

# Red Balloon of the Air Curriculum Statement 2023

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## Intent

Red Balloon of the Air is not like mainstream schools or other online education providers. We do everything we can to create a safe and supportive learning community for our young people. Our students may have been out of school for some time and may have lost their belief in adults, peers, and the education system, so we move forward gently at the pace the learner can cope with. We understand that young people cannot start to learn until they feel safe once more, so the relationship with our students is at the heart of all we do.

We are unique in that as much emphasis is placed on student wellbeing as there is on academic achievement, and we aim to support the development of the whole person (however, most of our students opt to achieve GCSEs or other appropriate qualifications during their time with us).

The curriculum is negotiated with each student, giving back control to the learner and recognising that each individual has different interests, strengths and goals. We know that learning can be an emotionally risky business and we support all our students to re-engage with learning and life, secure in the knowledge that Red Balloon is with them every step of the way, to their exams and beyond.

Red Balloon of the Air provision supports students in three areas: their personal wellbeing; development of their social confidence and community engagement; and enabling academic achievement. Our goal is to support students to re-engage with learning and the wider world and we recognise that the wellbeing of our students is of paramount importance in this: young people will not be able to achieve their academic potential until they feel safe, supported and understood by the adults working with them. The sense of

safety and trust developed through supportive relationships with staff and peers at RBAir enables students to recover and develop their self-image as learners, restores their self-confidence and reignites their love of learning.

All staff in the RBAir community model healthy, kind interactions and support the personal development of students through trusting and kind interactions with all members of the RBAir community.

Our academic curricula provide the breadth and depth necessary for students to master the key knowledge and skills in each of their agreed qualification areas so that they can achieve their potential. This includes and embeds empowering students to be aware of and care for their physical, emotional and mental health, relationships, and personal wellbeing. Through subject sessions, personal mentoring and careers education, we encourage students to consider and recognise their own learning and personal goals via a growth mindset so that they can achieve their future aspirations. We aim to prepare our students to take their next steps into the wider world with renewed confidence.

Confidence and personal efficacy is also developed through individual therapy and mentoring sessions. Therapists build a trusted relationship, adapting their approach to each individual young person's needs. Staff proactively promote self-advocacy through the ongoing gentle encouragement of communication and assertiveness. The therapy and mentoring teams work within RBAir's bespoke Wellbeing Framework, which consists of three overarching domains: Self, Others, and World. Captured within the domain of Self are areas such as self-esteem, self-awareness and physical health and lifestyle; the theme of Others covers communication, relationship-building and conflict resolution; and the broader domain of World includes decision-making, future planning and engagement.

Similarly to therapists, the students' mentors develop strong and supportive relationships with the students (and their families) and work on specific areas of the wellbeing framework negotiated with each young person. Mentors also have a pastoral role and join up the provision and team around each student, as well as helping the young person to develop their social skills and to act with confidence in the wider world.

## Implementation

When a young person joins RBAir, they and their parent sign a 'Community Agreement' to acknowledge that they wish to make progress -both personally and academically - and that they will treat all members of the community with kindness and respect.

By focusing upon fully negotiated project-based learning for new arrivals, we provide immediate positive learning experiences, quickly develop trusting learning relationships, and start to re-ignite student engagement and a move to a growth mindset. Thereafter, every student is invited and encouraged to engage in a broad curriculum which values the development of mathematical, linguistic, scientific, technological and creative skills. Whilst physical education is a challenge in a primarily online provision, mentors support students to find and take part in activities of interest to them, such as yoga, gym visits, dance or walking. All students are welcome to attend Activate!, a weekly extra-curricular physical activity club.

Our academic delivery model of live online teaching allows staff to respond in real-time to each student's individual learning needs. By identifying gaps in students' knowledge and understanding on arrival and during KS3, and working to fill these rapidly, we enable students to build upon and expand their subject knowledge and skills. Courses at KS4 level deliver an appropriately challenging 'mastery curriculum', where fewer subjects are studied but these are covered in sufficient depth to gain qualifications and fulfil academic potential. Appropriate PSHEE and RSE sessions are a part of student programmes; and SMSC runs as a core thread through the whole curriculum and every interaction.

The development of students' social and emotional skills is supported through those respectful and trusting interactions in all lessons, as well as through individualised therapy and mentoring sessions. In addition, peer interactions in groups online and in occasional face-to-face activities, such as our whole-school termly co-curricular days, help to rebuild trust and the ability to work alongside others. Members of staff demonstrate unconditional positive regard for all individuals within the RBAir community and ensure they model the helpful, respectful behaviours and positive growth mindsets we aim to encourage.

## Impact

Student voice is a vital part of sessions and our wider programme, with staff listening and responding to students' subjective learning experiences and self-evaluations of learning. This enables staff to adjust learning programmes to support continual development. We assess progress regularly against each student's Individual Progress Plan, which may be linked to their EHC Plans or negotiated targets, and make any necessary adjustments to programmes to facilitate achieving each learning goal.

Our delivery model allows teachers to consider students' views on their own learning and to provide immediate focused, supportive and ongoing formative feedback during sessions. Teachers also produce

summative feedback at termly intervals both to ensure and demonstrate progress is on track, and to reflect upon students' achievements and develop specific supportive learning interventions where required.

In wellbeing sessions, progress is mapped against the different areas of the Wellbeing Framework. Mentors also use this framework to create 'progress stars' which visually display the development of students' learning for life in a graphic format that can be easily understood. This can identify areas of progress to be celebrated, or areas which need further consideration and support. 'Progress' in mentoring can also be seen in young people's growing self-confidence, willingness to try new things, and the small steps students take to re-enter the wider world (whether within the RBAir community, the students' local area or in their longer-term transitions plans).

We seek detailed feedback via an annual questionnaire from parents and students regarding their experiences with RBAir. These are evaluated and responses can result in adjustments that impact our provision for the coming year, supporting our approach of continuous improvement.

We have a dedicated Transitions Lead, who offers bespoke advice to all students, and who closely monitors transition outcomes as our students move on to their next destination, whether that is training, work or further education. Ultimately, we know we have succeeded in our aims when our young people have the qualifications, confidence and skills to leave RBAir and move on successfully to the next stage in their lives.