

Inspection of The Sydney Russell School

Parsloes Avenue, Dagenham, Essex RM9 5QT

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 September, and 7 December 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected

Ofsted has not previously inspected The Sydney Russell School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged The Sydney Russell School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy. From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened in The Sydney Russell School's effectiveness before and after it converted to academy status.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils throughout this large school enjoy their learning. Leaders have made sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and online. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe.

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious programme of learning that aims to meet the needs of all pupils. This includes making sure that primary-age pupils learn to read quickly. In the secondary school, most pupils build up their knowledge and understanding effectively. However, in Years 7 to 9, some aspects of pupils' learning are not planned for as successfully. This is particularly the case for pupils with lower starting points.

Leaders expect pupils to behave well. They have created systems that teachers use consistently and that pupils understand. Pupils are respectful of each other and to adults. Leaders celebrate diversity and equality, and pupils feel included in the school community. Staff encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour. This leads to a calm environment throughout the school.

Bullying is not tolerated here. Pupils told inspectors that this is a school where it is safe to be you, whoever you are. If pupils have concerns, they know who to report them to. Staff resolve any issues effectively and pupils value this.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Throughout the school, leaders have thought about the subjects they want pupils to study and how pupils should study them. Curriculum planning is typically ambitious, and teaching focuses on making sure that pupils understand and remember essential knowledge. As a result, pupils get better in each subject and achieve well overall.

In Years 7 and 8, all pupils study a broad range of subjects. Subject plans introduce and revisit essential subject content logically. The content selected matches the breadth of the national curriculum. Most pupils gain the knowledge they need to be successful in their future learning. Pupils who need additional help with reading and language development receive well-planned and effective support. This helps them to get back on track with reading. However, these pupils do not develop their knowledge in history and geography as effectively. This is because planning does not identify clearly what subject content pupils should learn and how this needs to build up over time. Leaders are taking steps to improve pupils' learning by revising subject planning. They are also developing staff's expertise, so that they are ready to teach the new curriculum from January 2022.

In Year 8, pupils decide which subjects to study at GCSE. The curriculum pupils follow in Year 9 is based on these decisions. In the subjects that pupils continue studying, leaders and staff make sure that pupils learn demanding subject content. This means that pupils acquire a rich understanding of key concepts. Nevertheless,

because pupils do not continue studying some subjects, they are unable to develop and extend their learning as successfully in all areas of the curriculum. Leaders are making important changes to the curriculum from September 2022. They plan to make sure that Year 9 pupils continue to develop their knowledge in all subjects, regardless of whether they select these subjects for GCSE study.

In the early years, primary and sixth-form phases, leaders have carefully planned the knowledge they want pupils to know and remember. This helps pupils to achieve well. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They choose activities and resources to help pupils understand new ideas. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly. They typically make sure that pupils' previous learning is secure before building on that knowledge.

Leaders have made reading a priority in the primary school. This begins in the early years. The teaching of phonics is carefully planned and delivered. Staff receive training on the phonics programme and teach it consistently. Teachers make sure that pupils take reading books home that match the sounds they know. Story times and book corners in classrooms foster a love of reading. Teachers check pupils' reading development carefully. They intervene quickly to support pupils if they fall behind.

Leaders and teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. From the Nursery class through to Year 13, staff and pupils know the system of rewards and sanctions. As a result, pupils manage their own behaviour extremely well. There is very little low-level disruption in lessons. Pupils learn without distraction. When they are not in lessons, pupils are polite and respectful to each other and staff.

The personal development programme is ambitious and exceptionally well planned. Through the programme's five pillars, pupils take part in high-quality experiences in the arts, sport, careers, global citizenship and adventure. These are very popular with the pupils and participation rates are high. Leaders check which pupils take part in extra-curricular activities. They make sure that all pupil groups take advantage of the opportunities on offer. Pupils learn about life in modern Britain and being part of a diverse society. An ethos of equality runs through the whole school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to debate and elect peers to leadership roles.

The careers programme supports pupils well with their choices after GCSE examinations. Pupils receive impartial guidance on progression to the school's sixth form or to other schools and colleges. This includes information on vocational courses at schools in the local sixth-form consortium. Students in the sixth form have regular 'future pathways' sessions to prepare them for university, apprenticeships or work.

The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well met. Leaders know their pupils well and are ambitious for them individually. Pupils' needs are identified quickly. Teachers receive the information they need to support pupils to learn well. This is also the case for pupils who attend the additional resource provision.

Teachers, support staff and early career teachers feel supported by leaders. Staff said that their workload is manageable. They know that leaders consider their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training. They know about the dangers that are most likely to affect pupils in and outside school. Staff know how to report their concerns. Leaders keep accurate records of all reported incidents. Leaders use external agencies, when necessary, to get the support that pupils may need. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and they know how to report a concern.

Procedures are in place to respond to any concerns that may be raised about staff in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Until this year, pupils have chosen their GCSE subjects in Year 8. This cuts short pupils' learning in some subjects. Leaders are addressing this issue. They are making changes to the curriculum and plan for current pupils to make GCSE subject choices in Year 9. This will give all pupils the opportunity to benefit from a broad and deep curriculum in all subjects for as long as possible. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied. Leaders must now ensure that their new curriculum plans are implemented effectively.
- In Years 7 to 11, most subjects are planned and sequenced well. In these subjects, teaching focuses on ensuring pupils make progress through the curriculum. However, in key stage 3, pupils who receive additional literacy support do not benefit from a sufficiently well-planned and coherent curriculum in history and geography. This means that these pupils do not gain and secure important knowledge. Leaders have credible plans in place to address this from January 2022. This includes training staff to deliver the revised curriculum. This is another reason why the transitional arrangements have been applied.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141683
Local authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	10200564
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2496
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Craig Smith
Principal	Clare Cross
Website	http://sydneyrussellschool.com/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Sydney Russell School converted to become an academy school in February 2015. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school is now an all-through school. The primary phase opened with the early years foundation stage in 2014.
- The previous principal retired in July 2021 and the current principal is new in post.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. The provision provides up to six places for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- Careers guidance meets the requirement of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of

education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors initially inspected the school on 15 and 16 September 2021. On 7 December 2021, two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors returned to the school to gather further evidence around the quality of education in the secondary phase. The evidence gathered from all three days was used to inform the final judgements.
- Inspectors met with the principal, vice principal and other senior leaders. Inspectors met with the chief executive officer of the trust and the chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, geography, music, computing and physical education. Inspectors visited lessons, reviewed pupils’ work, met with pupils to discuss their learning and hear them read and met with subject leaders and teachers. Inspectors also considered pupils’ learning in other subjects, including art, history, languages, and design and technology.
- Through discussions with leaders, governors, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. Inspectors also looked at records related to safeguarding, including records of pre-employment checks carried out before staff are appointed.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from both the primary and secondary phases of the school. Pupils’ behaviour in lessons and at playtimes was observed.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff about safeguarding, behaviour and their workload in school. Inspectors looked at 108 staff responses, 81 parent responses and 154 pupil responses to Ofsted’s surveys.

Inspection team

Mark Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Alice Clay	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Sarah Murphy	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Charlotte Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Jones	Ofsted Inspector

Abdul-Hayee Murshad

Ofsted Inspector

Brenda Watson

Ofsted Inspector

Debbie Rogan

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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