

Inspection of Mackenzie Thorpe Centre

Beech Grove, South Bank, Middlesbrough TS6 6SU

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 April 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending school. Over time, they develop strong and trusting relationships with the staff who support them. These relationships help pupils to feel calm and to focus on their learning. Pupils feel cared for and valued.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils meet these most of the time. Sometimes, pupils become frustrated, resulting in poor behaviour. Staff resolve this quickly and effectively. Bullying and other acts of unkindness are rare.

Staff are ambitious for what pupils can achieve during their time at the school. They are determined that pupils will fulfil their potential and that they are well prepared for adulthood. Pupils follow a bespoke curriculum that is designed to meet their specific needs. Most pupils achieve well.

The school provides pupils with a varied range of opportunities that enhance their learning. This builds on what they learn in the curriculum. For example, completing 'travel training', that enables them to develop greater independence. Pupils enjoy the opportunities that they have to learn in the local community. Pupils participate in weekly clubs, such as chess, that allow them to explore their interests. Many contribute more widely, such as to the school council or the society talent show.

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 an education, health and care (EHC) plan with a diagnosis of autism. They join the school at non-standard times through their education. The school creates a personalised curriculum for each pupil. This reflects their prior knowledge and their needs. Staff adjust their teaching effectively to enable pupils to access their learning. This helps pupils to progress well from their starting points. If staff consider it to be appropriate, pupils complete national assessments, such as GCSEs.

The school provides staff with extensive training. This helps them to understand the needs of pupils at the school and how to meet these. Staff teach lessons that develop pupils' understanding of the curriculum. However, sometimes, the activities that pupils complete do not emphasise the most important knowledge that the school intends pupils to learn. This slows pupils progress through the curriculum. Teachers regularly check on what pupils know and can do, for example by asking questions about taught content. They use this to inform future lessons, helping pupils to achieve well.

The school prioritises strengthening pupils' reading and communication skills. Staff use stories, songs and rhymes to help pupils learn new vocabulary. They are inclusive of pupils who are nonverbal, using symbols and Makaton to help them communicate their thoughts effectively. A small number of pupils learn phonics. This helps them to become increasingly confident in segmenting and blending words.

Sometimes, staff do not implement the school's phonics scheme consistently. For example, by introducing pupils to alternative reading strategies. This does not support pupils to learn the curriculum as quickly as they could.

Staff are expert at helping pupils to manage their behaviour. They recognise when pupils are struggling to remain calm and use agreed strategies to help them. Staff support pupils to communicate their emotions more effectively. This has helped the number of incidents of poor behaviour reduce over time.

Pupils attend school regularly. When pupils are absent, the school quickly identifies reasons for this and any additional support that may be needed. As a result, pupils' attendance is rising and above that of similar schools.

The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum prepares pupils well for life beyond school. Pupils learn important knowledge, such as how to keep themselves safe, including online, and how to keep physically and mentally healthy. The school adapts its curriculum to the needs of pupils. For example, by ensuring that pupils learn life skills, such as shopping for ingredients and cooking. This supports them to develop their independence. The school's careers programme supports pupils and their families to identify appropriate next steps in their education, employment or training.

The proprietor has clear oversight of the impact of the school's work. Trustees provide effective scrutiny. Staff appreciate leaders' positive approach to supporting their workload and well-being. The school continues to meet the independent school standards and fulfils the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's phonics scheme is not consistently taught as intended. Sometimes pupils are introduced to mixed strategies to learning to read. This reduces how effectively pupils progress through the school's phonics scheme. The school should ensure that its phonics scheme is taught consistently well and with fidelity.
- Sometimes, the activities that teachers use in lessons do not emphasise the most important knowledge that they intend pupils to learn. This limits how effectively pupils learn this most important knowledge. The school should ensure that lesson activities consistently support pupils to learn the intended curriculum well.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	147914
DfE registration number	807/6002
Local authority	Redcar and Cleveland
Inspection number	10342166
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	North East Autism Society
Chair	Rakesh Chopra
Headteacher	Tracey Train
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,827 to £138,069
Telephone number	01642 810730
Website	www.ne-as.org.uk/mackenzie-thorpe-centre
Email address	info@ne-as.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 to 11 November 2021

Information about this school

- Mackenzie Thorpe Centre is an independent special school for pupils with autism. All pupils have EHC plans.
- Pupils join the school at various times throughout the school year. The places of all current pupils are commissioned by Redcar and Cleveland local authority.
- The school received one material change inspection since the previous standard inspection. This took place on 13 December 2023. The inspection was to consider a change to the maximum number of pupils on the school's roll and a change to the permitted age range of pupils who attend the school.
- The school is registered to provide education for up to 45 pupils aged from 4 to 19. Currently the school only has pupils on roll from age 5 to 16.
- Some pupils at Mackenzie Thorpe Centre attend some of their education at Redcar and Cleveland College, part of 'The Education Training Collective' (URN 130576). The school does not use any unregistered alternative provision.
- The school operates from a single site. It is located at: Beech Grove, South Bank, Middlesbrough TS6 6SU.

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.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspectors discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with the principal and the chair of the board of trustees. They also met with other senior leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and personal development.
- The lead inspector met with the society's director of education and spoke with a representative of Redcar and Cleveland local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading), mathematics, preparation for adulthood and PSHE. 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 curriculum plans, reviewed samples of work and visited lessons to understand the quality of the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation regarding the support pupils with SEND receive. They looked at the quality of the provision for pupils with SEND in lessons.
- Inspectors looked at a range of information regarding behaviour. They observed the behaviour of pupils in classrooms and at social times.
- Inspectors reviewed additional documentation, including the school's health and safety policy, risk assessments and fire safety checks.
- The lead inspector toured the school site with senior leaders.
- The views of pupils and staff who responded to Ofsted's surveys were considered. Inspectors also held discussions with staff and pupils at the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Thomas Wraith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ian Rawstorne

His Majesty's Inspector

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