

# Inspection of The Nelson Thomlinson School

High Street, Wigton, Cumbria CA7 9PX

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Inspection dates: 17 and 18 October 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since May 2013.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at The Nelson Thomlinson School are proud to live out the school's values in their everyday actions. They know and demonstrate the key school principles of acting in a responsible, thoughtful and decent manner. The atmosphere around the school is calm and purposeful. Pupils treat each other with respect and politeness. Pupils are safe and happy at this school.

The school has high expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils know that teachers expect them to try their best in lessons. They know that teachers will help them when they are not sure about something that they are learning. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. Sixth-form students also leave school well prepared for the next steps in their education, employment or training.

Pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to them. The enrichment experiences on offer capture most pupils' interests. They include art, drama and music clubs. Pupils also benefit from sports clubs and specialist interest groups, such as chess or writing to a pen pal. Staff nurture pupils' wider talents through these activities and through the programme of personal development.

The school is acting more quickly to ensure that incidents of bullying, when they occur, are addressed.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

This is a school with strong traditions. It is at the heart of its community. Pupils enjoy a range of opportunities to take an active role in their local community. For example, they embrace fundraising for local and national charities, and they contribute well to community projects.

The school has thought carefully about the curriculum that pupils learn. The curriculum is broad, balanced and ambitious. Staff have identified the essential knowledge that pupils must know. Knowledge and skills are delivered in a logical order. In the sixth form, the curriculum is well designed, and teachers have very strong subject knowledge. Overall, staff ensure that pupils, including students in the sixth form, have secure foundations on which to build new learning.

The school, including governors, has thought carefully about the most appropriate qualifications for pupils to study. For example, leaders have placed a renewed emphasis on developing the key stage 3 curriculum offer in languages to increase the uptake of these subjects at key stage 4. The level of entry for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is slightly below the national average. Nevertheless, the school ensures that all aspects of the EBacc are available to all pupils.

Teachers use assessment well to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Teachers successfully fill any gaps in pupils' learning. They design a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to revisit that reinforce topics and concepts.

Some pupils do not read as confidently and fluently as they should. However, the support that takes place in key stage 3 is beginning to have a positive impact on improving pupils' reading ability. Nevertheless, a small number of pupils in key stage 4 continue to struggle with their reading. Furthermore, although the school has begun to develop a wider culture of reading, this is not embedded across the curriculum.

The school has clear and effective systems in place to identify any additional needs that pupils may have. Pupils with SEND are well supported to access the ambitious curriculum on offer. Staff successfully involve parents and carers of pupils with SEND in designing how the school supports pupils' individual needs.

On occasion, however, some other parents and members of the community have negative perceptions of how well the school manages the behaviour and bullying of a small number of pupils. Leaders' systems to communicate with parents are not as well developed as they could be. Despite this weakness, typically, inspectors found that pupils behave well in school. Lessons are not disrupted by poor behaviour.

In the main, pupils attend school regularly. However, the school's systems for analysing pupils' rates and patterns of attendance are underdeveloped. This means that patterns and trends in the absence rates for different groups of pupils are sometimes missed.

The school has put in place a robust programme of personal development for pupils in Years 7 to 11. This ensures that pupils have a secure understanding of a range of important issues that affect their well-being. This includes age-appropriate relationships and sex education.

Pupils also experience a wide range of trips, experiences and visitors to school. These opportunities build their understanding of different cultures, religions and the issues facing society. For students in the sixth form, various enrichment opportunities are available to encourage them to become active citizens. The school provides a wide range of balanced careers information to all pupils.

Leaders, including governors, are cognisant of staff well-being, and they provide a range of support to staff to ensure that they are best equipped to fulfil their roles. For example, staff's ongoing training is a priority at The Nelson Thomlinson School. Leaders have designed a bespoke package of learning so that teachers continually improve how well they deliver the curriculum. Staff appreciate the opportunities that this provides to them to develop their own knowledge and skills.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The culture of reading is not fully embedded across the school. Furthermore, some pupils in key stage 4 are behind with their reading knowledge. This means that some pupils do not read as widely and often as they could. In key stage 4, some pupils struggle to access the wider curriculum because they lack fluency in reading. The school should foster a culture of reading across the school. It should ensure that those pupils who are behind with their reading in key stage 4 are well supported to catch up quickly.
- The systems that the school, including governors, use to analyse patterns in pupils' attendance are underdeveloped. As a result, the school does not have all the information that it needs to identify and address persistent absence for some groups of pupils. The school, including governors, should refine its systems to monitor pupils' attendance.
- The school does not engage with parents and other stakeholders as effectively as it could. This has resulted in some parents having negative perceptions about how well the school manages pupils' behaviour, including bullying. Leaders, including governors, should reflect more carefully on how they engage with parents, and other stakeholders, to alleviate the concerns that they may have.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112397
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10245234
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,192
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	182
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Joint chairs of governing body</b>	Adrian Lloyd and Richard Lynn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sam Northwood
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://nts.cumbria.sch.uk/">https://nts.cumbria.sch.uk/</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	16 and 17 May 2013

## Information about this school

- The school uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provider for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders, and teachers. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also met with governors, including the joint chairs of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, English, modern foreign languages, history, physical education and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in corridors, at breaktimes, at lunchtimes and in lessons. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, leaders' improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their programme of wider personal development.
- Inspectors considered the responses from parents to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys.

## Inspection team

Elaine Mawson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jackie Cahalin	Ofsted Inspector
Jamie Lawler	Ofsted Inspector
Lindy Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector
Alexia Gargrave	Ofsted Inspector

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