a high standard.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Islington, the Chair of the Governing. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gaynor Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector