



# Ralph Sadleir Middle School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 117543  
**LEA** HERTFORDSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 280112  
**Inspection dates** 20 June 2006 to 21 June 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr. Michael Smith HMI

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

|                                    |                    |                           |                       |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>              | Secondary          | <b>School address</b>     | Station Road          |
| <b>School category</b>             | Community          |                           | SG11 1TF              |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>         | 9 to 13            |                           |                       |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>            | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01920 821042          |
| <b>Number on roll</b>              | 332                | <b>Fax number</b>         | 01920 822663          |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>       | The governing body | <b>Chair of governors</b> | Mr.Rod Bufton         |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | 29 February 2000   | <b>Headteacher</b>        | Mrs. Elizabeth Hinton |

| Age group | Inspection dates               | Inspection number |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Ralph Sadleir is a popular middle school serving the relatively affluent areas of Puckeridge, Standon and surrounding villages. The school has very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Attainment on entry to the school is above average and the number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals or have learning difficulties is low. The school works with partner schools as a combined specialist humanities school.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that Ralph Sadleir is a good school. It works well to meet its aim which is to work with parents to encourage pupils to work hard and prepare themselves for the challenges that will meet them in teenage and adult life. One parent commented 'the school has helped my children reach their potential both educationally and personally'. Pupils achieve well and reach high standards. They are supported well to achieve challenging targets and they generally know what they need to improve and this is reinforced by suitable wall displays and support from staff. A good curriculum, which links subjects and current events, stimulates and enthuses pupils. They enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good. Pupils behave well in lessons because good teaching engages them. Teaching generally challenges pupils and lessons are well planned. However in a minority of lessons insufficient consideration is given to what and how pupils are to learn and hence it is not always possible to assess how well they achieve. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and social education, including citizenship have improved, although the school does not assess or report on citizenship to parents. Under the strong leadership of an effective headteacher the school shows a good capacity to improve further. The senior leadership team and middle managers monitor and evaluate the work of the school and have made significant improvements to the provision and raised standards. However, the analysis to identify strengths and weaknesses is not consistent across all areas and sometimes lacks rigour. Governors support and challenge the school well and hold the headteacher to account for the quality of education. The school has made very effective use of its specialist school status in the first year, to expand its ICT facilities and to ensure far greater cooperation between all schools within the local partnership. The school gives good value for money.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve further the quality of learning by planning for appropriate learning outcomes and using assessment effectively to measure progress in lessons.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring a consistent and more rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses.
- Assess and report on standards in citizenship to parents.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement and standards are good. Pupils enter the school with above average standards. They make effective progress in Years 5 and 6 and gain results above average at the end of Key Stage 2. School data shows that pupils make good progress in Years 7 and 8. The majority of them achieve high standards when they leave the school at the end of Year 8, above those expected for them by the end of the key stage the following year. The school sets challenging targets and achieves these for Level 4 and

above at the end of Key Stage 2 but greatly exceeds them for Level 5 and above. It also sets challenging targets for the end of Year 8 to support the Key Stage 3 targets for the joint specialist school. Pupils working at all levels, including those with learning difficulties, all make good progress within the school and some individuals make exceptional progress because of very effective support. Pupils identified as gifted and talented achieve well. Good use is made of national competitions to motivate and engage pupils, for example, the mathematics challenge, in which they succeed well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Personal development and well being are good. Pupils enjoy their time at the school and attendance is good. They speak positively about the school and the good opportunities they have to take an active part in school life. The effective school council was involved with the selection of the headteacher, the rewriting of the code of conduct, and with promoting ways in which the school could be more energy efficient. In addition, pupils are encouraged to think of creative ways to raise funds for local charities and do so with considerable enthusiasm. The most recent activity has involved raising money to support villages in India. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, though there is less emphasis on spiritual development in some lessons. Pupils are well aware of the importance of healthy eating and the benefits of regular sporting activities. They know how to look after themselves and feel safe at the school and when taking part in out-of-school activities. Pupils take mature responsibility for reporting safety issues they see around the school. These reports are always acknowledged by a member of staff. The actions of staff and pupils illustrate the shared commitment to maintaining a safe working environment. Pupils run the stationery shop efficiently and learn about other work related skills in lessons. Well formed plans are in place for sixth form students from the high school to extend their community work, in conjunction with specialist school status, by working with younger pupils in preparation for future options and pathways. Pupils' behaviour is good. The level of exclusions is very low which reflects a strong commitment by pupils to the ethos of the school. Pupils and staff respect each other. Relationships between pupils are very positive and supportive.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching is good and pupils learn effectively. Generally teachers, supported by teaching assistants, prepare lessons well, with a good range of activities to interest and engage pupils. Good use is made of a variety of stimuli including relevant references to local and world events and to moral issues, for example, fair trade goods. Teachers use effective questioning which encourages pupils to answer thoughtfully and leads to good progress in their understanding and knowledge. Teachers have a good understanding of the pupil's learning needs and generally plan work effectively to

meet these. Teachers' good subject knowledge is shared with support staff and contributes to the effective progress made by pupils. Pupils are effectively engaged in their own learning and respond and behave well. The few electronic whiteboards, which have been introduced recently, are used well to support teaching in some lessons but the enhanced ICT provision has not yet had an impact upon learning. The school checks on the quality of teaching regularly and provides extensive support and guidance for teachers. This leads to improved teaching and rising standards. Teaching assistants receive good support for their work which ensures their consistent and good support for pupils. Recent developments have meant that staff effectively share lesson objectives with pupils. However, a minority of lessons do not adequately consider what or how pupils are going to learn which means that assessment is not used effectively to show how pupils progress. Marking is generally good and supports pupils though in some lessons limited advice is given on how to improve.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school provides good opportunities for all learners, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties, to progress and perform well. The curriculum has a number of strengths. Years 5 and 6 benefit from specialist facilities and staff. Regular planning meetings ensure cohesion in what is being taught. In all years staff make very effective links to other areas and world events so that the pupils do not see subjects in isolation. Citizenship is well coordinated and delivered in subjects but is not assessed and reported to parents. The school provides appropriate careers education. The school has close links with its partner schools so that the curriculum is coherent. Its specialist school status is further improving links with the upper school; this includes effective support for gifted and talented pupils. The enrichment programme supports the curriculum with a variety of special events, which often last a whole or half day. The school also takes advantage of other special events and days, such as national poetry day, so that cross-curricular links can be made between as many subject areas as possible. Extra-curricular activities are provided for the wide range of interests of the pupils. They include a large range of physical activities which are well supported. These promote healthy lifestyles and include swimming lessons for Year 5 pupils who are unable to swim effectively.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The school makes good provision for the care of pupils through its own internal systems and by linking up with external agencies which support the school well. The care and guidance given to pupils with learning difficulties is very good. A particular strength is the effective use of teaching assistants who are valued members of the team helping pupils. The needs of pupils who are gifted and talented are well met through a stimulating programme of activities and visits. The transitional arrangements for pupils joining or leaving the school are comprehensive and sensitive. Pupils are very appreciative of this support. The

procedures for promoting health and safety, and child protection arrangements are fully in place. Risk assessments are robust and carried out regularly by staff and by outside agencies such as the fire service. The governors appropriately carry out regular site visits to evaluate the safety provision for pupils. The school makes good efforts to work with parents to ensure that all pupils are guided well. Pupils have a good awareness of the targets they have for different subjects and how they can improve to meet these.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The relatively new headteacher has created an impetus and commitment to further improve the quality of the provision and raise standards. The senior leadership team gives a strong direction to staff. Middle management is effectively focused on raising standards and has implemented important improvements through systematic monitoring. However management is weaker in some subject areas and not sufficiently rigorous in its analysis when identifying strengths and weaknesses. The school has recently completed a comprehensive audit of how pupils stay safe and healthy, enjoy their education, contribute to the community and develop an awareness of economic factors. However, this information has not yet been adequately incorporated into departmental development plans. The school has an accurate and helpful self-evaluation which it has used well to develop an appropriate improvement plan. The school works hard to gain parents' and pupils' views and act upon their findings. For example, the parents' forum has increased approachability and understanding between parents, governors and staff. The majority of parents feel their views are taken into account, but a few find communications with the school difficult. The school has been successful in gaining specialist school status in partnership with other schools within the partnership. This has led to improved ICT capability and to closer working relationships with partner schools. The effective governing body is very supportive of the school. Through close links with subject areas, governors monitor the provision and standards within the school and act as critical friends to hold it to account. Good improvements since the last inspection, for example the use of ICT within the school, the improvements to the social education of pupils, and developments linked to specialist school status show the school is in a good position to improve further.





## Inspection judgements

|  |                       |              |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | <b>School Overall</b> | <b>16-19</b> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 2   | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 2   | NA |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage  | NA  | NA |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 2   | NA |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | Yes | NA |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes | NA |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |    |
|--|---|----|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 2 | NA |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 2 | NA |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | NA |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress                              | 2 | NA |

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

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

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 2   | NA |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2   | NA |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review      | 2   | NA |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 2   | NA |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money  | 2   | NA |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   | NA |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected  | Yes | NA |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>  |     |
| 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 |
| <b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>   |     |
| 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 |
| <b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>  |     |
| 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 |
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>                           |     |
| 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               | NA  |

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

Thank you for your very positive responses and welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting with you and your teachers. Your comments helped us to gain a clear understanding of school life, and what you enjoy and value in school. We think that your school is a good school of which you can rightly be proud. The school works well to meet its aim which is to work with parents to encourage pupils to work hard and prepare themselves for the challenges that will meet them in teenage and adult life. Your positive comments show how much you like school and appreciate the work of the staff. You work well with your teachers to make sure that the school is a stimulating and interesting place. Your good attendance and behaviour show that you enjoy school and find it a very rewarding experience. We were pleased to see how you could influence what happens in school and how you take health issues very seriously, for example how you have influenced the healthy option available at lunchtime and been part of the process when appointing new staff. You enjoy some very interesting lessons and activities with some good teaching and a varied curriculum, including a very large variety of extra-curricular clubs and sports. Your school is very well led and knows its strengths as well as the areas it wants to improve. As in nearly all schools, there are areas that could be better. The school needs to ensure it has a clearer understanding of why it does well. All lessons should be planned to identify what, and how, you should learn and your parents should have a report on citizenship. We wish you well for the future and hope you enjoy and are successful at this very caring and supportive school.