

Inspection of Mackenzie Thorpe Centre

Beech Grove, South Bank, Middlesbrough TS6 6SU

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
------------------------------	-------------

The quality of education	Good
--------------------------	-------------

Behaviour and attitudes	Good
-------------------------	-------------

Personal development	Good
----------------------	-------------

Leadership and management	Good
---------------------------	-------------

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected
--	--------------------------

Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
--	------------

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff meet each pupil when they arrive at school and know just how each pupil likes to be greeted. This makes sure that the day starts calmly because pupils are reassured that today holds no surprises. Pupils feel valued and respected. Staff know them well and understand their needs exceptionally well. Comments from pupils such as, 'I know it's important to respect everyone as we are all different' show pupils' growing understanding of the world around them. Staff believe that this is key to developing pupils' independence.

All staff want pupils to achieve as much as they can. 'The sky is my only limit,' exclaimed one pupil. Pupils recognise that staff are there when they need them. 'Staff keep me calm and then I can learn more,' commented one pupil. 'My brain is like a sieve some days,' said another pupil. 'Staff prompt me and then I remember'.

Pupils nearly always behave well. When they do not, staff understand that this is because they are trying to communicate their feelings. When a situation is likely to upset a pupil, staff work with them to help them to stay calm and manage their feelings. Pupils told the inspectors there was very little bullying in and around school. School records confirm that few pupils are bullied.

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

Pupils who attend the school all have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The majority have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). School leaders believe that this should not prevent pupils from achieving as much as possible during their time in school.

School leaders are very clear that preparing pupils to learn is the first step on their journey to success. So great are the needs of some pupils that they initially find it difficult to set foot in the building. When this happens, staff move lessons outside, whatever the weather. Gradually, pupils begin to trust staff and take the first steps to successful learning.

Pupils' individual needs are a top priority for all staff. Timetables are carefully crafted for each pupil. This helps pupils to make as much progress as possible socially, emotionally and across the curriculum. Pupils learn well in most areas of the curriculum. The mathematics and English curriculums are well planned overall. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) includes relationships and sex education. This is delivered in an age-appropriate way to all pupils.

Science is less well planned and delivered. Work in pupils' books shows that this subject is not as clearly sequenced in some areas of the school. This reduces the amount that some pupils learn in science. Many staff are new to the school. Some pupils are unable to write. Staff record work for pupils, but some lack the scientific vocabulary to describe the work pupils are doing. This leads to inaccurate recording.

Pupils often confidently read text. However, pupils' comprehension of what they read is often less good. Few pupils develop a love of reading. This is often due to pupils' lack of understanding of the meaning of the printed words. Regular trips to the library to select books of their choice helps pupils to improve their vocabulary and reading skills.

Staff start to assess pupils' needs before they arrive in school. Staff make regular checks on pupils' understanding, and use this to plan further learning.

Pupils nearly always behave well. Behaviour that disrupts learning does not often happen. Pupils feel that staff understand their needs and respect them. The principal does not believe in excluding pupils. Staff recognise that pupils' difficult behaviour is a form of communication. Leaders support staff to try to work out what it is that is causing the pupil concern and to enable the pupil to overcome the issue.

The PSHE curriculum helps pupils to learn how to recognise inappropriate behaviour in others. They also learn the impact of their own behaviour on others. This includes age-appropriate discussions on issues including healthy relationships and sexual consent.

School leaders have a clear focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development from the time they arrive in school. A very individual approach is taken to increase pupils' feeling of inclusion in, for example, their local community. This often starts through travel training. Staff accompany pupils to their home area and help them to identify key features, such as the health centre. They then work on identifying bus routes to and from school and the shops, for instance. When pupils are confident with bus travel, the aim is to take pupils on longer train journeys to Newcastle. These slow and carefully designed steps are part of a carefully thought-out plan to prepare pupils for further education or the world of work.

Currently, local authorities offer pupils independent careers education. School leaders are planning to increase the independent guidance for pupils by using an independent careers adviser.

The managing director of education provides focused support and challenge to the school's leaders. Through regular visits, she ensures that the independent school standards are all met.

Leaders check on the impact of their work carefully. They identify strengths and weaknesses and set effective targets for improvement. Staff say that they appreciate the support given to them by leaders. Staff also say that they are offered a range of continuing professional development opportunities that enable them to do their job well and with confidence.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's safeguarding policy is on the company's website and makes reference to the latest government guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education 2021'. The school has trained five designated safeguarding leads (DSL) for the school. This ensures that there is a DSL on site at all times.

The principal and deputy principal provide regular training for all staff. This ensures that staff are clear about what to do if a pupil is in need.

Safeguarding records show that the deputy principal identifies pupils in need of help and works closely with outside agencies to secure the relevant support. Records are securely kept in chronological order. Currently, each new event for pupils starts a new chronological entry. This leads to multiple separate entries for each pupil. The deputy principal agrees that although the system works currently, as the school grows, the system may become confusing.

Checks on the single central record are diligently kept, which ensures that staff are recruited safely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- The school has not been open long and COVID-19 restrictions initially slowed the growth in pupil numbers. Many staff are still very new in post and require further training. Despite this, leaders have created a curriculum that is effectively planned and meets the needs of pupils. Most subjects are carefully sequenced. Discussions with pupils show that pupils learn and remember much of what has been taught in line with their level of need. However, in science the curriculum is not as effectively sequenced. End-points are not always clearly defined. The building blocks that support pupils' learning are not as clearly identified as they are in other subject areas. Leaders are aware that the science curriculum is not as far developed as other subject areas. Staff also need further training so they can record pupils' actions and learning using scientific vocabulary. When redeveloping the science curriculum, leaders need to ensure that the key knowledge they want pupils to remember is clearly identified.
- Although safeguarding records are kept in chronological order, entries for each pupil are not sufficiently well linked. A new chronology is started for each concern raised. This makes it difficult to spot patterns of behaviour or linked issues. Leaders should ensure that a system is in place that enables pupils' records to be kept together without having to open a new file for each issue. This action would enable staff to spot pertinent evidence and linked incidents more quickly.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	147914
DfE registration number	807/6002
Local authority	Redcar and Cleveland
Inspection number	10202214
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	23
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	North Eastern Autism Service
Chair	Gavin Bestford
Headteacher	Tracey Train
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,000 to £110,397
Telephone number	01642 810730
Website	www.ne-as.org.uk/mackenzie-thorpe-centre
Email address	mtc@ne-as.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school was registered by the Department for Education (DfE) in August 2020. This is the school's first standard inspection.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school caters for the needs of pupils who have a diagnosis of ASD. Some pupils have additional needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- The Mackenzie Thorpe Centre is an independent special school based in South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland for learners aged five to 19 years.
- The school's mission is 'working together to inspire, support and equip people with autism and neurodiversity to fulfil their potential in life.'
- The school is part of the North East Autism Society.
- The school is within its registration agreed with the DfE.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The inspection team met with the principal and the assistant principal, who is currently the DSL for the school. The inspector also met with the school's managing director for education.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, English (including reading), science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also visited learning in other curriculum areas, including history and art. Curriculum plans were checked in most areas of the curriculum and discussions were held with leaders in some of these areas.
- The inspection team checked health and safety documents, documents relating to the school's fire evacuation policy, first-aid boxes to check the contents, and staff certificates of attendance on first-aid courses.
- A tour of the building was carried out to check the school's compliance with part 5 of the independent school standards.
- The lead inspector met with the DSL to check on the quality of systems used to record safeguarding incidents. Further discussion focused on the frequency and

content of staff training, as well as the school's role in multidisciplinary safeguarding meetings.

- Discussions were also held with staff to check their safeguarding knowledge and the frequency of training.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
-------------------------------	------------------

Moira Banks	Ofsted Inspector
-------------	------------------

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021