

The Nobel School

Mobbsbury Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 0HS

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Under the strong and decisive leadership of the headteacher, students' achievement is sharply rising, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- There has been a significant increase in the proportion of good or better teaching. This is noticeable in English.
- Teachers plan lessons well, with activities that link very well, creating opportunities for students to discuss and refer back to what they already know, so that they can apply this to their learning and accelerate their rates of progress.
- The safety of students is good. Older students take responsibility to ensure that younger students are safe.
- Students are very proud to be ambassadors of the school. This is shown by the vast majority of students attending well. The behaviour in and around school is exemplary. In lessons, behaviour is good.
- Students are highly motivated, because of very well structured systems of rewards, and they make significant contributions to each other, the school, and the community.
- The leadership team responsible for teaching has made significant improvements on the quality of teaching and students' learning.
- The staff and the governing body are united and determined in making the school better. There is a real sense of teamwork and commitment in extending the opportunities for students.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. There is uneven progress, particularly for some of the most-able students in reaching the highest standards, especially in the academic and Level 2 courses in English and mathematics.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching consistently across all subjects. Some teaching still requires improvement, because work is not always challenging students to progress more.
- Some marking of students' work is inconsistently assessed and learners do not fully act upon the comments made. This is not always checked by some subject leaders.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 42 lessons, observing 42 teachers. Seventeen lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also conducted a series of further brief observations of learning and students' behaviour, a scrutiny of students' work and observing the supervision of the students during different points of the school day.
- Members of the inspection team asked students for their views of the school when observing learning and when formally interviewing students.
- Two members of the inspection team attended the 'Nobel celebration breakfast', through which Year 12 students, with their families, were being congratulated for their high levels of achievement and exemplary behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, governors, the senior leadership team, staff from the school and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 41 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the school's own survey of parents and carers. In addition, the inspectors took account of the school's survey of staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at improvement plans, records and analyses of students' behaviour, the tracking of students' progress and examples of students' work. They scrutinised the school's attendance figures.

Inspection team

Raymond Lau, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jane Ladner	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Jacqueline Pentlow	Additional Inspector
Isobel Randall	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average secondary school. The vast majority of students are from a White British background and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of girls in the school is slightly above the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided to the school for students known to be eligible for free school meals, with a parent in the armed services or in the care of the local authority), is below average. There are very few looked-after children.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average.
- The proportions of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs are below average. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school uses North Herts Education Support Centre to provide education off site.
- The headteacher has been in post since September 2013.
- In March 2013, the school was judged to require improvement at the time of their previous inspection. In June 2013, they received a monitoring visit from Her Majesty's Inspectors.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Speed up students' achievement in the sixth form by challenging the most-able students so that more of them consistently achieve the highest grades.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning across the school, so that students' progress is quicker, through:
 - setting demanding activities that enable all students consistently to achieve more in lessons
 - teachers ensuring that high quality written and verbal feedback is consistently provided to students
 - students always acting upon the teachers' feedback and improving their work
 - subject leaders consistently making more frequent checks on marking and improving the quality of students' learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start the school with attainment levels that are in-line with the national average. Previously, students underperformed. In 2013, the proportion of students achieving five good grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, rose to be in-line with the national average. Many subjects' attainment is broadly average and is now rising. The school does not enter students early for examinations.
- In 2013, the proportion of students making steady or better progress in mathematics generally compared favourably to the national average. However, their progress in English declined. According to the school's current robust tracking data, observations conducted by the inspection team and a scrutiny of students' books, there is a substantial rise in students' progress in English and mathematics, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The progress of students across the school, in English, mathematics, and a range of other subjects, is now improving rapidly. This is mainly because of consistently good or better teaching. The students' knowledge and understanding of the subjects are improving because of skilful teaching. In a Year 11 English lesson, students were well motivated in planning and writing responses to answer questions in preparation for examination questions enabling them to make good progress.
- The progress of students in Years 7 to 9 is now improving strongly. However, there remain some small uneven pockets of slower progress between English and mathematics. Nevertheless, the school is actively tackling these, as the teaching in English and mathematics is good. The school has successfully tackled the progress of girls across the school, which is now rising significantly.
- The achievement of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is now strongly improving. In 2013, these students attained grades in GCSE English and mathematics, which were approximately one whole grade lower than their classmates. The school's current tracking shows that the gaps have closed by half a grade between their peers. Across the school, in terms of students eligible for additional funding, the gaps are closing rapidly.
- Students working off-site are making good progress.
- The school is making good progress in improving students' literacy skills. The Year 7 'catch up' premium is used in funding a range of strategies, for example small group teaching, creating a nurture class, and increasing the range of books that the students can read. Across the school, staff offer reading sessions three times a week, setting work at the right level. This is boosting the quality of student enjoyment and literacy skills well.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs generally make similar progress to that of their peers. The school's records show that students in Years 10 and 11 are making more rapid progress than in the past. This is because support staff are used well in supporting students in lessons, and the effective use of small-group tuition.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form requires improvement. Students studying academic subjects enter with broadly average standards. In 2013, students attained broadly average results at AS and A Level. Students reaching the higher grades are in-line with the national average. The school's progress information suggests that achievement is improving. During the inspection, the sampling of work and observations showed that progress is improving. The achievement of students studying work-related subjects is good. Success rates at

Level 2 English and mathematics are too low, given students' starting points.

The quality of teaching is good

- The very large majority of teaching is now strongly improving students' achievement. It is consistently strong in English, mathematics, and science.
- Students learn well because teachers generally set work at the right level for them. Teachers use a wide range of approaches to ensure that students acquire more knowledge and skills. Students apply their understanding and many make good progress. This was evident in a Year 9 dance lesson, as students learnt specific phrases of movement, and demonstrated mature attitudes to their learning as boys and girls supported each other. Students were creative in their responses, by adding to these ideas.
- Some teaching is of the highest quality. In a Year 8 Spanish lesson, for example, students were learning to analyse text and to write in Spanish. Students were engrossed because of the high quality discussion, and the way the teacher enthused their levels of interest. The work that was set enabled all students to make rapid and sustained progress. One student, said, 'I like my learning in Spanish because it is challenging, interesting, fun and varied.'
- However, there is not enough of this excellence in all subjects. In some lessons, the work is not demanding enough for students to make rapid progress.
- The school helps students develop their writing skills in subjects other than English, as this is evident in the improving quality of work in geography and history.
- Teachers' marking and feedback to students remains inconsistent. Students do not consistently, across all subjects, act upon the information given in order to help them to improve their work.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving in work-related subjects. For example, Year 12 students researched the operations of local, regional and national government in a public service lesson. However, the most-able students are not being challenged enough to reach the highest standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. The school has successfully promoted a happy atmosphere. Students are thoughtful and very well mannered, friendly and courteous to each other, staff, and visitors. Students are proud to be part of the school. They wear the new uniform with pride and generally look smart, and well presented. This is also represented in the quality of their presentation within their books.
- Students enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in their high levels of attendance. The school has successfully carried out ways of tackling absence. These have been successful in improving the attendance of those students who are deemed to be persistently absent from school. There are very few exclusions.
- The school has successfully created a system of rewards that motivate students. The house system provides significant leadership opportunities for students. Students across the school raise money actively for their house-nominated charities. They volunteer to read with younger students. There is a successful school council. The sixth form students were proud to lobby the

school in gaining their new common room. These students tirelessly worked to decorate and refurbish the area, which demonstrates their commitment to the school's values and beliefs.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. All statutory requirements are met. The students report that bullying and racism are rare, but do very occasionally occur. They report that this is resolved swiftly by the school. They are able to speak clearly about the different types of bullying. Students have a good understanding about how to protect themselves from harm, including when using the internet, and different types of social networking media.
- The behaviour and safety of students are not outstanding. While the vast majority of students are engaged in their learning and show good attitudes to learning, they have yet to demonstrate consistently a passion and enthusiasm for learning in all lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- In a short space of time, the headteacher has successfully galvanised staff and students in successfully moving the school forward at a rapid rate. He provides strong and decisive leadership and has revitalised the senior leadership team. He has successfully introduced a wide range of motivational strategies and activities. For example, the headteacher hosts the Nobel celebration breakfast which is attended by the families of Year 12 students. This is replicated for all year groups during the academic year and celebrates academic achievements and their exemplary behaviour.
- The school's view of its effectiveness is robust and accurate. The school identifies its strengths and areas for development well. It is sharply focusing, quite rightly, on priority areas. For example, the marked improvements in student attendance, low exclusions, and increased levels of student motivation and engagement. The school's concerted efforts in improving the quality of students' achievement in English are evident.
- The management of teaching is good. The school has responded successfully to the previous inspection and monitoring reports. As a result, teaching is now good. These improvements are a result of a team that includes appointed lead practitioners, who successfully support, coach and mentor individual colleagues. Staff are positive about the training given to them, and the opportunities to work with other schools. Some teachers act as examiners for major examination boards.
- The role of subject leaders is strengthening. Most leaders are actively involved in making checks on the quality of teaching. There is some inconsistency of approach, especially regarding the checking of teachers' marking.
- The school is reducing variations in students' achievement well. Teaching is strongly improving. The well-targeted strategies are making sure that all students are given the opportunity to achieve well.
- The subjects on offer are broad, balanced, and varied. The main school and sixth form now have different options for studying subjects. Students receive effective information, advice, and guidance in the subjects to pursue at Key Stages 4 and 5. This enables them to be more motivated and aspire to improve, as opportunities to move between subjects exist. The extra-curricular activities provide a wide range of activities to develop students' social and cultural skills well. This is noticeable in the uptake of students in sporting activities and the high quality art and textiles work proudly displayed across the school.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body has a range of expertise that meet the needs of the school well. Governors ensure that the leaders are held accountable for the school's current performance. They understand how the performance of students compares to other schools.
- Governors make frequent visits to the school to gain first-hand knowledge of the areas they focus on.
- Governors ensure that there are strong systems for monitoring the pay of teachers and leaders. They exercise their rights to award or not award a rise in an individual's pay, based on performance.
- They monitor how well the students who receive additional funding perform, and are aware of such spending as small group tuition and the promotion of specialist classes.
- The governing body regularly attends appropriate training. This enables it to become sharper in checking the quality of the school's performance.
- The governing body ensures that the school is safe and all statutory requirements are met for the safeguarding of students.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117530
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	442026

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1300
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Aggus
Headteacher	Martyn Henson
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 March 2013
Telephone number	01438 222600
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