

Nova Hreod

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126465
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315561
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Christopher Russell HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1336
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol Gibbon
Headteacher	Andrew Fleet
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2004
School address	Akers Way Moredon Swindon SN2 2NQ
Telephone number	01793 528800
Fax number	01793 430394

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Nova Hreod is a larger than average sized comprehensive school. The school was designated as a specialist science and mathematics with computing college in September 2006 and is also a full service extended school. Few students at the school come from a Black or minority ethnic background. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school moved into new buildings in April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Nova Hreod is an improving school, but its overall effectiveness is inadequate because too many students make insufficient progress. In accordance with Section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to teaching, learning and achievement.

At the time of its last inspection in 2004, the school was judged to be satisfactory with some good features. Its effectiveness declined in the following years. A number of factors contributed to this decline, including problems with teacher recruitment and the school's deteriorating buildings. The school has received a range of additional support from the local authority over the past year to help overcome its difficulties. This has been well targeted and focused on building long-term improvement. It has supported the development of leadership across the school and has helped to sharpen the school's focus on raising standards. A number of very good teaching appointments have been made in the last two years, and staffing is more stable. The school's effectiveness is now improving again.

Although achievement is beginning to improve, it is still too low. Students make insufficient progress as they move through the school, particularly during Key Stage 4. The main barrier to further improvement is the inconsistent quality of lessons. Teaching has improved, and around half of all lessons are now good and some outstanding. However, too many are inadequate or barely satisfactory. These lessons lack pace and variety, and fail to interest and engage students sufficiently. This limits students' overall progress and enjoyment of learning.

Other aspects of the school's provision are satisfactory. The curriculum has been developed to meet students' needs and interests more closely. It is possible to see the impact of some of these changes on students' progress and development, although it is too early to assess the impact of others. Students are well supported and cared for. The way in which the school tracks their achievement has been strengthened this year. However, many teachers do not make enough use of the information that the system provides when planning lessons or monitoring students' progress in lessons.

Strengths in care, guidance and support contribute to students' satisfactory personal development and well-being. The way in which the school helps students to live healthy lifestyles and contribute to the school and local community are particular strengths. Most students are positive and feel that the new school is a very different place to the old one. A large number of parents who replied to the inspection questionnaire expressed concerns about behaviour. There is clear evidence that it has improved and that student behaviour is generally good. However, behaviour is poor in some less effective lessons and so is satisfactory overall.

The school's development as a specialist college was limited in the first year by accommodation issues. Facilities and resources are now much better. Developments are generally at any early stage, although the expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) is having a positive impact on students' motivation and engagement with learning.

The school's evaluation accurately and honestly identifies strengths and weaknesses. Leaders can point to improvements over the past year, but they also know that more are needed. They are now in a position to make these improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise levels of students' achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching and learning by reducing the number of less effective lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter the school with average standards. They make inadequate progress during their time in school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to other students.

The progress that students make in Key Stage 3 is consistently below expectations. In 2007, national Key Stage 3 test results were slightly below national averages, although results in English were average. Progress is weaker at Key Stage 4. GCSE results have fallen in recent years and were well below national averages in 2007. These students made particularly poor progress. The school did not meet its specialist targets in 2007. Achievement in mathematics was particularly low.

There are clear indications that students are making greater progress this year, but their progress is still inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students say that they feel safe in school and that behaviour is much better now than a year ago. However, some students, particularly in older year groups, say that bullying is not always dealt with quickly enough. Staff identified this concern prior to the inspection and have been working to make improvements. Attendance was good at the last inspection but has fallen since then and was at the national average last year. However, it has begun to improve again this year. Students have a good awareness of how to live healthy lifestyles, and they make a good contribution to the life of the school and local community. Many students, for example, work as mentors or as sports leaders. Students have a very clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities in school.

The school's good provision for enterprise education makes a strong contribution to students' future economic well-being. The proportion of students continuing in education when they leave the school has increased significantly in recent years. However, the low standards achieved by many students inevitably limit their future prospects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Although the overall quality of teaching and learning is inadequate, there has been clear improvement this year. Students confirm that teaching is now better, but that it is variable. Students respond very well to the large number of good lessons. They behave well and enjoy learning. However, too many lessons lack interest and variety, and move at a slow pace. Students become bored. As a result, behaviour can deteriorate in these lessons and become a significant barrier to learning.

There are two general weaknesses in lessons across the school. The first is that teachers often do not develop work to meet the needs of all students sufficiently closely. The second is that teachers often dominate activities in lessons and spend too long talking to the class. As a result, opportunities for students to learn how to work independently and in groups are too limited.

Some teachers are making very effective use of marking and assessment to help students understand how well they are doing and how to improve further. However, practice is highly inconsistent and in many cases students are unclear about the strengths and weaknesses of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is currently evolving and many changes are at an early stage. While the full impact of these changes is not yet evident, they are beginning to enable the school to shape the curriculum to meet the needs of all students more closely. The school's extra-curricular provision is strong and opportunities are popular with students.

A range of changes have been made to the Key Stage 3 curriculum. A small number of students likely to find the move to secondary school difficult are taught separately by a small team of teachers. This eases their transition into secondary school and supports the rapid development of their literacy skills. The introduction of arts options in Year 9 has had a positive impact on students' enjoyment. Opportunities for some students to take national tests at the end of Year 8 are providing useful additional time for them to study other subjects, although the longer-term impact on their standards is not yet known.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum is developing and broadening. Students are able to follow an increased number of vocational courses. Students of higher ability are able to accumulate a large number of qualifications. Some of the curricular changes that the school has introduced in the last couple of years have not been successful. However, the school has recognised this, reviewed provision, and changed direction where necessary.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school's provision for care, guidance and support is satisfactory overall with some strengths. Students, particularly vulnerable students, are well supported. There is good teamwork between staff and close partnership working with external agencies. Procedures for safeguarding students are robust.

The way in which the school tracks and monitors achievement has improved. In some cases, good use has been made of the information that it provides, for example to target mentors to work with students. However, teachers make insufficient use of this information in their work. In some cases, students are clear about their targets, how well they are doing and their next steps, but in many cases, they are not.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Systems for evaluating the effectiveness of different areas of the school are increasingly sharp. They are enabling leaders at all levels to identify weaknesses and to hold staff more accountable

for their performance. Planning is improving. Previous plans suffered from having too many priorities, but draft plans for next year are much more focused. The way in which the school uses targets is improving and is making an increasing contribution to improvement. The monitoring of teaching and learning is now more rigorous. Senior leaders' judgements are generally correct, although they slightly underestimate the proportion of inadequate lessons. Governors are ambitious for improvement and are holding leaders accountable. Their ability to do so has been enhanced by the local authority's additional monitoring and support work.

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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Nova Hreod, Swindon SN2 2NQ

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We found that your school is improving and has some positive features. However, we also found some important things that need to be improved. We have therefore given the school a 'Notice to Improve'. This means that an inspector will return in a few months to check the school's progress. Our main concern is that students are not making as much progress as they could.

There have clearly been improvements since you moved to the new site a year ago. Students that we spoke to were appreciative of the new buildings. They told us that behaviour and teaching have both improved. However, they also told us that teaching is inconsistent and that behaviour deteriorates in some of the weaker lessons. We also saw that for ourselves. We saw many good lessons during the inspection and some outstanding ones. However, we also saw some that were not as good.

Staff care for you and you told us that you feel well supported. We were impressed by the way in which students contribute to the school and wider community, and by the way in which the school helps you to live a healthy life. The school has also been working hard to develop the curriculum so that it meets your needs and interests as closely as possible.

Your school's leaders understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and are committed to making further improvements. The inspection team wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Chris Russell Her Majesty's Inspector