

Inspection of a good school: Ralph Sadleir School

Station Road, Puckeridge, Ware, Hertfordshire SG11 1TF

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 October 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending school. They are responding positively to the raised expectations that leaders have put in place. Pupils feel safe. In the past, bullying was sometimes not dealt with quickly enough. Now, if bullying occurs, pupils know who to speak to and trust it will be dealt with swiftly and fairly.

Pupils like being reminded of the 'Ralphie' values, which inspire them to promote respect, achievement, learning, persistence, happiness, independence and encouragement. These help pupils become responsible members of the school community. Pupils appreciate the rewards they get for demonstrating them.

While most pupils demonstrate these values, a small minority do not. This means that there is sometimes low-level disruption in lessons. Over time, pupils have not been clear enough about what sanctions they face for poor behaviour. Pupils, parents, carers and staff agree that the new behaviour policy has started to make a positive difference.

Pupils are confident that teachers know them well. They enjoy lessons. They particularly like the hands-on activities they do, including regular practical work in science. They say that in the best lessons they understand how different bits of their learning fit together, but that this is not always the case.

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

In some subjects, the curriculum is well planned. Leaders have thought carefully about the order in which topics are taught, and how they link together. In other subjects, curriculum plans lack the required detail to support teachers to know what to teach and when to teach it. In these subjects, leaders have not thought about the series of steps that are needed to build the skills, concepts and knowledge that pupils need. As a result,

pupils do not always remember the information that they need for the next stage of their learning.

In some lessons, teachers set work which helps pupils to understand and remember the learning they need to achieve well. In these lessons, teachers then use questioning effectively to find out what pupils have learned and adapt their teaching where necessary as a result to fill in any gaps. However, in other lessons teachers design activities which are interesting in themselves, but which are not always well matched to what pupils need to know.

Leaders have introduced a range of approaches to strengthen reading across the curriculum. This helps some pupils to read fluently. However, the weakest readers often struggle to read the texts they need to, and they do not always get the help required to catch up quickly enough.

Leaders have made sure that all teachers can access detailed information about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Most teachers use this information well to help them plan their lessons, but some do not use it so effectively to adapt their teaching. This means that pupils with SEND do not always do as well as they should.

Leaders have raised expectations of behaviour around the school. A new behaviour policy is in place. However, not all staff are applying this consistently. While most pupils behave well around the site and are polite and courteous, some are not. Pupils say that clearer rewards and sanctions have improved behaviour in lessons and around the school.

Staff help pupils become confident young people who understand a range of cultures and beliefs. There is a growing number of clubs and trips. Pupils love their residential visits built around adventurous activities. These help pupils to explore their passions and develop their resilience. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to undertake leadership roles, including as school council representatives, house captains and sports leaders.

Leaders, including governors, have a clear picture of the improvements they are driving forward in the school. They are conscious that this change will alter how teachers work. While most staff agree that leaders are mindful of the impact of these changes on their workload, some say it has increased the work they have to do.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a clear process, understood and used by all staff, for reporting concerns to the safeguarding team. Training makes staff aware of risks to pupils and how to spot the signs that pupils might need extra help. Safeguarding records are sufficiently detailed. They show timely responses to concerns. Leaders work with a range of agencies to give pupils and their families the help they need. Staff share information effectively. This

means that pupils get the support that they require quickly. The school provides high-quality pastoral support.

The curriculum content supports pupils to know how to keep themselves safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subject leaders have not planned in sufficient detail how pupils' skills, knowledge and conceptual understanding should be built over time in their subject. This means that there is variation in the depth and quality of curriculum plans across different subjects. Leaders should ensure that systems are firmly in place for assuring the quality of curriculum planning.
- The tasks and activities which teachers design for pupils are not always well judged to ensure that pupils can rapidly understand and remember what they need to learn. This slows the progress that pupils make. Leaders need to ensure that teachers set work which is consistently well matched to the key learning objectives of the lesson.
- Pupils at the early stages of learning to read are not sufficiently supported to gain the knowledge they need to read fluently. This is because the implementation of reading strategies to support these pupils is not sufficiently thorough. Leaders should ensure that they continue to develop and embed support strategies for those at the early stages of reading, so that all pupils can develop fluency and confidence in reading.
- Some teachers do not use the information that they receive about pupils with SEND to adapt how they deliver the curriculum for this group of pupils. This means that some pupils with SEND do not achieve as highly as they should. Leaders should ensure that all staff receive appropriate training and support to use this information to adapt their teaching effectively to meet the needs of all pupils with SEND.
- Behaviour within lessons is not always as positive as it should be. This means that the learning of pupils is sometimes disturbed and hampered, and pupils do not learn as well as they could. Leaders should work with and support teachers to ensure that the new behaviour policy is consistently applied.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school (Ralph Sadleir Middle School) to be good in March 2012.

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.

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	140249
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10200040
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	347
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Julia Tye
Headteacher	Stephen Fanthorpe
Website	ralphsadleir.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 September 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a single-academy trust, Ralph Sadleir School.
- Leaders use one registered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the trust and one other member of the trust board.
- Deep dives were carried out in English, mathematics, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects. They spoke to the special educational needs coordinator.

- Inspectors evaluated the information available on the school's website, including school policies, curriculum plans and information available for parents.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the arrangements in place to safeguard all members of the school community. The checks leaders make on the suitability of staff were scrutinised, and records were checked.
- Inspectors reviewed records of behaviour, including incidents of bullying. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes.
- The inspectors reviewed 84 responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. They also reviewed the 81 free-text comments that parents submitted during the inspection. The inspectors considered 28 responses to the staff survey and 67 responses to the pupil survey. Additionally, inspectors met with members of staff and spoke with pupils to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Paul Lawrence, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Karen Kerridge

Ofsted Inspector

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