



# The Nobel School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 117530  
**Local Authority** HERTFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 290863  
**Inspection dates** 11–12 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Kenneth Thomas

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>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Mobbsbury Way
<b>School category</b>	Community		Stevenage
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Hertfordshire SG2 0HS
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01438 222600
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	947	<b>Fax number</b>	01438 222606
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	205		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Slava Budin-Jones
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Alastair Craig
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 March 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	11–12 December 2006	290863

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

The Nobel School is an oversubscribed secondary school of average size. Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, as is the proportion with statements of special educational needs. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is also broadly average. The school gained specialist status for science and performing arts in June 2005. Artsmark Gold was awarded for the second time in May 2005. The school has been a training school since 2000. A new headteacher took up post in September 2006.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school judges its effectiveness as satisfactory and inspectors agree. The school has not had a smooth passage over the last three years, as frequent changes of headteacher have disrupted the continuity of leadership. As a result, progress since the last inspection has been slow. Nevertheless, the school has achieved specialist status and the purposeful learning environment in which students are very well cared for has been maintained. Senior leadership has now been stabilised and the new headteacher provides decisive leadership and a clear direction. He receives very strong support from a restructured school leadership team. Senior managers make very good use of assessment information and the impact of more rigorous monitoring is already evident. These developments give the school good capacity for future improvement. This is recognised by parents. One parent wrote, 'Recently introduced systems such as academic review now give me detailed information on how my daughter is progressing.... I feel excited about the direction the school is taking.' Middle management is generally sound and is becoming increasingly effective. However, there are inconsistencies in how well middle managers evaluate the quality of teaching and use assessment information to set targets and monitor progress.

Achievement is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress and standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are broadly average. However, there is too much variation in students' progress in different subjects. In particular, progress is weaker in science and information and communication technology (ICT) than in English or mathematics. Nevertheless, the school provides an education that has a number of strengths and some outstanding features. Students enjoy their education and their behaviour is very good. In order to raise standards and tackle underachievement, the curriculum has been revised and successfully provides for a much wider range of students' interests. Students take full advantage of the excellent range of enrichment activities.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and often good. Specialist status has led to some imaginative teaching methods through the development of links between subjects. In many lessons, teachers take full advantage of students' very positive attitudes and encourage them to take initiative. Where expectations in lessons are high and planning takes full account of students' attainment levels, students are challenged and fully engaged. However, in some lessons, students are not stretched because expectations are too low and the activities are not demanding enough.

Students respond very well to the numerous opportunities for leadership, and contribute exceptionally well to the school and wider communities. This makes a significant contribution to their outstanding personal development and builds their self-confidence. Students appreciate how to live healthily and are provided with a sound base for the next stage of education. The school has exceptionally strong links with outside agencies to promote students' well-being, and parents appreciate the way that their children are treated as individuals. They are very positive about the school. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. The sixth form is highly regarded and a considerable number of students join from other schools. Through the Stevenage 14 to 19 Partnership, students of wide-ranging abilities are provided with a variety of flexible learning opportunities. Standards, however, are below average. Success is better on AS-level and vocational courses than on A-level courses. This is because the school admits a number of students with GCSE results below those usually required for advanced study and some struggle to meet the demands of A level. Nevertheless, achievement is satisfactory when students' starting points are taken into account. Most students complete their chosen courses. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In order to raise standards, the school is developing teaching methods that promote students' independent learning. Students' personal development is outstanding. They serve as positive role models, display mature attitudes to learning and act responsibly towards younger members of the school. This makes a significant contribution to the school's ethos. Students are well cared for, guided and supported in their academic work and in making choices for the future. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory.

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

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in science and ICT, by ensuring that expectations are high and that learning activities are appropriately challenging in all lessons.
- Improve the consistency of middle management by ensuring that managers monitor teaching and learning systematically to identify weaknesses and tackle them promptly.
- Raise achievement by ensuring that the use of assessment information for setting targets and monitoring progress is fully understood and implemented consistently in all curriculum areas.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Achievement is satisfactory in the main school and in the sixth form. When students join the school in Year 7, their attainment is broadly average. They make satisfactory progress and achieve average results in Year 9 tests. In 2005, many more students attained higher levels in English and mathematics than in science. Girls and boys made similar progress. Results in 2006 stayed broadly the same. Students' progress was better in mathematics than in English and science.

GCSE results in 2005 were average overall. Higher ability students made less progress than other students. As a result, the school did not meet its A\* to C target, although the A\* to G target was achieved. The 2006 results showed a slight improvement, with

an increased proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades. While students' progress is satisfactory overall, there is considerable variation between subjects, and the proportion of students gaining A\* or A grades is below average. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. Students make much better progress in English and mathematics than in science or ICT. The school exceeded its specialist targets for performing arts but did not meet its science target.

Standards on entry to the sixth form are below average. Results of advanced courses were below average in 2005 and 2006. Students' progress and achievement in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE is satisfactory.

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

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development is outstanding, as it was in the last inspection. Students enjoy school and this is demonstrated by good attendance, which is well above average. Attitudes are highly positive. Students take part enthusiastically in the many enrichment activities particularly in the performing arts, and demonstrate their concern for others by engaging in numerous charitable activities. This results in a welcoming and safe community which helps students to develop the skills and attitudes needed for responsible citizenship. Students' social and moral development is excellent. Behaviour in and out of school is generally very good, and the school receives many appreciative comments from outside agencies. Spiritual and cultural development is good, and students develop a good awareness of different beliefs and cultures. High participation in sporting activities helps to develop a healthy lifestyle as does an understanding of healthy eating. Students' basic and work-related skills provide a satisfactory base for their future working lives.

The contribution of sixth formers to the school and wider community is exceptional. Very large numbers help to run enrichment activities, support staff in classrooms or act as mentors to younger students. Their charity events and regular work in primary schools are particularly successful.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning, both in the main school and the sixth form, are satisfactory. Lessons are often good, but the quality of teaching is not consistent. Very good relationships, attitudes and behaviour provide a positive environment for learning in almost all lessons. In most lessons, learning objectives are made clear and teachers use assessment well to decide the level at which to pitch learning activities. In these lessons the pace of learning is rapid because students are appropriately challenged.

In some lessons, however, progress is too slow because expectations are too low and students, particularly those at the upper end of the attainment range, are not stretched by the learning activities. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make good progress. The marking of students' work is regular and provides clear guidance on how to improve. The specialist status of the school is leading to some innovative links between subject areas which are improving the quality of students' experience. Many parents say that they appreciate the information on homework and targets they are given as it enables them to become more involved in supporting their children's learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum in the main school and the sixth form is good and improving. Through the Stevenage 14 to 19 Partnership, the school is working well with other providers to develop increasingly flexible programmes of study. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 allows students to follow routes which are well suited to their individual needs. This is intended to raise achievement and better prepare students for their future economic well-being, and is supported by exceptionally good links with local businesses. While the impact of these developments has yet to be seen in rising standards, there is evidence that the innovations are increasing motivation.

In Years 7 to 9 there is a clear emphasis on improving students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and previous weaknesses in ICT provision are being tackled. A well constructed personal, social and health education course contributes successfully to students' understanding of responsible citizenship. Students with learning difficulties have good access to the full curriculum. The school offers an excellent range of enrichment activities. Many students take part in the wide range of sporting activities and other clubs. Specialist status has created additional opportunities, particularly in the performing arts, that have increased students' enjoyment and achievement.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good in the main school and the sixth form. The school takes its duty of care very seriously and child protection and health and safety procedures are well established. Discussions with students revealed no concerns about their personal safety, and many expressed their appreciation of the readiness of adults to listen to their concerns. Students' personal development is monitored very closely and the school works very effectively with external agencies to support any students who may be at risk. The monitoring of students' academic progress has previously been a weakness, but has radically improved during the last year. Much better use is now made of assessment information to identify and tackle underperformance, although practice is not yet consistent throughout the school. Academic review days are used

to inform parents of the levels their child is working at and set their targets. Students are guided well to courses which best suit their abilities and aptitudes and have comprehensive careers advice. Excellent links with local colleges and the community extend the options available to students and help them to move on to further study or employment.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management of the school, including the sixth form, are satisfactory overall. In the short time since taking up his post, the headteacher has demonstrated firm leadership. He has gained a clear picture of the school's strengths and accurately identified the priorities for improvement. The school has a clear direction and, with good support from a strong senior leadership team, there is a sharp focus on raising standards. More rigorous procedures for analysing performance and reviewing the work of departments underpin a fresh approach to improvement planning. This, together with good leadership of specialist status, gives the school good capacity for further improvement. Surveys of the views of parents and students show a high level of support for the school and the direction it is now taking.

Middle management is satisfactory but not consistent. There is a clear commitment to improving provision and achievement, and performance management is in place. Middle managers monitor teaching and learning but the quality varies in how well it evaluates essential teaching skills. Staffing issues have affected performance in some subjects but are now largely resolved. The management of provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is particularly effective. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are well informed, actively involved and have the confidence to challenge and hold the school to account. Financial management is satisfactory and resources are used effectively, but accommodation is limited for the size of the school.

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## 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>
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### 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>	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<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.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

13 December 2006

Dear Students

The Nobel School, Mobbsbury Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 0HS

As you know, a group of inspectors recently visited your school. I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your cooperation and assistance during our visit. We appreciated your comments and opinions. I am writing now to tell you about our findings.

Here are some of the things we found out about your school. Your headteacher, governors and all of the staff at the school always act with your best interests in mind. They are committed to improving your examination and test results. They are also keen to improve the opportunities available to you and this is shown in the school gaining specialist science and performing arts status. Almost all of you are aware of this and are happy to come to school and take advantage of the many opportunities the school provides for you. We found that you behave very sensibly around the school and in lessons, and that people in the community are very complimentary about the way you behave when you are outside the school. This is really important because it allows your teachers to concentrate on helping you to learn and gives the school such a good reputation in the community. You are well cared for and many sixth formers contribute by helping younger students. Sixth form students are a real asset and contribute much to the positive atmosphere in the school. There is an excellent range of out of school opportunities, which very many of you take part in and enjoy.

The staff and governors are united in their commitment to improve the school's work still further and we have suggested three things that we think will help to achieve this. We think that you can achieve even higher standards, particularly in science and ICT, if you are really stretched in all lessons. The school has introduced some very effective ways of checking how well it is doing and we have asked if these can be extended so that they are applied in all subjects. Finally, we have asked that the very good systems for setting you targets and monitoring your progress that have been introduced become routine in all subjects so that you do as well as you can.

With all good wishes for your future

Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Lead inspector