

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

EXPANDING PRIMARY THRIVING WITH THE HELP OF A NEW TEACHING

BLOCK AND EXTENSION WHICH HAS CREATED AN ADDITIONAL 60 PLACES FOR YOUNGSTERS

A place of learning 'which has a soul and feels the love'

'Beautiful empty shell' transformed into a 'working school home' in space of 12 months

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Totley Primary School is thriving following a much-needed expansion to create an area of additional teaching space.

The £2.1million project, which was completed a little over a year ago, has seen the construction of a new two-storey teaching block to the rear of the school on Sunnyvale Road in Totley.

A single-storey extension was also added to the existing school building, creating an additional 60 school places for children from the surrounding area at a time when demand for places is high.

Despite the period of disruption that Totley Primary School endured during the project, Headteacher Ben Paxman said the project has created a modern learning environment with the very best facilities in which children can flourish.

He said: "It's been a really big period of change for the school. Having been traditionally a one-form entry school with around 200 students, due to a big demand for increased pupil spaces we've taken the leap and grown with the help of the local authority.

"The whole process started three or four years ago when the consultation was in place and once it was approved we had to go through the planning permission and design procedure first.

He added: "The net result of that was this new part of the school was built following quite a disrupted 18-months with lots of building work going on, but it's so been worth it and what we've now got is a 21st century facility to support Totley pupils for years to come.

"The old part of the school was built in the 1950s. We've tried really hard to look after and maintain it but when you compare it to the new part of the school, the room sizes are bigger in the new part, the ceiling height is a lot higher, we've got the technology, touch screens, the latest hardware and computers for teachers to use installed right from the start and it's just a much more efficient building, so cheaper to heat too."

The new two-storey teaching block, which sits to the rear of the school, houses six additional classrooms, a staff room, media suite, library, and dual food technology and science lab.

Parts of the original school building have also been renovated. For example, what was once a general classroom has been turned into a science-lab come food-technology room with built-in cookers, hobs, ventilation,



Pupils enjoying the books in the school library

lots of surface space, work-tops and a hard floor.

Totley Primary also holds a Mental Health Schools Award for Schools and now includes a 'wellbeing hub' as parts of the school's focus on student wellbeing.

This features sensory equipment such as bubble machines and aromatherapy devices to support children

with sensory needs but to also promote general well-being.

The expansion has also allowed the school to facilitate larger student numbers and is now two-form entry, meaning there are two classes per year group from Foundation Stage – or Reception – up to Year 3.

And, in three years time,

classes will go right through to Year 6, meaning that by the end of the process there will be a total of around 420 pupils at Totley Primary School.

"The new environment gives us a real aspirational feel to the school," Mr Paxman added. "I think, certainly for older students in Years 4, 5 and 6 who will benefit

from those brand new classrooms, it feels like a stepping stone between primary and secondary.

"It's that little bit more grown-up in feel – the decor and the layout is more grown-up really and the sense of space is more akin to a secondary school. We've already found that children respond to the learning envi-

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Classmates at Totley Primary School



Pupils in the sensory room at the school



Pupils in the school's sensory room



The school's library is very popular with pupils



Pupils in the IT suite

ronment really well."

Mr Paxman says it has been a challenge to develop the new building into a 'home' for both students and staff.

He said: "A year ago we were left with a beautiful, empty shell but to actually turn that into a home if you like, a working school and a learning environment which

has got a soul and feels loved, that's taken a lot of work.

"A lot of that has been around the displays in the classrooms, making sure that aligns with the rest of the school but also celebrates pupils work and making the most of the new technology that we've got on offer. We've now got WiFi through the school so

we're able to use the new computing facilities. We've got a green screen in our IT suite so we're starting to explore using more advanced audiovisual software and techniques. Robotics is also a big push for school at the moment.

"We're trying to integrate computing and, robotics particularly, into our cur-

riculum so that children have got a real sense of computing for a purpose, not just programming on a screen. They're learning that we can make things move and get robots to perform tasks.

"The new build has clarified that aspiration for us. We really want the very best for our children."

As part of its aspiration,

the school also recently invited a group of parents from a range of different careers and sectors to speak to the students about their professions and studies, and how they too can earn the qualifications to reach their goals.

Mr Paxman said: "That's something we're really trying to do. Even at this stage in primary education we're re-

ally trying to get the children to aim high, but also to think realistically about their careers and know that we can't all be YouTubers or footballers. It's about teaching them to think about what they can become if they work hard at school and gain their academic qualifications – to get them thinking and to get that spark."