

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



3 November 2016

Mr Dominic Spong
Headteacher
Ralph Sadleir School
Station Road
Puckeridge
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG11 1TF

Dear Mr Spong

Short inspection of Ralph Sadleir School

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 2016 with Peter Whear, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The leadership of the school has undergone a restructuring process and you, your deputy, your assistant headteacher and the school business manager have between you a wide range of important skills which complement your individual strengths. You all have a secure understanding of what has worked well to date and what can be improved.

The changes at middle leadership level have rightly concentrated the focus on pupils' achievement in individual subjects across all four year groups. You have achieved this through the introduction of heads of faculty who work alongside the two pupil progress coordinators. These colleagues work well collaboratively to ensure that pupils at risk of underachieving are not overlooked. Your senior leaders hold these colleagues to account for the performance of their individual areas. You are currently looking at establishing a more formal schedule for meeting with these colleagues so that they are able to report on their impact on a frequent basis.

You evaluate the school's performance regularly and maintain an up-to-date self-evaluation summary document. This, in turn, tells you what you need to include in your whole-school development plan, and heads of faculty also produce action plans which tie in well with whole-school priorities.

Parents, staff and pupils are overwhelmingly supportive of the work that you do in helping pupils to achieve their best and to promote their well-being. This is supported by the positive comments received, particularly from the inspection surveys. One parent wrote, 'Best move we made to bring our children here'. Displays on the walls celebrate pupils' achievements and they are reminded through numerous quotations printed on the walls of how well anyone can do if they put their mind to it. Parents who responded to the questionnaires expressed mixed views as to how effectively the school communicates with them, but you are aware of this and are seeking to improve your lines of communication.

You know that in the past, the progress pupils make in key stage 2 has been weaker than that made by the older pupils. The new leadership arrangements have helped to address this and improvements are evident in reading and writing. You have also set up reliable systems to measure pupils' attainment on entry so that you can establish each pupil's starting point and measure their progress as they move through the school, up until the time they leave in Year 8.

You have high expectations of your teachers and monitor their work through a range of activities, including formal and informal observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and tracking pupils' progress. Your current evaluation indicates that the quality of teaching over time in the school is good, although you also acknowledge that some teaching still requires improvement. You are working well with the few teachers who need extra support to make the quality of their teaching consistently good.

This is a school where pupils typically behave well and value their education as well as appreciating their teachers' efforts. They have a good understanding of the school's 'consequences ladder' (your code of conduct) and say that teachers use this fairly and only when they have to. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and they move around the school sensibly and with purpose. They enjoy coming to school and attend regularly.

Pupils' outcomes over time are good. You acknowledge that pupils' progress in mathematics as they approach the end of key stage 2 could be better, but when they leave the school in Year 8 they have made up for any previous shortfalls. Most-able pupils achieve well across a wide range of subjects including English and mathematics. Your work with disadvantaged pupils has reaped rewards, including with the most able disadvantaged pupils. In some instances, they outperform their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well, but you also acknowledge that they have the potential to perform even better than at present and with the new special educational needs coordinator have implemented plans to address this.

You have successfully addressed the points for action identified at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers' planning meets the needs of different groups of pupils better, and there is evidence of greater challenge in lessons. Pupils receive

improved guidance on how to enhance the quality of their work, and you have appropriate strategies in place to improve their spelling.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding is strong at the school. Staff are updated regularly on the latest requirements relating to the safeguarding of children. For example, they have all received and signed to confirm they have read the latest guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016). Staff's discussions with inspectors demonstrate that they operate within a culture of strong vigilance and they will readily refer any pupil about whom they have concerns.

Online safety is a key aspect of the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders and governors are very much aware of the risks associated with the misuse of social networking sites and the internet. They have, therefore, delivered a training package to parents to help them work in partnership with the school to ensure that the internet is only used positively when pupils are at home. School leaders have also provided pupils with ownership of the safe use of internet policy by asking them to write the policy themselves. The school provided documented evidence to demonstrate that any misuse of social media has been dealt with swiftly and severely, for example the practice of 'sexting'.

All staff have received up-to-date training in the 'Prevent' duty and their awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation of young people are strong. Following the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and in Brussels, school leaders reorganised the school day to alert pupils to the issues linked to terrorism through the delivery of specially-themed assemblies. Indeed, the school encourages open discussion about such matters. The chair of the governing body meets with the headteacher to discuss safeguarding matters six times a year. This ensures that the governing body has a thorough grasp of safeguarding and is able to fulfil its duties effectively.

Pupils feel safe in the school and the pastoral aspect of school life is a highly positive feature of the school. Leaders record incidents relating to safeguarding matters in great detail. Pupils know what to do if they wish to make a disclosure. A wide range of measures are in place to support the growing issue of pupils' mental health which includes priority funding for the school counselling service.

The school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff is fully up to date and compliant with the latest guidelines.

Inspection findings

- Pupils typically enter the school with average and above-average levels of prior attainment. You ensure that you establish an accurate evaluation of pupils' attainment on entry in Year 5 through a variety of tests and assessments. You also ensure that your information of pupils' progress is accurate through the use of external markers and jointly conducted assessments involving leaders from other schools.

- By the time pupils leave the school in Year 8, they make good progress in a range of subjects from their starting points. Your tracking systems allow you to monitor the progress made by all groups of pupils across all subjects.
- You are aware that pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2 has not matched the rate of progress made in key stage 3. You identified that pupils in key stage 2 were lacking confidence in working with numbers and were weak at recalling their times tables. You have ensured that some whole-school intervention has taken place to address these weaknesses. Challenges in the recruitment of suitably qualified staff have also acted as a barrier in the past. You addressed this problem by insisting that all new teachers for key stage 2 posts taught a mathematics lesson as part of the selection process. You have redeployed some of your specialist mathematics teachers in key stage 3 to teach targeted groups in key stage 2. The new head of mathematics has arranged training sessions using her specialist maths team. This sharp focus on the teaching of mathematics in Years 5 and 6 ensures that work is now more suitably matched to individual pupil's needs. Your early morning catch-up sessions for lower achievers in key stage 2, taught by a higher level teaching assistant, also aim to raise standards in mathematics. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 8, they have caught up and achieve well.
- Information provided on current pupils' progress, as well as inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books across all year groups and subjects, indicates that the current good rate of progress is being sustained.
- Pupils' writing skills are particularly strong because you have made clear to all teachers that it is their responsibility to develop pupils' literacy skills regardless of the specific subject they teach.
- The most able pupils are identified early on and teachers know their capabilities well. These pupils make good progress and are actively encouraged to attempt more challenging work in lessons. Indeed, most pupils are presented with work of varying degrees of challenge. Most teachers use a range of strategies in their lessons to encourage pupils to rise to the challenge. Where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not always match the work sharply enough to pupils' needs and so their progress is slower.
- Governors have ensured that pupil premium funding has been spent well to promote disadvantaged pupils' performance. Governors analyse the impact of this additional funding carefully to ensure it makes a real difference. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 in 2016 outperformed their non-disadvantaged peers in English. Most-able disadvantaged pupils achieve in line with other most-able pupils over time.
- The new special educational needs coordinator has identified greater differences in achievement in English for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities than is the case for mathematics and science. To address this weaker aspect, you are piloting a support programme to improve their use of phonics. You have also identified the need to improve the quality of individual education plans for this group of pupils.

- Your team of heads of faculty and pupil progress coordinators vary in their experience, but the more recently appointed middle leaders are able to learn from their more-experienced colleagues. Their subject improvement plans identify the right priorities for action and they value the opportunity to meet as a team. Although the lines of communication between them and senior leaders clearly exist, the current arrangements mean that middle leaders are not held fully accountable for their work.
- The quality of teaching in the school is good overall. All adults in the classroom understand their role in deepening pupils' understanding of what they are being taught. This is due to the fact that teachers are observed regularly in the classroom and that you chose to develop the roles and skills of teaching assistants. You rightly use your best practitioners to coach the very few teachers whose practice is not yet consistently good.
- Teachers have taken on board your amendments to the school's marking policy and they implement this well. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books in lessons as well as their sampling of a range of books across year groups and subjects shows that teachers provide pupils with better quality guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils respond well to their teachers' feedback and suggestions.
- Pupils enjoy reading and they read well. Teachers give pupils many opportunities to read aloud in lessons. The most able pupils are particularly articulate because the books they read often contain unknown or more complex words.
- Pupils' positive attitudes in lessons allow them to enjoy their learning. Teachers use the amended 'consequences ladder' only when they have to because pupils understand the boundaries. You also acknowledge good behaviour and promote equal opportunities well by monitoring unacceptable behaviour and rewards by different pupil groups.
- Pupils attend school regularly and you have good systems in place to identify any pupils whose attendance falls below an acceptable level. Case studies for such pupils demonstrate that you make good use of external agencies and follow all necessary procedures to promote better attendance.
- Pupils feel safe when in school and they are taught well to understand different forms of bullying. Such behaviour is not commonplace, but pupils are confident that any incidents of bullying that do occur are dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- The school develops pupils well as all-rounded individuals and provides them with a range of activities to develop their confidence and self-esteem. They support each other well and rarely laugh at each other's mistakes.
- The curriculum promotes fundamental British values well. This is supplemented by good use of form time and through assemblies. Pupils are taught how to empathise with people who are less fortunate than themselves and to know right from wrong. They receive good-quality careers guidance and support. During the inspection, Year 8 pupils were taking part in a week-long business and enterprise activity which

developed their entrepreneurial skills well. Inspectors observed them taking part in a workshop session led by a participant of the latest series of 'The Apprentice'. This then led to pupils working in teams, pitching their ideas to a group of local business people in the style of a well-known television programme, where successful teams raise money to fund a school trip.

- Some parents who responded to the online questionnaire are of the opinion that the ways in which the school communicates with them could be improved. Others expressed satisfaction. School leaders are aware of the need to alter this perception, and are investigating ways of addressing this.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is achieved through a range of sub-committees to which the school's leaders report on a regular basis. Governors seek to fill any gaps in skills by seeking out relevant and appropriate training. They have a good understanding of how well different groups of pupils achieve. Minutes of their meetings show that they ask pertinent questions of the school's senior leaders, particularly in relation to the headteacher's termly report on the school's progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they monitor the impact of the wide range of recently introduced strategies to improve the teaching of mathematics in key stage 2 so that they are certain these improve pupils' progress
- all teaching provides an appropriate degree of challenge
- systems for holding middle leaders to account are formalised
- pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make better progress and their individual education plans are of a better quality
- the school communicates with all parents effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, heads of faculty, a pupil progress coordinator and the special

educational needs coordinator. Inspectors had meetings with groups of pupils and the chair of the academy board as well as two members of the local governing body. A telephone conversation took place with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors looked at 79 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire and also considered responses to the online staff and pupil questionnaires. They observed teaching and learning in lessons, accompanied by senior leaders, looked at pupils' books and scrutinised a range of school documents. On the day of the inspection, Year 6 were absent from school on a residential excursion and the Year 8 timetable had been amended to enable pupils to participate in a business and enterprise activity.