

Ralph Sadleir Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117543
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379440
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2012
Lead inspector	Edward Wheatley

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	339
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julia Tye
Headteacher	Liz Hinton
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2009
School address	Station Road Puckeridge SG11 1TF
Telephone number	01920 821042
Fax number	01920 822663
Email address	admin@ralphsadleir.herts.sch.uk

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

Edward Wheatley

Additional inspector

Christopher Corp

Additional inspector

Christine Mayle

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 21 teachers teaching 28 lessons or parts of lessons, and eight other lessons were visited briefly. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at achievement information, development planning and self-evaluation records. They took into account 225 returned parental questionnaires.

Information about the school

Ralph Sadleir Middle is a smaller than average-sized school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage and come from several local first and primary schools. A very small number of pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportions of pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs are broadly average. The school is a specialist school for humanities in partnership with another middle school and upper school. The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Pupils achieve well and their progress is improving. Teaching is good and meets the learning needs of pupils well. Pupils' behaviour is good, they are well cared for and the school ensures they are safe. Leadership and management are effective and clearly focused on raising attainment. The school is not outstanding because pupils make good rather than outstanding progress. Occasionally teaching is not challenging enough and, in a small number of lessons, teachers spend too much time talking. At times pupils' spelling is inaccurate.
- Pupils' attainment is above average in Key Stage 2 and by Year 8 exceeds expectations and is often high. Pupils read and write well at the end of Key Stage 2 and Year 8. Their mathematical skills are above average and often high.
- Teaching is typically good and characterised by fast-paced, challenging work. The best lessons include excellent questioning and opportunities for independent learning. Occasionally work does not challenge pupils enough and there is too little time for pupils to work independently. Marking is usually good, but occasionally does not give enough guidance on how pupils' work should improve, or ensure pupils follow the advice given.
- Pupils generally behave well, even when they occasionally find work too easy or are bored by having too little to do. Unacceptable behaviour is rare, and is dealt with effectively and quickly according to pupils.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's weaknesses and take decisive, effective action to deal with them. They lead effectively in eliminating ineffective teaching. Leaders manage teachers' performance rigorously, set targets, monitor improvements and provide comprehensive professional development to support staff.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure all teaching reflects the best seen by:
 - always matching work to pupils' learning needs
 - giving pupils guidance on how to improve their work and ensuring they follow the advice provided
 - improving the accuracy of pupils' spelling
 - providing sufficient time in lessons for pupils to engage in independent learning activities.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Since the school was previously inspected, attainment has risen and past differences in performance in reading, writing and mathematics have largely disappeared. In the latest end of Key Stage 2 assessments and the school's end of Year 8 assessments girls attained higher levels than boys, and lower attaining pupils did relatively worse than similar pupils nationally. Currently, there is little difference between girls and boys, and the performance of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has improved considerably. Pupils throughout the school read well. They read fluently and when they meet unfamiliar words they sound them out with phonetic accuracy. They have a wide range of reading interests which contribute well to their above average reading skills at Key Stage 2 and in Year 8. Pupils' attainment in writing is above average, and sometimes high. Pupils write articulately, express themselves imaginatively and convey their understanding and knowledge well. However, otherwise good quality written work is occasionally marred by incorrect spelling. Pupils' mathematical skills are above average at Key Stage 2 and in Year 8. They have above average mental calculation skills; they use fractions and decimals extremely well and apply basic numeracy skills to solve problems exceptionally well.

Pupils of all abilities make good progress from their point of entry to the school. Progress is particularly good when pupils are encouraged to work out things for themselves. For example, in a lesson about angles, pupils carried out several tasks independently to measure angles in different triangles and to find out the rule that they always add up to 180°. They made good progress in developing this knowledge and then in starting to apply it to triangle problems. However, in some lessons progress slows a little when pupils do not have the opportunity to work independently for any length of time because the teacher has been speaking for too long, or when work is a little too easy for them. Pupils at the early stages of learning English make good progress, and rapidly gain the reading, writing and numeracy skills that help them learn well in all subjects. The small number of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good and improving progress under the leadership of a new special educational needs teacher and are fully involved in the learning activities other pupils experience.

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Parents and carers are mostly pleased with how well their children learn and inspection findings endorse their views. While a few feel that their children do not learn well enough, inspectors found that past underachievement had been largely reduced and that the great majority of pupils learn well.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers feel that their children are well taught, although a few feel that their children's learning needs are not always fully met. Inspectors support the view that teaching is usually good, and sometimes outstanding. However, they recognise that despite significant improvements in the teaching of pupils with special educational needs, occasionally the learning needs of some other pupils are not fully met. Most lessons are well planned with a wide range of activities that engage pupils' enthusiasm and make them want to learn. As a rule, teachers make sure activities are tailored to pupils' needs so that pupils make good progress whatever their abilities. Good relationships are fostered well. For example, in a science lesson the teacher organised an investigation effectively so that pupils collaborated extremely well to plan, experiment, record results and report on their findings. Teachers' questioning is often good and develops pupils' understanding well. For example, in an excellent lesson about 'Romeo and Juliet', the teacher's questioning skilfully ensured all pupils had the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to give sophisticated descriptions and explanations about individual characters from the play. Pupils used discussion with each other particularly well to develop their explanations and they used a wide vocabulary and complex sentence structures successfully to do so. Working together, and examining the writing of Shakespeare and the way characters in the play behaved, made a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Occasionally, teachers spend too much time explaining and talking themselves, rather than enabling pupils to work independently. A small number of pupils that inspectors spoke to justifiably found this boring or felt they were not being challenged enough. In most subjects there are well-planned activities to help pupils consolidate and extend their literacy and numeracy skills.

Teachers usually mark pupils' work well, giving detailed feedback about their performance and guidance on how to improve. Most pupils know how well they are doing and what the next steps in their learning are. The majority know their targets for improvement and what they need to do to reach them. However, occasionally guidance on how to improve is not specific enough and teachers do not always check that the advice they have given to pupils is followed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy school and learning. A small number of parents and carers feel that poor behaviour disrupts learning. Neither the school's records nor pupils confirmed this and inspectors generally saw good and sometimes excellent behaviour. Despite a small number of parents and carers expressing concern about bullying, particularly

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physical bullying, inspectors found no evidence of this happening, although there have been a small number of instances in the past. The pupils selected by inspectors to speak to confirmed this and said teachers dealt with any potential problems swiftly and effectively. Past rare incidents of racism and cyber-bullying have been successfully tackled. Pupils from all backgrounds work and play well together and the school has good strategies, especially through its personal, social and health education, to deal with all forms of discrimination.

Pupils feel safe and parents and carers consider that the school keeps their children safe. Pupils behave safely in lessons and around school and treat each other with care and respect. In practical lessons they handle resources such as chemicals with particular care. In physical education they play games enthusiastically, and also pay attention to the safety of themselves and each other. Their attendance is above average and is improving and the school works effectively to reduce absence. The school has very good procedures to care for pupils, and to support those pupils, and their families, whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

Leadership and management

Inspectors support the views of parents and carers that the school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides very clear direction and, along with all other leaders, has an accurate view of the priorities for improvement. The school has, for example, identified spelling, consistency of marking and the match of work to pupils' learning needs as areas for development, and is taking steps to implement improvements. The school has rigorous monitoring procedures and has taken clear steps to improve teaching, and in particular to eliminate inadequate teaching. The school provides a well-balanced programme of school-based and external support to help staff improve their professional skills. Teachers support these moves and teaching is improving. As a result, differences between subjects have been significantly reduced, attainment in English and mathematics has improved, and variations in the progress made by boys and girls, and by pupils with special educational needs have reduced considerably. The governing body works closely with the school in planning improvements and provides a suitable level of challenge for the headteacher. Staff are successful in ensuring all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed and in tackling robustly any form of discrimination should it arise. The school ensures that the small number of pupils at the early stages of learning English, and those with disabilities, are well integrated into lessons by making sure they work with, and are supported by, other pupils and adults where necessary. New leaders are supported in carrying out their responsibilities well. Given the rising levels of attainment, improving progress and teaching, the school is demonstrating a strong capacity to continue to improve.

Parents and carers are very supportive. One wrote, 'The school makes every effort to respond to individual children', and another, 'My children have made good progress'. The great majority are pleased with the level of communication from the school and the support with activities to help their children learn at home. The school has

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rigorous procedures to ensure safeguarding requirements are met. Storage of chemicals for science, which was inadequate at the previous inspection, is now good. Pupils are encouraged to be observant and report any unexpected or unusual occurrences. The curriculum is extremely wide and enriches pupils' learning experiences well. For example, links with a company involved in the drug testing of athletes provide pupils with real-life experience of careful, accurate chemical testing. Residential trips to France, Devon and Norfolk play a significant part in enhancing pupils' learning in several subjects, and in developing self-esteem and interpersonal skills. As part of a specialist humanities partnership, the curriculum is enriched with trips and visitors that contribute positively to pupils' enjoyment of learning and success. Opportunities for pupils to work independently, to present their work to each other and to speak in assemblies play a significant part in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ralph Sadleir Middle School, Puckeridge, SG11 1TF

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school and sharing your views with us. We agree with you that your school is good. You make good progress, and this is improving.

The following things are particular strengths of your school.

- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. You enjoy learning and there are many trips and activities that make learning interesting.
- The staff and governing body know where further improvements should be made and they are quick to take action to make things improve.
- You behave well and know how to stay safe in and around school. You say that if bullying happened it would be sorted out quickly.
- Your attendance is above average.
- The school takes very good care of you.

In order for your school to continue to improve, we have asked your teachers to make sure that:

- work is always challenging
- marking gives you clear guidance on how to do better
- they check you follow any advice you are given in your books
- there is enough time in lessons for you to work independently
- you spell accurately.

You can help by making sure you always spell accurately, tell teachers if you find work too easy, and make sure you follow advice teachers give you on how to do better.

Yours sincerely

Edward Wheatley
Lead inspector

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