



The Sydney Russell School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 101246
LEA Barking and Dagenham

Inspection number 276478
Inspection dates 23 - 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Andrew Redpath HMI

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

Type of School	comprehensive	School address	Parsloes Avenue Dagenham
School category	community		RM9 5QT
Age range of pupils	11-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02082704333
Number on roll	1617	Fax number	02082704377
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Ian Rowley
Date of previous inspection	January 2001	Headteacher	Mr Roger Leighton

Age group	Published	Reference no
11-18	8 December 2005	276478

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four contracted inspectors.

Description of the school

The Sydney Russell School is larger than average and in recent years the number of students on roll has shown a steady increase. The sixth form is relatively small and is part of a consortium with two other schools. Almost all students come from the local neighbourhood, which has a high level of deprivation. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is more than twice the national average. The percentage of students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is the same as that found in other schools. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is broadly similar to the national average. A significant number of students have a first language other than English. The school shares the facilities of a leisure centre with the local community and benefits from a recently opened suite for information and communication technology (IT) and a drama theatre. It is seeking specialist status as a Media Arts College. The school has had difficulties in recent years in recruiting and retaining staff in some subjects. There is now greater staff stability.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

The Sydney Russell School is an effective and improving school. This view is consistent with the school's self-evaluation which is based on thorough procedures for reviewing its performance. The headteacher provides very good leadership and is very ably supported by senior managers who share a strong commitment to improving standards. The school's recent improvement is recognised by both parents and students.

Students make satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. Targets are used well to help them improve and an increasing number of students gain higher test and examination passes. Students make good progress in literacy due to the very effective range of strategies used by teachers. Results in mathematics are too low for lower attaining students and students do not do as well as they might in some subjects at Key Stage 4.

Students' behaviour is good because teachers have high expectations and there are excellent arrangements to help students with behavioural difficulties. There are very good relations between staff and students. Students enjoy coming to school and develop a sense of responsibility and pride in their school.

Teaching is satisfactory. There has been a high number of staff changes in recent years which has affected standards in some subjects. The school has very good arrangements in place to support new teachers. The range of subjects offered at Key Stage 4 is not sufficient to ensure all students are fully stretched. Excellent links with external agencies are very effective in extending the curriculum and supporting students' emotional health and well-being. Some students who are learning English as an additional language do not receive the help they need.

The school has made significant progress since the time of the last inspection and has addressed all the areas identified for improvement. The school demonstrates a strong capacity for further improvement. In view of the rapid improvement in students' achievement and personal development, the school provides good value for money.

Grade: 3

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

The school evaluates the overall performance of the sixth form as satisfactory, but the inspection evidence demonstrates that it is good. Standards are below the national average but students achieve good results in advanced (A) level and vocational examinations given their starting points. Students are very positive about the personal support and academic guidance they receive. They feel a real sense of engagement with their learning, and as a result grow in confidence and self-esteem. The leadership and management are good and there is a clear focus on raising standards. The provision has a growing reputation and works successfully with other partners in the consortium.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

- * improve the results of lower attaining students in mathematics
- * improve the examination results in under-performing subjects at Key Stage 4
- * ensure the range of subjects offered at Key Stage 4 provides sufficient challenge for all students
- * ensure all students who are learning English as an additional language receive appropriate support.

Achievement and standards

Due to the efforts of the headteacher and senior leaders standards have improved significantly over the past four years. Students now make satisfactory progress. Students start in Year 7 with below-average standards and many have weak literacy skills. By the end of Key Stage 3, the good teaching in English is very successful in raising students' levels of literacy. Progress in science has varied in different years but is satisfactory overall. In mathematics, higher attaining students make satisfactory progress but too few lower attaining students achieve expected levels.

At the end of Year 11, the percentage of students who gain five or more higher general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades has almost doubled over the last five years. Although this proportion is below the national average, it represents a considerable achievement given students' starting points. The percentage of students gaining five or more graded results is high. Standards are not yet consistently high in all subjects. There is a wide variation between the high results in art, dance and media studies and the low results in mathematics, history and some technology courses.

Students make good progress in the sixth form in relation to their prior attainment. Results are above the average for schools in the area and students are gaining better results in A levels and in the vocational certificate of education (VCE) courses each year.

Students are set challenging targets and know what they need to do to improve. In 2005, targets were exceeded in several subjects. Students who are learning English as an additional language make satisfactory progress overall. They make good progress in the withdrawal groups but make slower progress in some lessons due to the lack of support. Variations between the performance of other groups are not significantly more than those found nationally.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Students behave well in lessons and are very enthusiastic about the school. They feel safe and well-cared for. The school's behaviour strategies have had a marked impact. The number of exclusions has fallen in recent years. Attendance has improved and it is now better than the average for schools nationally. Students develop good social skills and have good relationships with each other and with staff. Students' self-esteem and spiritual awareness are raised effectively, for example in performing arts lessons and when they take part in assemblies. They also learn to consider sensitive moral issues in religious studies lessons and through the personal, social and health education programme. Students have a good understanding of their own and

other cultures. They are very enthusiastic about the many cultural activities which include visitors coming to the school, visits to the theatre and residential trips.

Many students thrive on taking responsibility in the school and year councils, in running the school radio and when they take part in after school clubs. The Student Voice On-line is used effectively by students to make constructive suggestions for school improvement. Students are aware of the importance of leading a safe and healthy lifestyle, although the short time allowed for eating lunch and range of food available does not fully support this. Students show a real concern for others, for example through charitable work which sponsors pupils overseas. Students develop suitable skills for adult life, although some have low levels of numeracy and a minority lack confidence in expressing themselves.

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in the school is satisfactory with some good features. In the sixth form it is good. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and has put in place plans for improvement. The judgements that senior managers make of the quality of individual lessons are accurate, which was demonstrated when they joined inspectors for the observation of lessons. Teachers generally have good relationships with students and students are willing to learn. In the best lessons teachers have high expectations. Lessons are well planned and systematically move students forward, especially in literacy classes. Information and communication technology is used well to stimulate students' interest. Where teaching is only satisfactory, explanations are too complex for less capable students and lessons rely too much on teacher direction. Questioning is not always used effectively to get students to think more deeply and develop their speaking skills.

Shortages of staff, particularly in the mathematics department have meant that temporary teachers often cover classes. This has had an impact on the consistency of teaching and the progress made by some students. Target setting is used well in several subjects and has raised the aspirations of staff and students. However, the tracking of groups of students is not fully in place for all subjects. Marking is done regularly and teachers use an innovative rewards system to encourage students to do their best.

Grade: 3

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets students' interests. The curriculum is well planned at Key Stage 3. Students are taught in ability bands and this has led to improved standards. At Key Stage 4, students study GCSE and general national vocational qualification courses and about a third of Year 11 students also follow vocational courses at the local college. This flexibility generally provides a creative response to meeting the needs of students with a wide range of capabilities and interests. However, some students on college courses in Year 11 do not receive sufficient opportunities for developing their numeracy and literacy skills. Also the curriculum lacks challenge since many students only study a maximum of seven GCSE subjects. Students in the sixth form choose from a wide variety of A level subjects and vocational courses available through the new consortium arrangements.

Students benefit greatly from an extensive and diverse range of extra curricular opportunities, particularly in the performing arts and in sport, which supports the school's aim to become a Performing Arts College. Students clearly enjoy these activities and as one commented, 'there are no boundaries here' to what you can do.

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support

The school provides good care, support and guidance to students. Excellent links with external agencies enable the school to draw on a wide range of expertise to support students' emotional health and well-being. The child protection and risk assessment procedures are thorough. Vulnerable students are identified, their needs assessed and very good support given. Support for the significant number of students who speak English as an additional language is not provided consistently across the school which limits the progress of some. Excellent arrangements for supporting and managing students with behavioural problems have successfully raised the standards of previously disaffected learners. Transition arrangements from primary school are good, as is careers guidance for older students. Sixth form students greatly appreciate the high quality support which prepares them for future training, study or employment. Students find the target setting helpful and respond very positively to the school's extensive reward and merit systems.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

The school is well led and managed. The drive and commitment of the headteacher, very ably supported by senior leaders, has significantly raised the school's performance over the past four years. There is a growing culture of high expectations which has led to higher standards in students' levels of attainment and in their behaviour. Rigorous systems are in place across the school which successfully identify areas for improvement. Regular sixth form and subject department self-reviews are held which are followed up by discussion with the headteacher and a deputy to monitor performance.

The school successfully works together with parents and other partners. Parents' views are sought and acted upon. Parents are impressed with the leadership of the school and report that staff are helpful and approachable. Students appreciate that their opinions are taken into account in moving the school forward. The school has worked closely with the Local Education Authority advisory and inspection team to improve teaching and learning.

Resources are used well and the overall budget is managed effectively and kept in balance. There are good levels of staffing and the school has been very creative in managing recent recruitment difficulties. New teachers are given very good induction which helps them adopt the school's high expectations.

There are some vacancies on the governing body but it is competent in fulfilling its duties. Committees monitor the school improvement initiatives effectively but governors vary in their grasp of the school's strengths and its areas for development.

Grade: 2

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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?	3	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	NA	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variation between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal Development

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are the 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	No

Annex A

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	Judgement
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily.	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise.	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse.	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health.	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe.	Judgement
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place.	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism.	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them.	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution.	Judgement
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships.	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them.	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community.	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	Judgement
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills.	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams.	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in Key Stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form.	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14-19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy.	Yes

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The Sydney Russell School
Parsloes Avenue
Dagenham
RM9 5QT

8 December 2005

Dear Students

As you know, your school was inspected on 23 and 24 November 2005. I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. I thank those of you who helped the inspection by talking to us about your work and your life in the school. Some of your parents or carers came into school to talk with me and others returned a questionnaire. We also took their views and concerns into account when making judgements.

Here are the main points:

- * We believe The Sydney Russell School is an effective school. It has improved a lot in recent years and is on track to get even better
- * the vast majority of you and your parents are happy with the school and know it is getting better
- * the headteacher and those with responsibility run the school well to ensure that you are cared for well; they also work closely with people from outside the school to offer you help and support
- * teachers and assistants have your best interests in mind and treat you with respect; you respond by behaving well
- * targets and the merit system are used well to encourage good work and behaviour; most of you know what you need to do to improve your work and like the school merit system
- * through the year and school councils you play an important part in improving the school and your ideas are acted upon
- * if you experience difficulty with your reading, writing or behaviour the school supports you extremely well and helps you improve
- * test and examination results are a lot better now than in the past. In some subjects they still need to be higher, for example in mathematics across the school and in some examination subjects at Key Stage 4. You can help your teachers improve results by aiming just a little higher than you do now and trying your best in all subjects
- * some students who are learning English as an additional language need a bit more support.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Redpath, HMI (Lead Inspector)