

The Sydney Russell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101246
Local Authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	323430
Inspection dates	6–7 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter McGregor

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1613
Sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Rowley
Headteacher	Mr Roger Leighton
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	Parsloes Avenue Dagenham RM9 5QT
Telephone number	020 8270 4333
Fax number	020 8270 4377

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Sydney Russell is a much larger than average secondary school. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals and from minority ethnic groups are well above those found nationally. The school has a number of refugees and asylum seekers. The main minority ethnic groups are Black or Black British African, Any Other (than British or Irish) White, and Black or Black British Caribbean. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is above average. A broadly average number of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mainly dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties, autism and behavioural and emotional issues. A centre for students on the autistic spectrum has recently been established at the school. The percentage of students with statements special educational needs is below that found nationally. The school has specialist media arts status and shares the facilities of a leisure centre with the local community. The Sydney Russell works in a consortium with three other schools providing sixth form courses.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sydney Russell is a good and improving school. Its ethos is outstanding; students from a wide range of cultures get on extremely well together, valuing their diverse backgrounds. This harmonious situation has been achieved through rigorous and consistent application of carefully considered policies that build trust and respect. The headteacher, strongly supported by his senior team, provides excellent leadership, generating structured, long-term solutions to problems.

Substantial improvement in the quality of both teaching and academic guidance since the last inspection has resulted in students reaching higher standards and achieving well. They make good progress from below average standards on entry, and gain GCSE results similar to or above the national average in most subjects. Progress and standards in mathematics are satisfactory but not as good as in other areas, principally because of staffing difficulties. Achievements in information and communication technology (ICT) are outstanding.

Students' attendance is good; they enjoy coming to school and feel confident that they are safe there. Many have adopted healthy life styles. Students contribute well to the school and wider communities, taking responsibility for their actions and helping, for example, the local elderly. Their social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Preparation for employment and the next stage in their lives is good.

Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and generally teach effectively, relating very well to students. In some lessons, the work planned by teachers does not provide sufficient challenge, particularly for the most capable, and the pace of learning slows. A broad range of academic and vocational courses meets students' needs. The good curriculum and effective tracking of students' progress help to retain their interest. Demand for places exceeds provision in the good variety of extra-curricular activities. The quality of pastoral care is extremely high with an excellent balance of rewards and sanctions.

'High expectations built on firm foundations', as a member of staff stated, epitomise the leadership style and highly efficient school management. Staff have generated an exceptionally positive atmosphere where community cohesion is outstanding. Students and the local community have benefited greatly from the improved facilities made possible by the school's specialist media arts status. Governors are knowledgeable, and understand well their strategic role in guiding developments. Monitoring of teaching and learning by senior and most middle managers is very helpful and is leading to the rise in standards. There is no complacency as the school strives for all-round excellence, making extremely effective use of its good resources. The school has excellent capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form students attain standards which are broadly average and show good achievement, as seen in the 2008 examination results. Standards were highest in media studies, in which all candidates attained A to C grades, reflecting the school's specialist strength. Overall results were higher than in 2007, when a dip in standards prompted a rigorous identification of issues in curriculum planning and subject teaching. As a result of strengthened partnerships between the schools in the joint sixth form consortium, the curriculum is now broad and better balanced. A wide variety of A-level subjects and an increased range of vocational courses are provided.

Improved tracking systems ensure that all teachers within the consortium know the academic background of each student, enabling work to be better matched to needs. Teaching is good, characterised by the ability to engage students actively in learning. The Sydney Russell has led the implementation, within the consortium, of good systems and procedures to assess students' work, including self-assessment.

Students feel well cared for, guided and supported, due to very good pastoral care and the frequency and thoroughness of academic support. High quality careers guidance helps them to prepare very well for their future. Over three quarters of students in Year 13 go on to university. When discussing the many strengths of the sixth form, students report very confidently, 'There is no bullying and no racism.' Through the sixth form committee, students contribute to school improvement, for example by requesting screens to create 'quiet' zones where they can work effectively. They participate in school life at different levels, such as paired reading with younger students and organising the school play.

The leadership and shared management of the sixth form are good and are well supported by the headteacher. The accuracy of its self-evaluation and its ability to bring about rapid progress by establishing robust systems reflects an outstanding capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that all lessons proceed at a good pace and that work is based on the identified needs of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results have shown sustained improvement over the last four-year period, so that at the end of Years 9 and 11, student achievement is good. In 2007, across all groups of learners, including different ethnic groupings, progress was satisfactory or better, and for many groups it was good. Results for 2008 show an improving picture and the continuation of these trends. The most vulnerable students, particularly those in care, achieve very good academic success. Very well-informed use of performance data by pastoral leaders, including forecasting analyses of individual student outcomes and active monitoring of student progress, are key contributors to students' success. Progress and standards are good in English, facilitating learning across the curriculum. Mathematics standards have shown a slower rate of improvement, due to weaknesses in teaching over time. Students have, however, gained a broader than average understanding of handling data through the GCSE statistics course followed by all. Good, targeted support helps students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language, to make as good progress as other students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Virtually all students demonstrate a positive attitude to learning and to school life. Their personal development and well-being are good. Students' social, moral and cultural development is outstanding, and their spiritual development is good. Students from differing backgrounds participate in events with the local community, such as through charities for the elderly, with great commitment and enthusiasm. This has a positive impact on personal development and prepares students as confident, tolerant and very socially aware citizens. Students feel secure and well supported, and enjoy very good relationships throughout the school. Sometimes in

lessons students lack the personal drive to achieve high standards, and question what they do not fully understand. Behaviour around school and in class is generally good and in many cases excellent. Rare instances of bullying are managed effectively. Exclusions are low because strategies to deal with unacceptable behaviour are in place; students with behavioural difficulties respond well to individual support in an early intervention scheme. No students have been permanently excluded from the school for several years. Students are very positive about the wide range of student voice initiatives, such as the recent introduction of the senior student leadership group, paralleling that of the senior staff team. They appreciate the opportunity to communicate their views about school improvement using email. The school council is successful in influencing school development, such as the building of new bike sheds, which has resulted in more students now cycling to school. Healthy School status has been awarded.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning overall is good. Many lessons include very effective behaviour management, clear objectives and interesting activities that engage students and ensure progression. Students assess their peers, helping one another to learn, present their own findings following independent study, and receive clear feedback on how to improve their work. In an outstanding Year 10 physics lesson on microwaves, interactive whiteboard explanations based on excellent subject knowledge kept students fascinated and presented just the right level of challenge for their capabilities. Most teachers use the school's excellent ICT facilities to enhance learning, aware that visual imagery, as well as listening and doing, captures students' attention and interest. Some teaching is less effective in motivating students and responding to individual needs. In these lessons, work can lack pace and challenge, particularly for the most able. Marking is helpful, with many positive comments that identify the progress that individuals are making. Insufficient guidance is provided, however, on how to improve the standard of work in the future.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The timetable structure, which has three ability bands, and the setting arrangements provide a good, flexible curriculum well suited to students' needs. In Years 7 and 8, courses are adjusted to give greater emphasis to basic skills teaching for those students who are struggling. Higher-attaining students can take additional GCSE subjects. The provision for lower-attaining students in Years 10 and 11 is a strength. Good courses at local colleges, available for up to three days a week, help to keep these students in education. Students benefit from a strong focus on literacy and numeracy throughout their time at school, whatever their choice of course. Consequently, the time allocation for personal, social and health education, and for citizenship and religious education, is relatively low. Provision is appropriate in each area, because courses are well prepared and the content has been carefully adapted to suit the time available. Opportunities for physical education have improved since the last inspection, with increased time allocated and the introduction of dance for all students in Years 7 to 9. Although many students in Years 10 and 11 take the opportunity to participate in the recommended two hours' physical activity each week, some have only one hour a week of sport or physical education. Within the good breadth of the enrichment programme for the main school and sixth form,

students' participation is high in ICT clubs, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and nutrition and cookery activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good with some very strong features. Academic guidance provided by tutors and heads of year is excellent. Weekly conversations with individual students give rise to opportunities for praise and for early identification of difficulties. Issues are followed up, where needed, with very effective support. Academic support for the most vulnerable students is exceptionally good. It ensures that they reach their academic potential, such as going to university to read medicine. Departments, however, are less consistent in the quality of support that they provide for students struggling in a subject, or those who need greater challenge. Parents' and carers' views are sought regularly and almost all are positive about all aspects of the school. Procedures to ensure the protection of students are well coordinated, with very effective child protection procedures and staff training. The deployment of non-teaching behaviour supervisors, known as 'redcoats', is excellent. They are extremely effective in maintaining good behaviour on the playground and in the corridors. This in turn has a positive impact on behaviour, punctuality and attendance inside the classroom. Guidance on curriculum choices is good. Students comment on the helpful support they receive in their induction into Year 7, and when moving into the sixth form, and the useful targets they are set, including for careers. The very high quality of pastoral care, including the involvement of a wide range of external agencies, is important in helping students to enjoy their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Staff at all levels support the headteacher's clear focus on raising academic standards. Challenging targets are set and an extremely pleasant, caring and respectful ethos is established. The step change in standards and achievement has been sustained by strong leadership so that learners of all abilities and background make good progress. The school knows how well each student is progressing, and this information informs discussions with students and parents. Most heads of department provide good leadership and management, with some outstanding practice in ICT. The quality of support that is based on monitoring is not fully effective in a few departments.

Resources are allocated very effectively and efficiently. The appointment of the excellent redcoat support staff has made a major contribution to establishing good behaviour throughout the school. The school has moved away from a deficit budget without a negative impact on standards. Media arts designation is having a positive impact on the school's success, as can be seen in how it has met exacting targets. Specialist funding is used extremely well, particularly through the acquisition of high-quality ICT facilities. The international initiatives undertaken by the school, such as its overseas links, exemplify particularly good practice and this has been recognised by accreditation from the British Council.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Sydney Russell School, Dagenham, RM9 5QT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing what was taking place.

Our main findings are as follows.

- Your school is good and getting better.
- You get on extremely well together and behave well; your attendance is good.
- You feel safe, adopt ways to help you live healthily, and enjoy your education.
- You are making good progress in your lessons and attain average standards at GCSE and in the sixth form.
- We agree with the school that teaching is good overall and this is helping you to succeed in most subjects.
- You benefit from being able to choose from a wide range of courses in the main school and the sixth form.
- You and your teachers make excellent use of the school's resources, especially ICT.
- Staff track your progress very carefully, which enables them to provide you with help when it is needed, so that you can all do well.
- All staff supervise you very carefully, with redcoat staff keeping a watchful eye out for you at all times.
- The headteacher is providing excellent leadership for the school, and he is given very good help by his senior team and all the staff.
- The cohesion of everybody in the school community is extremely strong.

We think that you could be even more successful. We have asked the headteacher to work with you and the staff to:

- ensure that work is always sufficiently challenging for you in lessons, particularly in mathematics.

You can help by always trying a little harder and having the confidence to expect more of yourselves. We know you all want to be as successful as you can be.

With best wishes for your future from all the inspectors.

Yours sincerely

Peter McGregor

Lead Inspector