



The Nelson Thomlinson School
Wigton
Cumbria
CA7 9PX
...still "outstanding"
(Ofsted, May 2013)

Headmaster:
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Dear parents/guardians,

Parental Questionnaires: The Headmaster's Response

Thank you to those of you who responded to the recent parental questionnaire. Having been through them, I feel that I should share my thoughts and conclusions with you.

The first point to make is that only 170 questionnaires were completed, a mere 18% of the total number sent out. It is reasonable to assume that those parents who feel particularly strongly about the school – in a positive or negative way - were more inclined to respond. Results, therefore, may be naturally skewed towards the extremes.

In terms of general themes, parents were largely very positive about the following, in no particular order:

- The school's general ethos
- The general management of the school
- School safety
- The standards/expectations regarding discipline and behaviour
- The standards/expectations regarding uniform
- The range of extra-curricular activities on offer
- Marking and feedback from teachers
- Communication
- Report writing

We received some especially heartening comments from some parents who wrote at length in their praise of the school. 92% agreed that the school was an excellent school, 94% agreed that their child is encouraged to act on feedback, 95% agreed that they would feel comfortable contacting the school if there were a problem, and 98% felt that their child feels safe at school.

It was felt by some parents that we should try to improve the following:

- Inconsistency/amount of homework given
- The lack of a drop-off/collection point for children
- Communication through a texting service
- Payment for meals via a cashless/electronic system
- Choice/variety of meals

The above summary clearly does not take into account very specific, isolated or personal comments – positive or negative – that were not supported by the views of other parents. Where we came across negative comments, despite the fact that parents were given the opportunity to give their name, the vast majority chose not to. Unfortunately, this means that it is hard for me to address some of the issues raised. If you do have a concern that you would like me to address (and you did not provide your name in the questionnaire), I offer you again the opportunity to contact my secretary, Mrs Stanton, and we will respond.

Those few parents who *did* give their name will be contacted by me – personally - in due course so that I can gather more details and ultimately improve the situation or resolve the issue.

In response to the 5 general areas of improvement listed above...

Homework

This is usually the area that parents feel strongly about – in any school – partly because it is something they see first-hand, day in, day out (unlike classroom teaching, for example). We do have a homework policy (available on the school's website), and guidance is given to staff regarding the length and timing of homework. Every year, however, we get some parents complaining about there being either too much or too little. In a teacher's defence, it is sometimes hard to stick absolutely rigidly to the timetable/stipulated lengths of homework because of the nature of teaching/learning and the fact that some pupils work more quickly or more efficiently than others. Moreover, sometimes a teacher will need to give slightly more, sometimes slightly less depending on the time of year or where they are in the scheme of work. Occasionally, we do get things wrong, and when individual teachers need to be spoken to, I do not shy away from this responsibility. The best way of resolving the matter, therefore, is for parents to tell me specifically which teacher appears to be giving too much/too little – or on the wrong nights; I can then deal with things promptly, usually through the relevant Head of Department.

The lack of a drop-off/collection point for children

I know from personal experience that this is a problem! Unfortunately, the layout of the site and the lack of funding means that we can do little at the moment to resolve the issue. Dropping off your child close to the entrance of the school obviously causes traffic congestion (as I have mentioned in previous correspondence), and yet we cannot have cars driving through the school grounds for safety reasons. (Other schools have been heavily criticised for this recently by OFSTED.) In the planning stages of a new school build, issues such as these can be taken into consideration, but altering the layout of existing car-parks and school grounds is a mammoth undertaking for an old school and would involve considerable additional funding.

***N.B. On the subject of traffic, in order to improve site safety for pupils, an entrance barrier will be installed over half-term, and this will be closed at the following times:
8.30 – 9.15am; 11.05 – 11.30am; 12.20 – 1.35pm; 3.25 – 4.00pm***

The barrier will be controlled by a member of our site staff, and access will still be possible in an emergency or where a parent/pupil has mobility difficulties. In all other circumstances, parents visiting the school between 8.30am and 4.00pm are asked to park in the bottom car-park, next to the sports hall. If, for whatever reason, you do drive through the school grounds, please adhere to the 5mph speed limit.

Communication through a texting service/'parent-mail'

We have considered this on a number of occasions. Costs are prohibitive at the moment (certainly in the light of our current financial position) but we are in discussion with the FONTS PTA group and are considering the possibility of raising funds through them. We are making progress, therefore, and I will be in touch again soon to update you.

Payment for meals via a cashless/electronic system

Significant capital investment is, once again, the main stumbling block here. When I speak to visiting, prospective parents I have also stressed our attempts to prepare pupils for life beyond school, and asking pupils to be financially responsible is part of this process. We also have evidence from other schools that suggests that an electronic system can slow the queues down, especially when the technology fails.

Choice/variety of meals

A new area manager for the catering company we use has recently taken up the post and has already undertaken the task of reviewing the existing menus. I would hope, therefore, to see things improve in the next few months.

Finally, on the subject of responding to parents, please understand that this is a large school with some 1250 pupils and a correspondingly complex management/staffing system. There will be times when a complaint or problem is best dealt with by a member of staff other than myself, i.e. your child's Tutor, his/her Head of Year, a Head of Department or another member of the Senior Management Team. It is highly likely, therefore, that one of my colleagues will be the first port of call. Please do, however, contact me (via my secretary) should you feel

that the matter has not been dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner, and I will do my utmost to resolve things.

Other matters

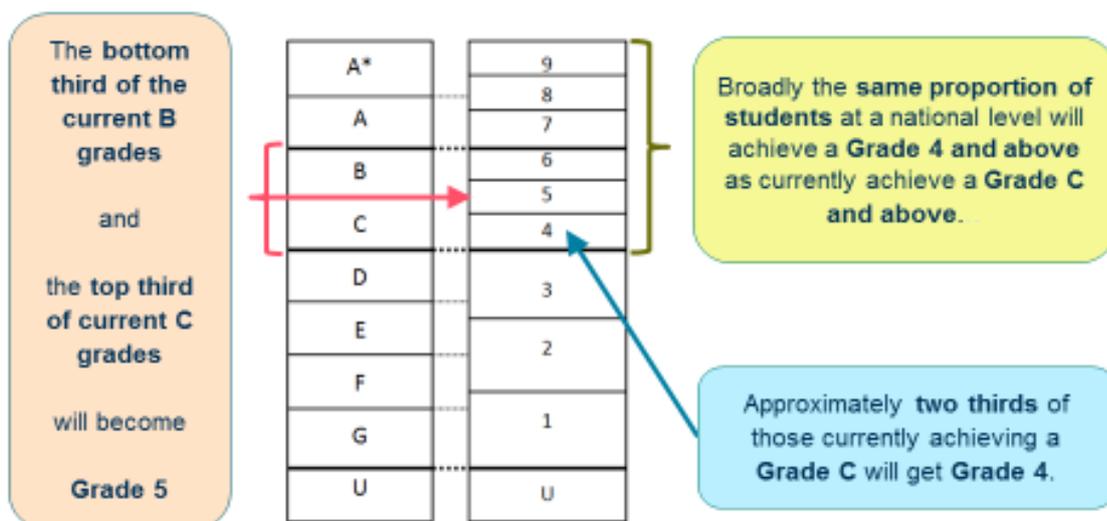
Attitude to Learning (AtL) Grades

Parents are reminded that the five descriptors for each Attitude to Learning grade are printed in each pupil's planner. The scale goes from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), and all pupils know that the *minimum* acceptable AtL grade in any one subject is 3. The expectation, therefore, is that pupils should be aiming for an average of at least 3.3. (Year group averages tend to be around 3.5/3.6, rising to 3.7 in the Sixth Form.)

New GCSE grades

Parents will be aware that in summer 2017, English Language, English Literature and Mathematics GCSEs will be awarded grades on the new scale of Grade 1 (lowest) to Grade 9 (highest). There isn't a direct comparison with the outgoing scale of Grade G to grade A*, but the diagram below illustrates where the new grades are expected to fit alongside the long-established A* to G system.

The impact of moving to grades 9-1 and the new 'good pass'



The 'good pass' grade is an area of debate. Statistically, the government has placed the 'good pass' at Grade 5, but educationally, we will consider outcomes at both Grade 4 and Grade 5 for Year 11 pupils making applications to the Sixth Form at NTS.

For examinations taken in summer 2018, the majority of GCSEs will be awarded grades using the new 1 to 9 system, with all GCSEs making the switch for examinations taken in the summer of 2019.

School Reception opening hours

Please note that our reception is open between 8.15am and 4.30pm Mondays to Thursdays, and 8.15am and 4.00pm on Fridays. Outside of these times, Reception will not be manned and there will not be anyone available to attend to visitors.

Holiday Dates Erratum

It has been brought to my attention that one of the original dates in my September letter was incorrect. The Summer Term actually finishes on **Thursday 20th July at 3.30pm** (not Friday 22nd July – which does not exist!). Please accept our apologies.

Facebook

In the light of a recent increase in bogus sites, please take care when searching for us on Facebook. The official page address is: <https://www.facebook.com/TheNelsonThomlinsonSchool/> In order to receive updates, you will need to 'Like' us.

Sixth-Form Matters

If a student in the Sixth Form is absent (unplanned), the Sixth-Form Office must be notified by telephone on **016973 42160 (Option 2** then ask for 'Sixth Form') between 8.30am and 9.00am. Please inform the Sixth-Form Office on each day of absence.

For planned absences e.g. interviews, university visits, driving tests, medical appointments etc. parents and carers are required to provide a letter to the Sixth-Form team prior to the first day of absence. However, we understand that in some cases this may not be possible and would therefore ask parents and carers to telephone the Sixth-Form Office.

Sixth-Form Applications: The deadline for Year 11 pupils applying to the NTS Sixth Form is **Monday 13th March**. Further information regarding courses offered in the Sixth Form can be found on the Sixth-Form page of the school website or the 2017 Prospectus.

Kind regards,

Mr DS Northwood
Headmaster