

Inspection of Appleton Thorn Primary School

Arley Road, Appleton Thorn, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 4RW

Inspection dates:	1 and 2 April 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
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 Zoe Jones. This school is part of The Challenge 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 (CEO), Andy Moorcroft, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Howard Platt.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Appleton Thorn Primary School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged Appleton Thorn Primary School to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, before it opened as an academy. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this welcoming village school bring its motto of 'individuals achieving, our community succeeding' to life. Pupils are excited to come into school each day. Staff form nurturing relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to flourish and feel happy.

The school has high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), consistently live up to these expectations. Pupils achieve well.

Pupils relish every opportunity to learn. Their behaviour is exemplary around the school. From the Reception Year to Year 6, there is a calm and nurturing atmosphere that enables pupils to focus completely on their learning.

Pupils take full advantage of the vast array of enrichment activities offered. For example, they benefit from outdoor learning activities and enjoy a variety of residential trips, some of which are overseas. These have been carefully designed to develop pupils' wider interests, talents and skills.

Pupils contribute to their school and community in many ways. They carry out responsibilities such as being school councillors and librarians. Older pupils design and lead events such as their 'Hallowe'en scream teas' to raise money for local charities. Pupils play an integral part in the village's yearly 'Bawming the Thorn' festival.

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

The school has designed an ambitious curriculum that carefully identifies what pupils need to know and remember over time. Staff benefit from high-quality curriculum training. This helps them to choose appropriate resources, activities and questions to help pupils to learn. However, in a few subjects, some teaching does not clearly follow the progression of learning that is set out in the curriculum. Consequently, some pupils do not build their knowledge securely over time.

Staff promptly identify and resolve misconceptions in pupils' learning. They use the school's checking systems accurately to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school uses this information well to shape pupils' future learning.

In the main, the school provides ample opportunities for pupils to practise retrieving the essential knowledge, skills and vocabulary that they learn. However, in a few subjects, this does not happen. This means that some pupils struggle to remember what has been taught and do not have the secure foundations on which to build new learning.

The school places great importance on the teaching of reading. It begins in the early years, where children enjoy listening to and sharing stories and rhymes. The school has ensured that staff have developed expertise in teaching phonics. Those pupils who find reading more difficult are well supported to catch up quickly. Most pupils are fluent readers by the end of key stage 1. Older pupils are enthusiastic readers. They understand

that reading will support them in their wider learning. They have access to a wide variety of well-chosen, high-quality texts within classrooms.

The school identifies the additional needs of pupils with SEND quickly and accurately. Staff adapt activities skilfully so that these pupils access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Pupils with SEND are well supported to succeed. They are fully involved in all aspects of school life.

Pupils are friendly and well mannered. They are avid, determined learners who are resilient and do not give up. Throughout the school, attendance rates are high. The school takes rigorous and effective actions to ensure that this is maintained.

Pupils' personal development is exceptionally well thought through. The school offers pupils a wide range of clubs, such as cricket, rugby and coding. Pupils talk excitedly about the many tournaments and competitions they take part in. These experiences help them to develop and share their talents and interests with others.

Pupils learn about their own emotional health and how they can manage this. They are taught about keeping safe outside of school, including the potential risks online. They know how to keep themselves physically healthy, and they can identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Pupils develop empathy and respect for other cultures and beliefs. As a result, they are highly considerate of the views and beliefs of different groups of people. Pupils are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

The trust and the local governing body have a range of skills that equip them well to oversee the school. The school has welcomed the expertise and resources that the trust brings, while retaining its unique village school character. Trustees and governors successfully hold school leaders to account for the quality of education that children receive. Staff spoken to were positive about the school. They said that they appreciate the ways that all school leaders pay consideration to their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, the lessons that teachers deliver are not aligned precisely enough to the order of the intended curriculum. In these instances, some pupils are hindered in building their knowledge securely over time. The school should ensure that staff deliver the curriculum as intended.
- In a few subjects, pupils do not recall their prior learning securely. This hinders pupils' progress through these subject curriculums. The school should refine its processes to check on what pupils know and can confidently remember over time in these subjects.

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	149676
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	10378047
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Howard Platt
CEO of the trust	Andy Moorcroft
Headteacher	Zoe Jones
Website	www.appletonthornprimary.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.
- The school manages an on-site breakfast and after-school club.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher and other senior leaders and staff. She also met with members of the trust, including the chair of trustees, and the governing board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. 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 considered the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The lead inspector observed some pupils from Year 1 to Year 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and breaktimes. They also spoke with pupils about their experiences of school. There were no responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments. The inspector also considered the responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Ruth Moran, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sandra Hamilton

Ofsted Inspector

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