

Red Balloon - Norwich

76 Earlham Road, , Norwich, NR2 3DF

Inspection dates 17–19 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding school

- The head of centre, supported by trustees and colleagues from the parent charity, works highly effectively to promote outstanding teaching and excellent learning and progress.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are highly committed learners who work hard during lessons. The centre's work to keep students safe is exemplary.
- The centre makes exemplary provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their personal development is also exceptional and provides a solid platform for them to thrive academically. Students have a strong grasp of traditional British values, such as respect, the law and democracy.
- Students are provided with a range of courses that are matched precisely to their learning needs. This includes sessions dedicated to ensuring they acquire essential basic skills and courses that enable them to fulfil their ambitions. However, while students gain good computer skills some of the equipment they are obliged to use is dated.
- Teaching is outstanding and teachers have excellent knowledge of the subjects they teach. They make sure students are fully involved in their learning. However, in some lessons, teachers do not use questions sufficiently to test and extend students' knowledge.
- Teachers assess students' personal development and their academic progress with meticulous accuracy. Teachers involve students very effectively in these assessments. They provide them with detailed knowledge about how well they are progressing and how to bring about further improvements.
- All students had very poor attendance at their previous schools. At the centre, their attendance improves dramatically.
- Students make exceptional progress, with many attaining outstandingly well in their academic courses. Attainment in GCSE courses compares favourably with the relevant national averages, as does the proportion of students who gain higher grades. In recent years all students have either continued with their education or entered employment after leaving the centre.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed parts of eight lessons. He was accompanied on one of the observations by the headteacher.
- The inspector met with representatives from The Red Balloon Charity, the Chair of the Trustees, the headteacher, teachers and students.
- In addition to observing lessons, the inspector looked at students' written work and considered information provided by the centre about students' attainment and progress.
- The inspector scrutinised documents relating to the centre's evaluation of its performance, its plans for future improvements, the arrangements to keep students safe, including the centre's safeguarding policy on its website, and details about the range of subjects and activities that students are taught.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to trigger an analysis. However, the inspector considered the views expressed in letters that parents had submitted. He also spoke with representatives of schools and services who refer students for placement at the centre, and considered the views expressed by staff in 11 inspection questionnaires.

Inspection team

Godfrey Bancroft, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The centre is an independent school which provides places for up to 18 students, aged 11 to 16 years.
- Students of sixth form age sometimes attend the centre, although at the time of the inspection there were no students in this age group.
- The centre is registered as a special school. It caters for students who have been traumatised by bullying or other events. All students have additional social, emotional and mental health needs. A small number of students have an education, health and care plan.
- There are currently no students who come from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language.
- The centre is part of group of centres that are situated in various parts of the country and which are operated by The Red Balloon Charitable Trust.
- The centre is accommodated in a large house in a residential suburb not far from the centre of Norwich.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Wherever appropriate, make sure that teachers use questions effectively to challenge students, to extend their thinking and to refine their subject knowledge and skills of analysis.
- Renew and replace the computers available to students as necessary so that they can acquire more extensive computer skills.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The head of centre and her staff, supported by leaders from the Red Balloon Charity, are working very effectively to ensure that students thrive, both personally and academically. They also ensure that students are supported by highly effective teaching.
- Leaders make frequent checks to ensure that the centre is fully up to date in meeting all the independent school regulations.
- Leaders place significant importance on promoting equal opportunities for all students and eliminating discrimination in its various forms. This is something the centre does very successfully. Students recognise how hard the centre is working to support them, and in their turn, behave exceptionally well. They and their parents are full of praise for everything the centre provides on their behalf.
- Centre leaders ensure that students are supported by high quality teaching in all their subjects and courses. They check regularly to ensure that teaching meets their high expectations. Staff morale is high and the centre manages teachers' performance well. Teachers are pleased with the support they receive to improve their teaching. The arrangements for teachers' continued professional development are highly effective and there are good opportunities for staff to share their expertise and skills.
- The centre evaluates its own performance accurately. It is supported in this process by leaders from the Red Balloon Charity, who support the centre very well. Leaders identify what is needed to sustain the centre's excellent performance. They use carefully thought out criteria to evaluate the success of everything they do.
- Students and their parents and carers are very positive about all aspects of the centre's work. One parent reflected the views of many when she said, 'I cannot thank the staff enough for their patience and kindness. My son's learning has come on in leaps and bounds.' Another parent wrote: 'Our daughter is settled and happy. Her confidence has improved dramatically'. The centre ensures that parents and carers are well informed about their children's academic performance and personal development.
- The centre provides students with an excellent range of learning opportunities. It does everything possible to place students on courses that will capture their interest and help them realise their ambitions. The majority of students take a range of academic GCSE courses. The centre takes great care to ensure that students also develop secure basic skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders accept that they need to update the equipment currently used by students so that they can develop their computer skills to the full. Students also receive excellent personal and careers guidance to underpin their progression to the next stage of their education or for entry into the world of employment.
- Provision to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal development is excellent. Students are very aware of the traditional British values that underpin modern society. Students also have a good understanding of the work of government institutions, the law and the cultures and traditions of people whose backgrounds are different to their own. The centre provides many additional courses, such as personal finance, visits to national restaurant chains, first aid and TITAN (a course which helps students gain the confidence to use public transport). This makes a highly effective contribution to their personal development.
- Arrangements to ensure that students are safe are very effective and fully meet current requirements. Safeguarding policies are readily available for parents and carers on the centre's website and in its brochure. The centre ensures that policies are reviewed and updated regularly. All staff are fully briefed and trained and take great care to adhere to these arrangements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is excellent and is provided by a board of trustees appointed by the Red Balloon Charity.

The trustees come from a variety of backgrounds and are very knowledgeable about all aspects of the centre's work.

- The trustees provide exceptional levels of encouragement and support, which are greatly appreciated by staff. They are quick to recognise and praise the things that are going well, such as the high quality of teaching. However, they also ask searching questions if they feel any aspect of the centre's work is not meeting their expectations.
- The trustees, supported by staff from the Red Balloon Charity, have a detailed insight into the quality of teaching. They know the staff and students well and visit regularly to observe activities and to discuss the centre's development.
- In partnership with centre leaders, trustees oversee the systems for managing the performance of teachers. They ensure that when resources permit, any rewards directly reflect teachers' success in bringing about improvements in students' progress.
- The trustees also work very effectively to ensure that resources are used wisely and that students are safe. They ensure that the safeguarding policy on the school's website complies fully with paragraphs 32(1) and 32(1) (c) of the independent school standards and makes regular checks to ensure it continues to do so.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Teachers and other staff quickly establish caring and supportive relationships with students. Teachers have high expectations and manage students' behaviour exceptionally well. After joining the centre, students soon gain confidence and rapidly become self-motivated. They are highly committed learners and work hard in lessons. Students give thoughtful responses to their teachers' questions and show their interest in what they are learning by posing questions of their own.
- Students are very keen to help in any way they can and to take responsibility for aspects of life in the centre. They are very appreciative of the way the centre consults with them about how successfully it is meeting their needs. Students are full of praise for the centre and are thoughtful and reflective about their needs and about what might be improved. One very able student made an excellent speech about the centre's work to the assembled multitude at a 'golf day' to raise funds to support the centre's work. The speech was very well received.
- Almost all students arrive at the centre with very low previous attendance records. Some have not attended school at all for a considerable time. The attendance of all students increases dramatically once they arrive in the centre. Even when they do not have to attend, such as when they have completed their examination courses, students still turn up because they enjoy being at the centre so much. One student commented, 'I'm proud of our school. Our maths lessons are really good.' Another student added, 'I feel comfortable, but at the same time I am learning a lot.'
- The centre provides an excellent programme to help students gain a firm grasp of traditional British values and to prepare them to make a positive contribution to modern society. Students are able to gain qualifications in first aid. They attend the annual carol concert and exhibit their art work with great confidence as part of their Arts Gold award course. Students show respect for each other and for the adults who support them. In this respect, as in so many others, staff provide excellent role models of how to show courtesy and sensitivity to others, qualities that students readily adopt for themselves.
- The centre's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- When staff are appointed, the checks to make sure they are suitable to work with young people are very thorough. The centre undertakes detailed risk assessments for all its activities. It also works very effectively to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to recognise potential risks and to keep them safe.
- Leaders ensure that parents and carers are fully informed about the centre's arrangements to keep their children safe. Parents and carers also have access to appropriate documentation on the centre's website.

- The care and attention that staff give to students' personal and social development are exemplary. Staff do everything possible to help students to settle in when they first arrive at the centre. Students quickly gain in confidence. They trust the staff and know that should they experience any problems, either with their work or in their personal lives, staff will provide them with all the support they need. The centre ensures students have access to high quality counselling should they need it. They are full of praise for the guidance and help this counselling provides for them.
- Bullying in its various forms is almost nonexistent. Students are sensitive and supportive towards each other and very aware of the negative impact that bullying can have. Many of the students have experienced extreme bullying at the schools they have previously attended or when they were in their local community. Students say that the centre's insistence that bullying of any form is unacceptable is immensely reassuring. The excellent work of the centre means that students rapidly gain an understanding of bullying in all its forms, including that of the potential dangers posed by misuse of the internet and social media.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is highly effective. Teachers ensure that students enjoy their courses, quickly settle to their work in lessons and make significant strides in their academic development and progress. They overcome problems that had previously 'loomed large' for them, and their personal development and self-confidence thrive.
- Teachers are very aware of the difficulties that students have faced prior to joining the centre. They are very well informed about the personal and learning needs of each student. They make every effort to provide courses that will appeal to students' interests and will help them to achieve their ambitions. Learning opportunities are tailored precisely to students' needs. Staff quickly identify any gaps in their learning and the well-designed activities and sensitive support they provide soon begin to eliminate any shortfalls.
- Teachers provide excellent opportunities for students to enhance their basic skills and the teaching of reading, literacy and numeracy in particular is often exceptional. Teachers take every opportunity for students to apply their communication, literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge in the other subjects they study. This lays down a very solid foundation for their learning in all subjects. Homework is regularly set and makes a valuable contribution to students' learning.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge that enables them to teach effectively in all the courses that the centre provides. This means they are highly competent in responding to students' needs and in enabling them to achieve their potential. This includes the provision made for disabled students, those who have special educational needs and the most able.
- Teachers make good use of questions to challenge and extend students' thinking and knowledge. Students are also very willing to pose questions and to contribute to debate. However, in some lessons teachers are too ready to give answers, rather than use questions to challenge students to consider things in greater depth for themselves or to draw out their skills of analysis and their knowledge.
- Support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs (in this case, all students) is excellent. The most-able students are also challenged to achieve to the best of their ability and are supported well. No matter what the students' abilities might be, teachers help them to catch up with any learning they might have missed and to make the progress of which they are capable.
- The work seen in lessons, in students' books and the outcomes from examinations all indicate that teachers' assessments of students' progress and attainment are accurate. The progress of each student in terms of their personal development and their academic achievement is tracked meticulously. Teachers also assess students' progress in terms of their readiness to learn. Every aspect of assessment is shared and discussed with students and provides them with a detailed insight into how well they are progressing and what they need to do to keep on improving their work.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students across the full range of courses make excellent progress. This progress is all the more remarkable given that many students have lost significant amounts of learning time before joining the centre. The centre enables students to follow a wide range of GCSE courses. This includes the key subjects of English, mathematics and science. Results in GCSE examinations compare favourably with those found nationally, including the proportion of students who gain A* and A grades.
- In almost all cases the most-able students achieve well and go on to follow 'A' level courses at local schools. The centre liaises closely with other providers to ensure they are fully prepared for the learning they will encounter and to check on their progress.
- The progress of students in Key Stage 3 is also rapid and sustained. Again, students' standards and progress compare favourably with those found nationally. This progress is confirmed by teachers' detailed assessments and by the standard of the work in students' books.
- The centre is highly successful in helping students to develop a passion for reading. For many students reading is one of their favourite leisure pursuits, and they speak with enthusiasm about the books they read.
- Teachers are skilful at identifying any gaps in students' learning. The courses the centre provides enable students to consolidate their basic skills courses in literacy, numeracy and the use of computers. Students make excellent progress overall, and especially in literacy and numeracy, but the outdated computer equipment, that is all that is available to them, somewhat restricts their progress. This means they do not always achieve quite as well in lessons covering computer literacy as they do in the other two subjects.
- In recent years, all students leaving the centre have either progressed to the next stage of their education, which includes appropriate vocational courses, or have found employment.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the GOV.UK website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	135250
Inspection number	462933
DfE registration number	926/6158

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

Type of school	Special
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Dan Kelly
Chair	Dan Kelly
Headteacher	Angela Hewett
Date of previous school inspection	29 February – 1 st March 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16500
Telephone number	01603622288
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	admin@nowich.redballoonlearner.org.uk

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