Inspection of Thorntree Academy

The Greenway, Middlesbrough TS3 9NH

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 April 2024

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Paul Watson. This school is part of Extol Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Julie Deville, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jackie Butterworth.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Thorntree are happy and safe. They embody the school values of 'learn, thrive, and celebrate'. Pupils appreciate the work that leaders do to promote high aspirations for later life through the school's 'Future You' programme. Pupils of all ages show respect to adults and each other. The positive relationships they establish with staff ensure that classrooms have a positive and purposeful atmosphere.

There are high expectations for behaviour and achievement. Staff give pupils the tools and support they need to meet these high expectations. Pupils talk about their learning with enthusiasm and interest. Pupils' positive attitudes towards one another ensure a calm and orderly environment in and around the school. Poor behaviour is infrequent. If it does occur, well-trained staff deal with it appropriately. Pupils demonstrate a resilient approach to school, with one pupil commenting, 'Birds don't just fly, they sometimes fall down and get back up.'

Parents have positive attitudes towards the school. They appreciate the way the leaders engage with them. One parent summed up the thoughts of many others by saying, 'This school is a school that cares passionately about its kids. It challenges our kids to behave, to speak properly, to care and to learn new things.'

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

Leaders have taken effective action to improve the curriculum for pupils. The curriculum is well sequenced. It meets the needs of pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils with SEND benefit from tailored support. This allows them to access the same learning as their peers. Where this is not the case, staff put bespoke programmes in place for pupils to allow them to make progress.

In the early years, the curriculum takes account of children's lower starting points on entry. There is a clear focus on communication and language. Adults support and encourage children to develop into confident and inquisitive learners. They tailor the well-planned curriculum to children's needs and interests. Children are ready for the next stage of their education.

The school's focus on early reading and phonics is clear. Staff deliver the school's phonics programme with consistency and fidelity. Pupils develop confidence and fluency in their reading. Talented staff ask probing questions in reading sessions to test understanding. However, published phonics outcomes for 2023 do not reflect the impact of the school's quality phonics provision. These outcomes were well-below national figures.

Pupils enjoy their learning in other subjects across the curriculum. As a result of carefully planned lessons, they build a secure base of key knowledge and skills. They have an appreciable recall of this learning. They apply this to new concepts in the classroom. The school has tailored the curriculum content to include local

heritage. Pupils could talk with understanding about Joseph Pease, a local railway pioneer. They knew he had changed Middlesbrough by opening the first railway lines in the area.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning. They understand the well-established classroom routines. As a result, behaviour does not get in the way of learning. Leaders ensure that pupils who may exhibit more challenging behaviour are well supported. Pupils enjoy coming to school. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is too high. Leaders understand the causes of absence. The actions that the school takes to improve attendance are having positive impact in some cases, but this is not sufficiently widespread to improve attendance quickly enough.

The school has significant strength in the way it raises pupils' aspirations through the 'Future You' programme. Across the whole school, this programme allows all pupils to understand more about careers and future employability. It raises pupils' aspirations. Pupils believe they can do anything they want to in later life. One pupil said: 'Teachers believe in us and help us build up our confidence and resilience.'

Pupils have a keen sense of equality and tolerance. They understand that discrimination of any sort is unacceptable. The 'Power of Women' ambassadors spoke with enthusiasm about the role they play in school. They visit local businesses and enjoy opportunities such as stargazing. This helps to further widen pupils' horizons. The spiritual development of pupils is effective. Pupils demonstrate commendable attitudes to those who have different faiths, religions or beliefs.

Leaders in the school and the trust focus on the pupils of Thorntree. All decisions address pupils' best interests. Governors and trustees have a clear understanding of their roles in school. They fulfil these roles with diligence and commitment. Staff feel very well supported around workload and well-being. Leaders engage with parents well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieve national standards in the phonics screening check is well below the national figure. This means that too many pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of education. The school must take action to ensure the proportion of pupils achieving national standards in phonics increases.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is too high. This means that these pupils miss a great deal of their education, struggle to catch up

with their learning and fall behind their peers. The school should take further action to ensure these pupils attend school regularly.

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 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

Unique reference number	147765
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	10323121
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	242
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jackie Butterworth
CEO of the trust	Julie Deville
Headteacher	Paul Watson
Website	thorntreeacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Thorntree Academy became a sponsor-led academy in March 2020. When its predecessor school, Thorntree Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school is part of Extol Academy Trust.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- The school operates a breakfast club for pupils who attend the school.
- The proportion of pupils who are entitled to receive the government's additional pupil premium funding is well above average.

Information about this inspection

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

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.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, other school leaders, school staff, some parents, representatives of the governing body, representatives from the trust and the trust's external school improvement adviser.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and geography. For each deep dive, the 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.
- An inspector listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors also met with leaders and discussed the curriculum 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the online staff survey, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Richard Beadnall, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jean Watt	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Cottrell	Ofsted Inspector

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