



Founded 1714

**The Nelson Thomlinson School**  
**Wigton**  
**Cumbria**  
**CA7 9PX**

*...still "outstanding"*  
**(Ofsted, May 2013)**

**Headmaster:**  
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Dear Parents/Guardians,

In my latest ParentMail message, I said that I would provide more details about the parental questionnaire feedback and attempt to respond to some of the general issues raised.

Firstly, though, I would like to thank once again those parents who submitted written responses – negative and positive – as they are especially helpful in helping us to improve the school and build on what we are doing well. I intend to display some of the very positive comments (anonymized), of which there were many, in Reception. Thank you, in particular, to those parents who praised specific teachers. I have passed on your comments to them personally and they were very much appreciated.

I will now address the general concerns/issues raised. I am sorry that this is a relatively lengthy document but I feel I should respond in as much detail as I can.

**Lesson supervision when the normal classroom teacher is absent**

Some parents complained about poor behaviour in some lessons where cover teachers are used because the normal classroom teacher is absent. Clearly, poor behaviour in any lesson is unacceptable and we expect cover supervisors to uphold the same standards and values as normal teachers. All supervisors have been trained in classroom management techniques and there is a support system in place where they can contact a named member of staff if there are any issues. They are also asked to report any problems to the Deputy Head in charge of Teaching and Learning. We normally issue a 'double sanction detention' for behaviour-related cover lesson matters: one for disruption to learning (held in department), one for treating a cover supervisor differently to a teacher (an 'H16 detention'). In an ideal world, we would not need any class to be covered but staff absence is inevitable sometimes. We are also restricted by how often we can ask normal classroom teachers to cover for their absent colleagues, as per the rules governing their employment. Where cover is short-term and we need a last-minute response to unpredictable illness etc., we employ cover supervisors. Long-term absence is done through supply agencies.

Specifically with regard to Science, this Department has been hit more than others in recent times, and the job of finding suitable replacements for staff on long-term absence has not been an easy one. Please be reassured that we are doing our very best on this front. The Head of Science, Mr Heyes, will shortly be in touch with parents of the pupils concerned to update them.

**Homework**

Some parents complained about inconsistency relating to homework (the amount set, the frequency, the difficulty/lack of challenge, the relevance...). I have reinforced the message to my staff in the first meeting back after half term that this is a concern and that they should strictly follow the school's homework setting policy. I have written to parents before about this matter (January 2017) and would like to reiterate the following:

*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. This is not to say, however, that*

*sometimes we get it 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.*

### **Format of the questionnaire**

Two issues were raised here, one about the lack of 'non applicable/don't know' in the possible responses (which forced parents to commit to agreeing/disagreeing when they had no evidence to support either opinion), and one about the default setting to 'strongly agree', which I admit may have skewed the statistics slightly. We are currently looking into how we can alter the form such that these issues do not arise again.

### **Communication**

Whilst a large number of parents praised us for the quality of communication, one or two sets of parents complained about it, specifically relating to closure of the school in poor weather, transport cancellations etc. and especially by those who are not on Facebook/ParentMail. Firstly, I would encourage those parents to join the school Facebook group or sign up for ParentMail (which had strong support according to the parental questionnaire feedback) if they have not already done so. We have always prided ourselves in the fact that we remain open whenever we can but there may be occasions when we have to close the school. Please note that the **only** reliable sources of information relating to school closure are:

- The official school website
- The official school facebook page
- ParentMail

If you are in any doubt about school closure, please check the above sources and do not rely on hearsay.

More generally, I accept that there are problems communicating with all parents when decisions can only be made at the last minute. (If it is of any consolation, the same problems are experienced by school staff.) I do not have the answers here but am looking into solutions and will update you in due course.

### **Form Tutors and communication from parents**

Some parents complained about a break-down in communication between themselves and their children and/or their child's teachers as a result of inefficiency on the part of their child's Form Tutors. Senior Management spoke to Heads of Year at this week's Pastoral meeting (so that the message filters down to Form Tutors) about the need for messages/letters from teachers to be passed on promptly in the Form Period and for messages/letters to be sent home/collected promptly. I appreciate that there is inconsistency here, and those Tutors who need to become more efficient will be dealt with directly.

### **PE ('Sport for all' and warm-up sessions)**

'Sport for all' (rather than just the most talented) is something that we should promote more, according to some parents. The introduction of the House System was designed partly to address this issue, but it is also worth noting that we have 'B' teams, as well as 'A' teams, in a number of sports with fixtures featuring regularly in the annual sporting calendar.

### **School Food**

We have recently addressed these issues to a large extent by introducing two 'sittings'. This has reduced the lengths of the queues, has encouraged more of our younger pupils to go to tuck and has enabled the catering staff to gauge the quantity of food required. In terms of the *quality* of food, too, a small number of parents complained. You should know that we contract out our catering to *Orian* and have therefore asked the area manager to respond to some of the complaints about the quality *and* quantity of food. This is his response:

In terms of tuck food running out, the Area Manager / Catering Co-ordinator will raise this concern with the Catering Manager.

Healthy Options – e.g. jacket potatoes with various fillings plus other diet meals are available but are apparently not frequently chosen by pupils.

The menu changes on a daily basis and includes the following homemade items:

- Homemade Pie – Steak, Chicken, Meat and Potato, Beef and Vegetable
- Homemade Chicken Curry
- Homemade Pizza – Pepperoni, Ham & Pineapple, Spicy Chicken, Cheese & Tomato
- Homemade Lasagne
- Homemade Vegetable Lasagne
- Homemade Spaghetti Bolognese
- Homemade Quiche

- Selection of fresh vegetables

The following are available every day:

- Baguettes, cooked fresh with various homemade fillings
- Sandwiches with various fillings
- Wraps with various fillings
- Salad Pots – Ham, Turkey, Cheese, Tuna etc.
- Pasta Pots – Chicken, Tuna, Cheese etc.
- Fresh Fruit pots
- Homemade jelly pots
- Selection of homemade cakes

In terms of lunchtime food running out, the only option that can possibly sell out is the 'daily special', but there is always a choice of other hot main course items available.

### **Congestion on Lowmoor Road due to parked cars**

We have no jurisdiction on the highway so are unable to approach parents with regard to parking before and after school. Occasionally, we do have presence from the County Council CEO's (Civil Enforcement Officers) who patrol the road to remind parents of the law regarding parking on yellow lines.

### **Behaviour on buses**

Any complaints we receive from parents, pupils and Reays are forwarded to the Pastoral team for investigation. Generally speaking, we normally receive very few of these, so I would urge the parents concerned here to contact us as a matter of urgency, giving specific details if possible, so that we can take action.

### **Standard of girls' dress in the Sixth Form**

I have spoken to the Head of Sixth Form who agrees that things may have slipped a little here and he will speak to the Sixth Form about this matter at the next available opportunity. By and large, I would argue that many of the girls look smart but accept that some individuals are not adhering to the dress code.

### **"Bullying"**

Some parents claimed that their child was a victim of bullying. I refer parents to this extract from our anti-bullying policy:

*The School gives this categorical assurance: at Nelson Thomlinson we are determined that there will be absolutely no bullying; we cannot make students like each other, but we can ensure they will not be actively unpleasant to each other. If we learn that anyone here is actively being made unhappy by another member of this community, we guarantee to put matters right.*

*Courses of action in Response to Bullying at Nelson Thomlinson:*

*Anyone at Nelson Thomlinson who becomes aware of any incident of bullying MUST report it. Pupils should report incidents of bullying to any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable. Any member of staff informed of such an incident will act immediately and this will usually involve informing the appropriate Assistant Head of Year, Head of Year or Deputy Head for Pastoral who will then investigate the incident by interviewing separately the victim, the alleged bully and any witnesses in order to establish an accurate account of events. Written reports by those involved may be made.*

*Where bullying is of a racist nature, Nelson Thomlinson School will report the matter to the Local Authority using the Racial Incident Form.*

*Where an incident is judged to be of such a serious nature the parents/guardians of both the bully and the victim will be contacted and if needed, invited into school to resolve matters. The School may also involve its Community policeman.*

*Sanctions for bullying will remain at the discretion of the Head after all the factors involved such as the nature of the incident and any previous involvement has been established. Our overriding concern as a School will be for the needs of the victim of bullying rather than those of the bully.*

With regard to point one, we do feel sometimes that delayed action prevents us from nipping things in the bud, so no matter how hard it might be, I would urge parents/children to act sooner rather than later in contacting the school and in providing as much detail as possible. Moreover, it is very hard to act and improve the situation if the complainant does not name themselves or their child.

Sometimes, teasing and 'just mucking around' can be viewed in different ways by the instigator and the child on the receiving end, and sometimes, this can indeed escalate into "bullying", which is generally regarded as much more serious and pertains to longer-term, persistent antagonism. Please understand that we deal with matters as we see fit in the light of concrete evidence and that this evidence will often determine the sanctions we implement.

If antagonism is taking place solely off-site (and is persistently aggressive or results in physical/mental harm), which can sometimes be the case, we ask that you contact the police in the first instance.

If those complainants in the questionnaire feel that our policy has not been followed with regard to a recent incident, please contact the relevant Head of Year without delay. And should you feel that the issue has not been resolved to your satisfaction, please contact Mrs Banks, Deputy in charge of Pastoral matters.

#### **Pupil Premium details**

A couple of sets of parents asked for clarification on what Pupil Premium funds are spent on. This information is available on the school website. Please address any specific concerns to Mrs Banks, Deputy Head in charge of Pastoral matters.

We did receive some complaints, which related to a particular incident or a particular child. **Where the parent/child gave their name, these issues are being dealt with this week via the Pastoral team or the relevant Head of Department.** In other instances, the complainant did not give sufficient detail and/or did not give their name, and without knowing the specifics of the complaint or the complainant's identity, it was hard for us to investigate or address the problem. So,

- If you would like us to respond specifically to an informal complaint or issue (other than those summarized above) and did not provide your name and/or any detail, simply phone the school to pass on the information or to arrange a meeting with the relevant member of staff. Alternatively, please write to us.
- If you would like to make a more formal complaint, please follow the complaints procedure (as outlined on our website).

As ever, we will continue to do our utmost to improve the school and resolve any matters you wish to raise.

Kind regards,



Mr DS Northwood  
Headmaster