

The Nelson Thomlinson School

High Street, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 9PX

Inspection dates 16–17 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Almost all students make excellent progress at all key stages throughout the school.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding and staff, at all levels throughout the school, have very high expectations of students. However, on occasions, teachers' marking does not give students enough information about how to improve their work.
- The behaviour of students and their attitudes to learning are often exemplary. Students are very polite and well-mannered to each other and to adults.
- Students say that bullying is rare and they feel very safe in school and parents overwhelmingly support this view. Students are very well cared for through the school's outstanding pastoral care systems.
- Attendance is above the national average and has continued to improve over recent years.
- The sixth form is first class. The vast majority of students make excellent progress and are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The curriculum is very well planned and provides students with an interesting range of subjects and topics that ensures that they enjoy school. This also very effectively supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is outstanding.
- The quality of leadership and management from the headteacher and senior leaders is a strength of the school. They, together with the governing body, have a very clear view of how well the school is doing and what it needs to do to improve further.
- Senior leaders and managers demonstrate a clear commitment and determination to drive the continued improvement of teaching and students' achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons taught by 42 teachers. Five lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors looked closely at the school’s work, including the school’s analysis of how well it is doing and its improvement plan. The inspectors also looked at the school’s information on students’ progress and students’ work, documents relating to behaviour and safeguarding and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Meetings were held with five groups of students, staff and five members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 192 responses from parents recorded in the online questionnaire (Parent View), together with a letter from parents and seven telephone conversations with parents.
- Inspectors also took account of the 96 responses to the staff questionnaire and of the views of students during the inspection.

Inspection team

Alan Parkinson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kevin Broadfoot	Additional Inspector
Paul Edmondson	Additional Inspector
Catherine Laing	Additional Inspector
Peter Eeva	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Nelson Thomlinson School is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- In September 2012 a new headteacher and two new deputy headteachers were appointed to form a predominantly new senior leadership team following a review of roles and responsibilities.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those from families in the armed services and those in local authority care.)
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is slightly above the national average. The proportion of those supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school uses the West Cumbria Achievement Zone and the Education Youth Service, which provide alternative provision for some students.
- In 2012 the school achieved the International Schools award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers' marking of students' work consistently provides clear and specific guidance on what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that appropriate homework is consistently set in accordance with the school's homework policy.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels have a clear and accurate overview of both the school's academic and pastoral work to enable them to give even better advice and guidance to students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Over the last three years, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A* to C including English and mathematics has been well above the national average. Although results dipped slightly in 2012 the trend over time is upwards.
- The proportion of students making expected progress in 2012 was above national averages in both English and mathematics. However, the proportion of students making more than expected levels of progress fell in both English and mathematics. This was because the school's focus had been on checking levels of attainment rather than the progress being made by this group of students. However, the newly formed senior leadership team has introduced more robust systems for checking students' progress. Recent changes to the students' target-setting processes have provided students with more aspirational targets for each subject. This, together with improvements in the quality of teaching, is having a more positive impact on students' learning.
- Although the school has entered two groups of current Year 11 students early for their GCSE foundation tier mathematics examination, students have the opportunity and are encouraged to re-take the examination at a later stage to achieve a higher grade. The school no longer enters students early for any GCSE examination.
- Current school information shows that the proportions of the students making expected progress and more than expected progress in English and in mathematics is improving across the year groups.
- In 2012, students supported by the pupil premium, including those students who were known to be entitled to free school meals, achieved approximately one GCSE grade below all other students. However, due to the effective use of this funding to provide additional teaching resources, one-to-one tuition and small-group work to support the development of literacy and numeracy, the attainment gaps are closing swiftly, year-on-year, in both English and mathematics.
- Students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium receive additional support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. As a result they make similar progress to that made by other students. The school's reading programme in Years 7 and 8 is very effective and is helping to develop students' literacy skills well and to support their learning across a range of subjects.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, those few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well supported in their learning, make good progress and achieve well.
- The few students following courses away from the school site receive good support and achieve well.
- The achievement made by the vast majority of sixth-form students is excellent. Although there was a slight drop in performance at both AS and A2 level in 2012, current school data indicates that achievement in 2013 will improve, showing students making superb progress.
- Lesson observations, hearing students read and scrutiny of work confirm that current students are making consistently excellent progress.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is very well organised and planned. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and their enthusiastic delivery engage students fully in their learning. Work is set at precisely the right level for all students to achieve well. Students respond well to teachers' high expectations and effective questioning that encourages them to think for themselves and extend their understanding.
- Students say they enjoy their lessons, know how well they are doing and get good support from their teachers. The good relationships between students and teachers and between the students

themselves, promote positive attitudes to learning and this helps to make learning enjoyable and effective.

- Teachers provide opportunities for students to work well together, to share and develop ideas. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson about persuasive language, the passion and enthusiasm of the teacher inspired the students. Students were using the television programme 'The Apprentice' to compare to help them create an advertisement to sell a bottle of water.
- The quality of teaching has improved over recent years and, as a result of teachers' high expectations, students' achievement in English and mathematics has improved rapidly.
- Teaching contributes well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through encouraging cooperation between students and very effective group working.
- Occasionally, teachers' marking of students' work does not provide students with clear written comments on what they need to do to improve. This means that opportunities are sometimes missed to take learning even further forward.
- Homework is not set across all subjects throughout the school as regularly as it might be. As a result opportunities are occasionally missed for students to develop their understanding and learn more quickly.
- Teaching assistants are used very effectively in lessons and make a significant contribution to the learning and progress of the lower-ability students and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. They help students to learn, develop skills and achieve well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students demonstrate a great deal of pride in their school. They are very polite, well-mannered and courteous towards each other and to adults and visitors. Students are extremely well behaved in lessons and around the school. This promotes students' very positive attitudes to learning.
- The school has a very strong anti-bullying policy. Students are fully aware of the different forms of bullying and report that bullying is rare. When any instances of bullying do occur they are quickly and effectively dealt with.
- Students say they feel very safe in school. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example, they learn about road safety, the responsible use of alcohol, and how to use the internet safely. Some sixth-form students help to teach Year 9 students about sexual health.
- The responses to Parent View indicate that the vast majority of parents agree that their children are very safe at school, exceptionally well looked after and that they would recommend the school to other parents.
- The excellent pastoral system ensures that students are very well cared for. Students show exceptionally caring attitudes towards each other and follow the school saying of 'Respect for Others'.
- The school provides many opportunities for students to take on positions of responsibility such as prefects, librarians and peer mentors or as members of the school council. Sixth-form students help younger students to develop their reading and mathematical skills.
- The school has established very effective partnerships with the local community. For example, the chair of the student council leads an annual neighbourhood forum to discuss local issues with local councillors and members of the local community.
- Students are also proactive in raising funds for organisations such as cancer charities, Comic Relief, Help for Heroes, the Northern Air Ambulance and Operation Christmas Child. This enables students to develop as responsible individuals and make a significant contribution to the wider community.
- The school has established effective partnerships with external agencies to effectively support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

- Attendance is consistently above average and has risen over recent years. Punctuality is excellent.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The recently appointed headteacher, together with a predominantly new senior leadership team, know the school very well and provide excellent leadership and management. They, with the governing body and the full support of staff, demonstrate a passion and commitment for further improvement with a clear focus on driving continued improvements in teaching and achievement.
- The recent improvements to systems for checking students' progress are highly effective. Students at risk of falling behind in their learning are quickly identified and given additional support, which shows the school's commitment to offering equal opportunities for all its students.
- Subject leaders and pastoral managers are very effective in their respective roles. However, they do not have a complete view of each other's work to enable them to more fully support students and colleagues.
- Rigorous systems and processes for checking the quality of teaching and learning provide accurate feedback on teachers' performance to ensure that teaching continues to improve. This information is used exceptionally well to identify and share best practice across all areas, and to advise the governing body about teachers' pay awards.
- The curriculum is very well planned and meets students' interests very well. Students say they are able to make informed choices about the next stages in their education at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and beyond the sixth form.
- The school makes very good use of alternative provision to provide appropriate courses and work placements for a small number of students that enable them to be successful. This supports the school's aim of providing equal opportunities for success for all students. The school takes all reasonable steps to ensure that these students behave well and are safe.
- The school's wide range of enrichment activities provides students with opportunities to develop their personal and academic skills. For example, some students regularly help at a local home for the elderly. A Year 10 assembly about the G8 Summit enabled students to reflect on the implications of world poverty. The Asia Club helps to develop international links and raises students' awareness throughout the school. These activities contribute well to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The local authority provides effective and valuable support to the school on teaching and learning, training for governors, and to support senior leaders and the governing body.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is highly effective and committed to the school and the community. Its members have a good understanding of the school's performance and know the strengths of the school. They have an accurate understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school further, in particular about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. They give good support and challenge to senior leaders and ensure that performance-management procedures set challenging targets. They understand the connection between the quality of work that staff do and the arrangements for pay progression. The governing body has a good knowledge of the school's finances. This includes allocating the pupil-premium funding to improve the literacy and mathematical skills of pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Safeguarding policies and procedures meet the statutory requirements.

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	112397
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	411998

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
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	1,391
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	258
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Turnbull
Headteacher	Sam Northwood
Date of previous school inspection	14 November 2006
Telephone number	016973 42160
Fax number	016973 49160
Email address	admin@nts.cumbria.sch.uk

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