

The Nobel School

Mobbsbury Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 0HS

Inspection dates

20–21 February 2018

| Overall effectiveness | Good |
|--|--------------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have established a culture of raising aspirations at all levels. They are relentless in their focus on improvement.
- Leaders have created a culture of community where being a 'Nobelian' is something that everyone is proud of.
- Governors provide challenging leadership. They have a clear understanding of the school's priorities, which they have helped to shape.
- Leaders' work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are very positive about the support they receive.
- Leaders are bringing about swift improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils make particularly good progress in English and history.
- School training ensures that most teachers plan lessons to match pupils' needs, but this good practice was not observed in all lessons. The most able pupils in the school do not always make the progress that is expected.
- The sixth form provides a good education and inspires all its students to further education. Its leadership is exemplary.
- Pupils said that they feel safe and well looked after. Safeguarding leaders have a high level of expertise and make a positive difference to pupils' welfare and the support for vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils have not made consistently good progress over the past two years. Curriculum changes and improving teaching are securing better progress this year.
- The revised school curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities. Teachers guide pupils to make informed choices at the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
- There are a range of strategies in place to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, including in the classroom.
- When planning for most-able disadvantaged pupils is made a priority, they are well supported, but they would benefit from being challenged in all lessons to make progress in line with their targets.
- Well-established procedures are in place to ensure that pupils attend regularly.
- The vast majority of parents and carers are highly positive about the school. They appreciate the quality of teaching and the support their child receives.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes by ensuring that:
 - the curriculum challenges the most able by making sure they choose subjects most appropriate to their ability
 - teachers make provision for different groups of pupils, particularly the most able, to enable them to improve their progress rapidly.
- Continue to improve achievement in the sixth form by ensuring the highest level of challenge for the most able students so that they attain the top grades.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and his team have created a powerful community in the school which reflects the importance of being a 'Nobelian'. Pupils are proud to participate because leaders lead by example. There is a clear culture of hard work and good behaviour throughout the school.
- Since the last inspection, the headteacher and the governing body have appointed some outstanding new senior leaders. These leaders have made rapid changes to protocols and practice. They are having a significant impact on the attitudes of learners and on teaching, learning and assessment. They work closely with the headteacher to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Leaders are very aware of the aspects of the school's work that need to improve. The self-evaluation and improvement plan reflects these priorities. The plan is set to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress, through good teaching and being cared for as individuals. Although outcomes in 2017 required improvement, leaders know what to do to ensure that pupils make better progress and have already taken effective action to do so.
- The majority of parents and carers who sent free texts during the inspection, or responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, praised the work of the school. They agreed that the school is well led and managed. The majority of parents would recommend the school to others and a view was expressed that 'the school is well deserving of its brilliant reputation in Hertfordshire'.
- Leaders obtain valuable information about pupils towards the end of their primary education, both about their academic ability and about their personal development. This enables pupils to make a smooth transition into secondary school and make immediate progress.
- Leaders and governors have designed a curriculum that allows pupils to study a wide range of subjects. The curriculum at key stage 3 is broad and allows ample time to develop numeracy and literacy alongside exploring a wider curriculum.
- Leaders have taken the decision that pupils should take meaningful options, linked to future career aspirations. The school has made recent changes to the key stage 4 curriculum due to previous choices limiting the extent of pupils' progress. The school currently offers four curriculum pathways at GCSE. Leaders are very aware of the needs of the most able pupils and are taking rigorous steps to ensure an improvement to outcomes in 2018.
- Leaders have worked relentlessly to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. An investment in new middle leaders and new teachers, combined with high-quality training and monitoring of performance, is improving the learning in the classroom.
- Leaders manage the performance of staff well. Teachers have performance targets, linked to teaching and their own development needs but targets are not sufficiently linked to outcomes.

- Middle leaders have a secure understanding of their role. They are fully aware of their contribution to school improvement. They are skilful in interpreting the information they receive about pupils' progress and attainment. They use it to identify future priorities for their subject areas and set purposeful directions for improvement.
- New teachers and inexperienced staff are supported well by the school. Newly qualified staff value the training they receive in the school and the support of their colleagues, which enable them to improve their planning and teaching.
- Leaders' actions to support disadvantaged pupils are proving successful. Training has enabled teachers to plan lessons that match the needs of disadvantaged pupils to help them achieve as well as their peers. Not all teachers create or implement these plans consistently, particularly for the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders have used the pupil premium grant to engage with the families of disadvantaged pupils and provide tailored support for them through the curriculum and school trips. Some of these strategies are relatively new, but the attendance of these pupils is improving.
- The school leader responsible for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is tenacious and passionate about inclusion. There is a clear vision to support these pupils and monitoring is systematic and informs progress. Teachers offer targeted support for these pupils in the classroom.
- School leaders, in every area, work tirelessly to ensure that all pupils are equipped with the skills and qualifications they need to go on to further education or employment.

Governance of the school

- The school has a local governing body. The governing body has actively sought to strengthen governance by attracting new governors who can act in the best interests of the school and its pupils. There is a clear scheme of delegation so that committees know their areas of responsibility and governors are linked to different aspects of the school's work. The safeguarding governor makes termly visits to check that policies and procedures are working effectively. Regular meetings ensure that governance is effective and efficient.
- Governors have a good working relationship with school leaders. They respect the headteacher and, through his leadership, have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. There is a culture of 'support and challenge' so that governors take effective actions to help leaders make further improvements. For example, the governors have asked questions about the curriculum, which has supported recent curriculum change at key stage 4.
- Governors have had a positive impact on the school's development plan. They have consulted with parents to ensure a shared responsibility for its wording and implementation.
- Governors are proud of the school's position in the local community and its relationship with parents.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff and governors undertake safeguarding training and receive regular updates to ensure that they have a current understanding of child protection procedures.
- Leaders responsible for safeguarding have a high level of expertise and a comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Their work has a significant impact on the welfare of pupils and the effectiveness of support for vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils reported that incidences of bullying are extremely rare and resolved swiftly. Leaders have established a strong culture of respect and tolerance so that pupils say it is 'ok to be different'.
- Almost all pupils who completed Ofsted's online survey agreed that they feel safe when they are in school. Pupils said that there is always someone to talk to if they need to.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- In most subjects, effective teaching, learning and assessment support pupils to make good progress. Teachers have high expectations of how pupils should behave. They are consistent in applying the school's behaviour policy. As a result, classrooms are mutually respectful environments that encourage learning. Teachers care about their pupils and have good relationships with them. Pupils said that their teachers look out for them.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this carefully to plan and deliver lessons which engage pupils. Some teachers, for example in art, history and physical education, support the needs of all pupils in the classroom. When this is successful, pupils make rapid progress. One parent stated, 'Teachers at this school have always displayed both pride in the school and commitment to the children and their progress'.
- In line with school leaders' expectations to develop pupils' thinking, some teachers ask challenging questions to develop pupils' deep understanding and support faster progress, particularly of the most able pupils. This is having a positive impact in the classroom. Not all teachers provide this level of challenge. Nevertheless, in English, French and mathematics lessons, there is an expectation that the most able pupils will respond in depth. For example, in a history lesson, the teacher phrased challenging questions and expected the most able pupils to respond using correct subject-specific terminology, so that they can reach the highest levels.
- There is good support in the classroom for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Targeted support and work, matched to their specific needs, are having a positive impact on their attainment and progress.
- Teachers work hard to raise the aspirations of the most able disadvantaged pupils so that they understand what they could achieve if they would rise to the challenges offered.

- Some pupils do not show confidence in their ability, but the school addresses this by ensuring that all target grades are linked to prior attainment and are challenging. These are evident in every exercise book and in every subject. The school is working towards consistency in the presentation of these target sheets. Leaders have confidence in the teachers' predictions for the progress of pupils, but these have yet to be tested against national expectations.
- Pupils know their target grades for each subject and refer to them in lessons. They support each other and work willingly together to complete or improve their work. When evaluating each other's work, they assess against success criteria, learn from each other and identify the next steps. Pupils' work suggests they are making better progress this year than previously.
- In some Year 11 lessons, for example in mathematics, there is an emphasis on deconstructing questions to ensure that pupils know how to answer questions in examinations and address the grade criteria. Pupils find this strategy useful.
- Tests used in the school's termly assessment programme have been created and moderated in network groups supported by North Hertfordshire Teaching Alliance. A local authority adviser has also checked the school's assessments to confirm that these are accurate. After each assessment, a review of targets takes place and leaders offer appropriate interventions or celebrations.
- A small minority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View or sent free-texts or emails during the inspection would like homework to be set more regularly. The school uses an online homework system, which pupils are very positive about. Some younger pupils expressed a desire that teachers should also inform them of any homework in their lessons to offer them further support.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The leadership of personal development and welfare is very strong and the level of commitment to support pupils to be successful learners is very high. Clear procedures are in place to ensure that pupils are treated fairly and consistently and that parents are included in any actions taken.
- The school's personal, social and health education programme has ensured that pupils know how to stay safe in school and beyond it.
- Pupils reported that the transition to The Nobel School from primary school was a positive experience. Leaders have established clear, successful protocols to enable this. One parent who sent a free-text during the inspection was grateful for this support and stated that their child is thriving at Nobel.
- Pupils listen carefully to the views of others. Both form time and personal, social and health education lessons provide good opportunities for learning about broader topical issues including fundamental British values, staying healthy and keeping safe using

social media. Careers guidance is also part of this programme. It has an individual focus, which prepares pupils very well for the next steps in their education or career.

- Precise strategies are in place to support pupils' welfare. Form tutors and year leaders work closely together. Pupils speak positively about the school's support for their personal well-being. One pupil said, 'There is always someone to help you at this school'.
- The assembly programme provides a framework to promote the school's and British values. For example, an assembly focusing on extremism made reference to the values of democracy, the rule of law, individuality, respect and tolerance and related them to the 'Nobelian' values, upheld by the school. Assemblies are an important aspect of the school's work to raise pupils' aspirations. If pupils make very good progress, their parents are invited into school for a celebration 'breakfast' assembly, to witness their child's achievements being rewarded.
- Leaders' efforts to improve aspirations have resulted in 98% of students going on to further education or training. Teachers offer extensive support with university applications and interviews. In contrast, the numbers seeking employment or training opportunities is very low, but the school works closely with employers and other colleges in the local area to support those pupils.
- An extensive extra-curricular programme underpins pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a real strength of the school. Pupils enjoy the provision and it is well attended. The leader of this programme shows great commitment to collating the provision and monitoring pupils' attendance at the sessions so that attendance is regular and changes can be made to adapt to pupils' needs.
- The school offers pupils leadership opportunities, for example for them to act as class ambassadors or as members of the pupil leadership council, 'the Senate'. Sixth-form students support younger pupils as 'reading leaders'. Sixth-form students lead by example by supporting the younger pupils with clubs and activities as well as with their work. Younger pupils appreciate this and say that the older years will always help out if needed.
- A small number of pupils are educated part-time, off site, in local provision. Their safety, personal development and progress are well managed and monitored by the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have implemented strategies to secure improved behaviour. The focus is on celebrating success and rewards, but there is also a simpler set of rules and sanctions. Pupils think that the new school rules are clearer and easier to follow. The impact of this consistent approach is improved behaviour in and out of the classroom and it has led to a strong drop in the number of exclusions this year.
- The vast majority of parents and carers who sent free-texts during the inspection, or responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, agreed that the school makes sure pupils are well behaved.

- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning support the progress they make across the school. Older pupils are also aware that teaching has improved. In lessons, pupils behave well and do not interrupt the learning of others.
- Bullying is rare. A very small minority of parents expressed some concerns about bullying in the school. Inspectors spoke to pupils across all year groups. They understood what bullying is but said that it rarely occurs. Pupils do not worry about bullying and said that they know what to do and who to speak to. They are confident that any bullying would be resolved swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils enter assembly in a calm and purposeful manner. It is clear that routines for entry and expectations are well established. Celebration assemblies are well respected and enjoyed by both the pupils and their parents.
- Pupils are aware that teaching has improved. They said that teachers support them and help them to learn. They say that if they do not understand something the teacher will always explain it again but in a bit more detail. These positive attitudes towards their teachers ensure that pupils behave well in lessons and do not interrupt the learning of others.
- Pupils are inclusive; different ages, genders and backgrounds mix happily. In the corridors, there is a calm and controlled pace of movement. Pupils enjoy the indoor and outdoor social spaces, which are freely available to them, and behave appropriately. Behaviour witnessed during a wet breaktime was exemplary.
- Pupils are clear that the school does not tolerate any bad language or discriminatory behaviour. Pupils believe that those who have a different background or outlook on life to their own are treated with respect and that everyone is treated equally.
- Well-established procedures are in place to ensure that pupils attend regularly. Any absence is followed up rigorously so that attendance is improving. Leaders are targeting improving the attendance of all groups, particularly the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Attendance is broadly in line with national averages. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is declining.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils join the school with standards that are average for their age. This pattern is seen in all year groups; however, the current Year 11 pupils entered the school with slightly higher standards.
- In 2016, the progress of pupils in English was below average and attainment was broadly average. The progress of pupils in mathematics was significantly above average and attainment was also above average.
- In 2017 in mathematics, although still meeting the national average, pupils did not do as well as in the previous year. Pupils made less progress than their peers nationally and attainment was below average. In 2017, leaders in mathematics made the decision to enter a higher percentage of the cohort for the foundation tier than in previous years. This resulted in limiting some pupils from achieving the higher grades. Leaders have reflected greatly on this and have already taken action to ensure that all current

pupils enter the correct level of examination linked to their targets and that teaching makes provision for their needs.

- A new subject leader is making significant improvements to teaching, learning and assessment in English. In 2017, progress and attainment were broadly in line with the national average.
- In 2016, in humanities and languages, pupils achieved broadly in line with national averages. In 2017, in humanities and languages, pupils achieved below national averages. Not every pupil took a humanity or a language in 2016 or 2017, but the new curriculum plan ensures that most pupils will do so in 2018. Scrutiny of pupils' work, the school assessment records and observation of lessons confirm that current pupils are making good progress in these subjects, particularly in history and French.
- Progress in science was lower in 2017 than in 2016 but a new subject leader has addressed the curriculum offer to enable pupils to make better progress.
- The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils in 2016 was significantly below the national average and these pupils made significantly less progress in 2017 than other pupils from similar starting points. Leaders have a clear understanding of the needs of disadvantaged pupils and well-targeted support is now in place. As a result, the progress of disadvantaged pupils who are currently in the school is showing some signs of improvement.
- In 2017, the achievement of the most able pupils was below average. The proportion of most-able pupils achieving at least a grade 4 in English and mathematics was average, but the proportion of most-able pupils achieving a strong pass (5+) was below average. The school has identified strategies to support the most able pupils in all year groups, including lunchtime lectures and support from sixth-form students, to encourage these pupils to aspire to the higher grades. In 2017, leaders invested significant resources into support for less-able pupils with the result that they did do better.
- The GCSE curriculum offer has been refined to allow four different pathways in Year 9, to ensure that pupils choose courses in which they can achieve highly. Individually, alongside their parents, teachers guide pupils to their most appropriate pathway. In Year 11, most pupils join the school's sixth form, but a few are supported to go on to study elsewhere and a few are guided into local apprenticeships.
- The school offers a range of opportunities for careers education. Pupils value the high-quality impartial advice they receive. Some are quite clear about their chosen career path as early as Year 7, when aspirations are already high for some pupils who aim for a science or law-related career.
- Current pupils in Year 11 are attaining more highly than previous pupils were at this stage in the academic year. Leaders have compared their predictions against the 2017 results to check their accuracy.
- Leaders are taking swift action to address the issues which arose from the GCSE results in 2016 and 2017 by improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

and revising the curriculum offer. Year leaders and subject leaders rapidly identify any areas of underperformance and implement support plans. As a result, the school's assessment information and the work in pupils' books indicate that pupils are making good progress and that outcomes are set to improve.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. The sixth-form leader has a clear vision for success, and teachers are aware of the need to manage students' motivation and aspirations alongside potential graduate employment. Form tutors and teachers offer a high level of support to the sixth-form students.
- The 16 to 19 provision is very strong. Value-added measures in most academic subjects and applied general subjects have been significantly positive over the past three years.
- In 2017, the average points score per student met the national average but was below average for progress against prior attainment. Vocational and technical subject outcomes over the past year were overwhelmingly positive for value-added measures, with achievement significantly ahead of the national picture.
- In 2017, the average A level grade was grade C, in line with the national average. However, the percentage of pupils achieving three high A level grades was below the national average. The school recognises that action must be taken to increase the number of students who achieve the higher grades by continuing to provide challenge in lessons for the most able students.
- Some students join Year 12 without a grade 4 in either GCSE English or mathematics. Leaders ensure that all of them attain these essential qualifications by the time they leave the sixth form. Most of these students have already made at least one grade progress at grade 4 or above by November of Year 12 due to the mathematics and English revision sessions offered by the school.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is excellent. Students take pride in their school and in their work and are committed to doing well. They conduct themselves in a mature and responsible way. There are high expectations of attendance and punctuality, which are good.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form is strong with evidence seen in lessons of challenge, insightful questioning and progress through regular and systematic testing.
- Sixth-form leaders are successful in guiding students onto appropriate courses. This contributes to extremely high retention rates across Years 12 and 13. Careers advice and guidance for students once they are in the sixth form is highly effective.
- Leaders and teachers are committed to raising students' aspirations for further education. A significant number of students move on to appropriate higher education courses, some to Russell Group universities and a few to Oxford or Cambridge.
- Students value the regular information and advice given to them about future career opportunities and the help that they receive from form tutors and other staff in

completing applications to university. An extensive careers' programme, supported by Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire universities, helps prepare students for their next steps, but Ofsted's online pupil survey suggests that some think they would benefit from wider support.

- The school successfully meets the requirements for the provision of 16 to 19 study programmes. Leaders monitor effectively all elements of the study programmes, including non-qualification activities. Alongside the curriculum, students take up the many opportunities offered to them to enhance their understanding of the world of work; almost all post-16 students undertake work experience, relevant to their aspirations, which the school can facilitate, if required.
- A wide range of additional activities enrich the sixth-form experience. Sixth-form ambassadors are mature and can articulate their learning experience in the classroom. Students are encouraged to volunteer as mentors for younger pupils, leading by example to support them both academically and personally to be successful in school and in the outside world. They assist staff in organising events and do 20 hours of volunteer work of their own choice. They know how to keep themselves safe in and outside school.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 117530 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10041799 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1476 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 292 |
| Appropriate authority | The local authority |
| Chair | Peter Heppelthwaite |
| Headteacher | Martyn Henson |
| Telephone number | 01438 222600 |
| Website | www.nobel.herts.sch.uk |
| Email address | head@nobel.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 24 – 25 April 2014 |

Information about this school

- The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirement for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Alternative provision is provided for pupils at NOVA, Stevenage.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of 64 lessons. Thirteen of these lessons were joint observations with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, newly qualified teachers, a representative from the local authority and six governors.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils of all different ages individually and in groups.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school self-evaluation, improvement plans, spending reviews and plans, behaviour and attendance records and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's single central record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors considered 197 responses to Parent View, 133 responses to the staff survey and 307 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Kathryn Herlock, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Bruce Clark | Ofsted Inspector |
| Phillip Barr | Ofsted Inspector |
| Diana Fletcher | Ofsted Inspector |
| Lynn Ayling | Ofsted Inspector |

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