



# The Nelson Thomlinson School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 112397  
**Local Authority** Cumbria  
**Inspection number** 289270  
**Inspection date** 14 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ruth James HMI

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>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	High Street
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled		Wigton, Cumbria
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		CA7 9PX
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01697 342160
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1305	<b>Fax number</b>	01697 349160
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	214		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Rev Geoffrey Ravalde
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Peter M Ireland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 February 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	14 November 2006	289270

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Nelson Thomlinson School is a comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 situated in the small town of Wigton in Cumbria. It is a specialist mathematics and computing college and is bigger than average. The proportion of students who receive free school meals is low. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and very few have a first language other than English. Slightly lower than average number of students have additional learning needs.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Nelson Thomlinson School is an outstanding school. It does everything in its power to maximise the life chances of its students by providing the highest quality teaching. Parents recognise this and are overwhelmingly positive in their support for the school. The inspection confirms their view that their students enjoy school, make excellent progress, are safe and well supported, and that the school is very well led and managed.

The majority of students enter the school with levels of attainment that are very slightly above average. By the time they leave the main school, the majority have reached levels of achievement that are far higher than expected given their starting points and circumstances. Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level results are all excellent.

This success has been achieved through a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning as central to the success of the school. The time and effort devoted to the professional development of teachers has contributed to the overall quality of teaching becoming outstanding. Teachers work hard to get the best out of all their students and to ensure that every lesson is effective. Students know what their targets are and what they need to do to improve. Students are provided with a balanced curriculum, enriched by opportunities to stretch those who are particularly gifted and talented and to support those with additional learning needs. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good. Students behave very well in lessons and around the school. They know who to turn to for help. Teachers set high expectations and deal firmly with occasional minor misbehaviour.

The care, guidance and support the school provides are outstanding. The school knows its students well. Senior staff, leaders of the academic and pastoral care systems, and staff supporting students, work together closely. Support systems work well because of the commitment and dedication of all those involved; they go the extra mile for their students. All students leave Year 11 with a place in the sixth form, or at a local college, or a job. Specialist status in mathematics and computing has been used well. Expertise in mathematics teaching has been shared with the whole school. Information and communication technology (ICT) and computing resources are now excellent, and good use is made of electronic whiteboards. The school has made good progress since the last inspection in most respects. For example, the number of exclusions has reduced. However, the school does not do enough to prepare students for life in a multicultural society. The leadership provided by the headteacher and the senior team is outstanding, and has been crucial to the sustained improvement the school has made. The quality of teaching and learning, the culture of accountability that has developed, and the resulting improvements in the school's performance are a consequence of this outstanding leadership. The school continuously evaluates its performance. Managers at all levels rigorously review the quality of the school's work. High expectations of the quality of teaching are reflected in the regular observation of lessons by senior staff, which leads to specific pointers for teachers to improve their teaching and students' learning. Opportunities for professional development are directly linked to these observations. The improvements already achieved and the way that it has tackled areas for development over time demonstrate that the school has outstanding capacity

to improve even further. There is a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school recognises that it needs to introduce more work related opportunities at Key Stage 4.

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

### **Grade: 1**

The GCE A-level results in 2006 are of a very high standard and continue the pattern of high achievement over the last five years. A high proportion of learners achieve high grades and a large proportion progress to higher education. In 2006, five learners gained entry to Oxford or Cambridge universities. Many learners do better than would be expected on the basis of their GCSE grades. Retention rates are high with around 95% of learners completing each year. Teaching is outstanding, but the school is not resting on its laurels and seeks to improve even further. Progress and attendance is monitored scrupulously. Sixth formers take on a wide range of responsibilities that provide very positive role models for the whole school. The school has an innovative and exciting approach to the way it works with employers and this benefits many learners. Leadership and management are excellent and there is a clear focus on strategies that seek to continuously improve standards. Learners speak in glowing terms of their experiences in the sixth form and feedback from questionnaires is very positive.

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

- Introduce more vocational opportunities at Key Stage 4.
- Improve opportunities to prepare learners for life in a multicultural society.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Achievement and standards are outstanding, and the school has sustained its excellent results over many years. Students enter the school with attainment at Key Stage 2 which is very slightly above national average, and leave with qualifications which are far better than average.

Key Stage 3 results are outstanding. The proportions of students who achieve Level 5 and above are consistently high. In science and mathematics, high percentages of students achieve Level 6 and above, and in 2006 this was also true for English. Data, which takes account of contextual factors, show that students make very good progress in English and outstanding progress in mathematics and science. In 2005, the school was in the top 10% of all schools on this measure for mathematics and science.

GCSE results are also outstanding. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of students who gain five or more high grade GCSEs is consistently high. Between 2002 and 2006, this was between 65% and 70%. In comparison with national figures, high percentages of students achieve five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics. The

percentage achieving five or more A\* to G passes is at least as good as that found nationally and often better. The proportion of students who do not achieve any GCSE passes has declined and is below average. Almost all subjects have A\* to C pass rates, which are well above average, and in many subjects high numbers get the highest A and A\* grades. Mathematics results are exceptionally good; over a quarter of students got A and A\* grades in 2005 and over 70% gained a C grade or above. Progress in mathematics is outstanding. Boys' achievement was not quite as good as girls in 2006, but was still well above that found nationally. Value added data show that students make excellent progress overall between Years 7 and 11.

In the sixth form, there are high pass rates for GCE AS, A level and AVCE courses. Value added data show that overall, learners get higher grades than expected. Progression from GCE A level to university is excellent.

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

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The personal development of students is outstanding. Students behave extremely well both in lessons and around the school. There is a culture of mutual respect between staff and students. Attendance rates are high and consistently above the national average. The school council has played an important part in ensuring that healthy food options are available to all students. There is a particularly successful programme to ensure that students understand the importance of sexual health. This is a happy school where bullying is rare and students feel safe. Exclusion rates have fallen since the last inspection due to the improved pastoral system. In Years 8 and 9, all students have the opportunity via a citizenship and enterprise programme to plan and run a charity event and take part in a business enterprise competition. The school recognises its relative cultural and geographic isolation, but provides too few opportunities to develop the cultural awareness of the ethnic diversity of the United Kingdom. Students take part in a large number of charitable and voluntary events. Students are proud to attend this school and parents are overwhelmingly positive.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning are outstanding. Teaching and learning are rightly regarded as absolutely central to the success of the school and given a high priority accordingly. Excellent use is made of the expertise of teachers within the school in spreading good practice. In lessons visited by inspectors, students of all abilities were engaged in productive activities and were enjoying their work. Lessons are well planned and teachers have very good subject knowledge. They use a range

of teaching styles to engage students. Activities are carefully selected according to the intended learning outcomes and students' abilities. Different tasks are used to reinforce particular aspects of learning by getting students to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in different ways. Some tasks are chosen to provide a well defined end product so that students have a record of their work that they can take pride in. Meticulous assessment and progress monitoring ensure that students at risk of underachievement are identified at an early stage. The school identifies relative weaknesses in teaching and sets clear agendas for improvement. The excellent professional development programme in school includes coaching and mentoring. Appropriate themes are chosen, such as 'motivating the hard to motivate'. In-service training events led by groups of teachers have focused on topics, such as the teaching of boys, the most able, the least able, and 'top tips' for effective discipline.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

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

The school provides a good curriculum for all its students, including those in the sixth form. Students choose from a range of extra-curricular activities in sports, music, and drama with very high participation rates. Extensive investment has been made in sports facilities. Extra-curricular music is a significant strength of the school. A personalised learning approach for some students in Years 10 and 11 allows individuals to take up work related programmes and this has a significant impact on the employment prospects of students who leave school aged 16. The school recognises that its vocational programme is rather limited in scope, partly due to its geographical isolation. There are particularly successful arrangements in place for the gifted and talented, including lunchtime Latin and Greek lessons, and extra classes in philosophy and mathematics. The school has excellent links with primary schools.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding, and have a very powerful influence on their progress. A very well planned induction programme helps Year 7 students integrate quickly. Arrangements to improve the literacy skills of Year 7 students have a remarkable effect on students' attainments. The headteacher meets students on a weekly basis over lunch to listen to their comments and concerns. Good use is made of outside agencies. The monitoring of academic progress is very effective and enables tutors to identify areas of underachievement and improve performance. The heads of year are well supported by a central pastoral team to ensure that students have effective individual learning plans. Students receive very good advice, guidance and support at points of transition. Very positive relationships exist with the majority of parents; communication is usually effective and parents' evenings are well attended. The school is committed to full inclusion and a very strong learning support department enables students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make very good

progress. Child protection arrangements are frequently reviewed and understood by all staff.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the headteacher is exemplary. He sets out a clear vision for the school and, together with his senior team, has pursued a highly successful and sustained improvement strategy over many years. The headteacher and his senior team have a very strong focus on teaching and learning. Much time and energy is devoted to professional development to raise the quality of teaching and learning and this is amply rewarded. Excellent use is made of an observation room allowing groups of teachers, guided by a coach, to observe the good practice of their peers. Despite many years of excellent results there is no sense of complacency and staff are driven on by the belief that there is always scope for improvement. Senior managers' own reflective practice encourages all teachers to seek and try new methods and ideas to improve their own lessons. All teachers are held accountable for their results. Heads of department have a clear understanding of their role and make a very strong contribution to the school's success. Data analysis is extremely thorough and is used to identify any specific areas where performance is not as good as elsewhere. Performance management is particularly effective and all teachers have objectives related to improving teaching and learning. Views of those managed are sought when managers' performance is assessed.

The governing body is effective in supporting the school and monitoring performance, but as yet the school has no race equality policy and action plan.

Self-evaluation is outstanding. The internal observation system, departmental reviews, and analyses of examination results all contribute to the self-critical culture. The self-evaluation report was accurate in its judgements. Managers' understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development are exceptional. Resources are deployed very effectively, supporting the different needs of students and giving excellent value for money.



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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>	1	1
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	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	1	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1	1
<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>	1	1

<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>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

The Students

The Nelson Thomlinson School

High Street

Wigton

Cumbria

CA7 9PX

14 November 2006

Dear Students

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting lessons and talking to a number of you and to some staff. We also looked at the results of questionnaires sent in by your parents. The vast majority of your parents are very supportive of the school.

We found that yours is an outstanding school that you can be very proud of!

Your teachers work hard to make your lessons interesting and the teaching that you get is outstanding overall. Most of you work hard. This helps you to make excellent progress and get very good qualifications. GCSE results in your school are excellent. Almost all GCSE subjects have high A\* to C pass rates. Mathematics results are especially good. Results at Key Stage 3 are also excellent.

Most of you behave very well most of the time, both in lessons and around school. You have a school council, which has been involved in improving the healthy food options at lunch time.

The school cares very well for you and you told us that there is almost no bullying. Staff work hard to help you settle in when you join in Year 7. You get very good advice and guidance to help you make choices at different stages. The school makes sure that no-one leaves Year 11 without a sixth form or college place, or a job.

You have a good choice of extra-curricular activities, and those of you we met told us that you especially like the sports opportunities.

The sixth form provides a very high quality education and results are excellent.

Your headteacher and other managers in school work extremely hard to make yours such an outstanding school, and we found that they are doing a brilliant job. They are always looking for ways to make the school even better. We agreed with them that they should consider introducing more work related opportunities at Key Stage 4, and we have also asked them to do more to prepare you for life in multicultural society.

We are sure that you will keep up your good work and we wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector