

# Ralph Sadleir Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117543
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326642
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 May 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Jones HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	343
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Rod Bufton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Elizabeth Hinton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 June 2006
<b>School address</b>	Station Road Puckeridge Near Ware Hertfordshire SG11 1TF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01920 821042
<b>Fax number</b>	01920 822663

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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 smaller-than-average middle school. The pupils' social and economic backgrounds vary and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The numbers of girls and boys in each year group vary annually. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national figure and the proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is low. Attainment on entry is above average. The proportion of pupils registered by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than average and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is small.

Ralph Sadleir is part of a cross-phase pyramid of schools that serves the villages of Standon and Puckeridge on the eastern border of the county. Specialist status for humanities was achieved jointly with Freman College and the other local middle school in 2005. The school has received the following national accolades: Sportsmark and Eco School Bronze.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Standards are well above local and national averages in both key stages and overall, pupils make good progress in Years 5 to 8. Progress in mathematics is significantly stronger than in science and English. Standards and achievement at Key Stage 2 have improved for the last three years. There is no discernable difference in the progress made between girls and boys or between those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their peers. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds make good progress.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with some variations. A number of lessons could have provided greater challenge if the use of prior attainment data had been more consistent and the lessons focused more effectively on the quality of learning. Curriculum provision is good, with the restructured Key Stage 3 curriculum beginning to bring positive benefits in terms of progression. However, some aspects of the storage of resources for science do not meet current best practice. The specialist school status shared with the upper school is aiding pupils' transition and helping to maintain standards.

Leadership and management are good. The effectiveness of middle managers and the communication between areas of the school has improved since the last inspection. Overall, self-evaluation is good, although senior staff were more generous in their appraisal of achievement and teaching than inspectors. The headteacher has a realistic view of the school's key strengths and areas requiring further development. Capacity to improve is good.

The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding; similarly, their behaviour and general attitudes to education are excellent. A small number of parents raised concerns regarding pupils' behaviour and bullying, however, inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns and pupils were very positive about the school's behaviour management system.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding with pastoral support more positive than academic guidance. Attendance is good. Efforts to secure the pupils' future economic well-being are particularly good. The pupils are guided towards healthy lifestyles by effective physical education provision. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. The school provides good value for money.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils progress as well in English and science as they do in mathematics.
- Improve the quality of learning by making more consistent use of assessment data at classroom level and by ensuring tasks consistently match the pupils' learning needs.
- Improve the storage of science resources.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Standards of attainment are high. In 2008, the performance of pupils in the Year 6 national tests was significantly above the local and national averages; their attainment on entry to the school was above average and they made good progress in Key Stage 2. Pupil progress has risen steadily for three years. In Key Stage 3 standards remain high and achievement remains good overall. A detailed scrutiny of the progress made by Year 8 in 2008 revealed that most

pupils made above average progress. Progress in mathematics was significantly stronger than in English or science.

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

### **Grade: 1**

The pupils' spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is outstanding with the school making a particular effort to build up their self-esteem. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. Pupils work well together, play well together during break times and are keen to take part in the range of school activities offered; they are willing to learn and enjoy their education. Attendance is above average.

Pupils have a secure understanding of safe practices and exercise these within the school environment. They adopt healthy lifestyles, using their knowledge of food to eat well at lunchtimes and by participating in a wide range of physical activities in lessons and in clubs. Pupils are pleased to take advantage of the opportunities to accept responsibility in the classroom and around the school. Similarly, they participate in a wide range of charity events in the local and wider community. Pupils are keen to be involved in the school council and all display a good knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, in addition to learning about financial decisions related to the school's charitable work. Pupils are extremely well prepared for their future studies.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good and contribute to the pupils' good achievement. This judgement is lower than that of the school. Senior leaders frequently observe lessons but the monitoring of teaching does not consistently focus on the quality of learning.

Teachers know the pupils well and have good relationships with them, creating an environment in which the pupils are ready to learn. They have a good knowledge of their subject and use questioning effectively to make the pupils think about their work and how to help them progress. The most successful lessons have a variety of interesting activities to maintain appropriate challenge and a pace of work that is suitable for the needs of all pupils. Those lessons that are less successful are often dominated too much by the teacher, with the whole class doing the same work. On these occasions, staff do not make sufficient allowances for the variation in pupils' abilities or their pace of learning. The use of teaching assistants varies and their contribution to the lesson is not always well managed.

Academic guidance varies. In the best cases individual pupils are told their targets, what is good about their work and how to improve. In other cases, generic guidance is provided for the whole class and some pupils are left without a clear context for the direction of learning. Marking shows similar variations.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The good curriculum meets the needs of the range of pupils, including those who find learning difficult. The curriculum has improved with the introduction of the accelerated Key Stage 3 programme and there is useful emphasis upon common skills, such as the use of computers.

Curriculum planning has improved through cooperation with partner institutions and between the key stages. Pupils benefit from extended cross-curricular projects, such as the 'archaeology day' during which they developed investigative skills and extended their knowledge of history and art.

A major strength of the curriculum lies in the range and quality of extension activities. Pupils enjoy many instrumental and vocal musical groups as well as numerous clubs, including chess, science, badminton, girls' cricket, and a comprehensive range of sport and fitness activities. There is also a stimulating range of residential activities in Britain and France. A good personal, social and health education programme develops pupils' understanding of personal safety, relationships and future adult responsibilities.

Specialist status has improved planning between the partner schools, although implementation has yet to secure real impact, in part because of changes in key staff.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The excellent care, guidance and support for the pupils are contributing to their outstanding personal development and good achievement. All requirements for child protection are in place and suitable risk assessments are undertaken. The pastoral care for the pupils is particularly strong; teachers know them well and the pupils appreciate the support that the teachers give. The pupils feel safe and there are good systems for supporting vulnerable pupils on a personal and social level. Pupils report very few incidents of bullying and know that any incidents will be dealt with quickly and fairly.

The support given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make the same good progress as other pupils. However, in Key Stage 3 gifted and talented pupils make more progress in mathematics than in other subjects. A good system of tracking pupils' progress is in place, although the analysis and use of that data is inconsistent at classroom level.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has set a clear direction that has led to improved learning opportunities for all and the provision of high quality care, guidance and support. Leaders and managers have used challenging targets to raise standards successfully and outcomes are well above the local and national average. Equality of opportunity is promoted very effectively and discrimination eliminated. Vulnerable pupils who join the school from other establishments progress well.

Community cohesion is good, with a wide range of local activities and charitable work. Good links have been established with a school in India and the pupils' appreciation of cultural and spiritual diversity is good. Resources are deployed effectively and efficiently and the school meets the required national financial standards. Governance is good, with a strong focus on improving provision.

The school provided a senior management team nominee to join the inspection team and the headteacher accepted this responsibility. Senior and middle managers were involved in the joint observations of lessons with inspectors. A formal evaluation of this exercise by inspectors

and senior staff revealed that many of the lessons were not as good as they could have been because insufficient emphasis was given to the learning outcomes expected. The school is a calm and orderly community, pupils' behaviour and relationships are excellent.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

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

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

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

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

11 May 2009

Dear Pupils

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

It was a pleasure to meet so many of you during the inspection of your school. I found the ideas and opinions you were happy to offer provided a real insight into the daily life of the Ralph Sadleir Middle School. Thank you.

The inspection team were impressed by your behaviour, levels of attendance and the excellent care, guidance and support the school provides for you. As a result, we found that your personal development was outstanding and the standards you reach are often well above the Hertfordshire and national averages; well done.

The progress you make in mathematics is very impressive and the inspection team believe you can perform as well in English and science so I have asked the headteacher to improve the quality of learning by making more consistent use of assessment data in the classroom, and by ensuring tasks consistently match your learning needs. I have also asked the governors to ensure that the storage of science resources is improved.

I look forward to hearing about your future success.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector