

## SEND Information Report - Red Balloon of the Air 2023/24

### An Introduction to the SEND Team at Red Balloon of the Air

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### Key Roles and Responsibilities

- **Headteacher - Michelle Williams** [michelle.williams@rbair.org.uk](mailto:michelle.williams@rbair.org.uk)
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### **Red Balloon of the Air Policies and Statutory Guidance related to this Information Report**

- SEND Policy
- Exams Directory
- Safeguarding Policy
- The SEND Code Of Practice
- Keeping Children Safe in Education Sept 2021
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Accessibility Policy
- The RBAir Well-Being Framework

#### **1. The Red Balloon Approach and Profile of Learners at Red Balloon of the Air**

Red Balloon of the Air (RBAir) is an independent specialist provision working with 11-21 year olds experiencing trauma related anxiety or ill-health. Students come to RBAir with a range of Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties (SEMH), large academic gaps in learning and often prolonged social isolation from peers and formal schooling.

All learners at RBAir are recognised as having SEND requirements whether they have an Education and Health Care Plan or otherwise.

The foundation for principles of learning at Red Balloon are based on three key tenets that provide opportunities to explore different aspects of learning which may have proved difficult in the past, via a negotiated curriculum which supports agency and student voice.



The structure of the learning experience includes :

- Individualised provision, tailored to meet need
- Graduated exposure and challenge at the right pace
- A designated trusted adult for every student/family known as a Link Mentor
- Highly qualified professionals who create a team around each child. Staff are supported by supervision and a strong Red Balloon of the Air SEND team

The curriculum is delivered via a learning platform which uses an online text-based delivery method. This enables students to engage with learning and reduces the stresses of a face to face class or group interaction. The pace of progress and delivery is bespoke to the individual and each young person is given time to establish trust and security in order to begin to re-engage with learning.

Red Balloon of the Air supports and currently provides additional and/or different provision for a wide range of needs, in line with the Code of Practice including those with:

- **Communication and interaction barriers**, for example, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and difficulties of communication and interaction associated with anxiety and other SEMH difficulties.
- **Cognition and learning difficulties**, for example, dyslexia, dyscalculia, gaps in learning, working memory difficulties, processing difficulties and difficulties associated with high anxiety. Due to the primarily online nature of our provision, we are unable to meet the needs of those who require extensive multisensory approaches to learning, or those whose cognitive functioning is unsuited to an online learning platform.
- **Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties**, for example: anxiety (social and generalised), depression, low self-esteem, low resilience, sleep difficulties

and students who have experienced trauma. We are unable to admit students if safeguarding risks are too high.

- **Some sensory and/or physical needs**, for example, some physical impairments, sensory sensitivities. Due to the online nature of our provision and the nature of our physical setting, we are unable to meet the needs of those with hearing or visual impairments, or certain physical disabilities.

It is likely that the main area of need for RBAir students is related to both social and mental health difficulties. The approach we take in all three strands of our provision works to support and develop these skills. (see figure 1)

- Students are actively listened to and encouraged to have a meaningful voice around which learning approaches work for them.
- We actively look for opportunities to reduce social isolation and develop peer relationships online, through planned supported social activities, and through our face to face provision.
- Students work with their teachers who adopt individual approaches to help re-engage them with learning and progress towards their academic potential.
- Link Mentors support students to engage with the wider community and reduce social isolation.
- Therapists support students with managing their anxieties, help them to make their own decisions and express their opinions and to develop greater coping mechanisms
- Our students are encouraged to be part of our online community and, when they are ready, to access our in-centre activities to develop friendships and teamwork skills.

An essential component of our provision is that we provide a safe and supportive community for every student. The issue of individual rights as set against the rights of the broader community is a complex one. It is, however, the case that we will not allow any student to access or remain in a Red Balloon of the Air placement if they consistently refuse to respect the rights of other members of the community. We acknowledge that this may curtail our capacity to work with the full range of SEMH students, but we will always protect the community that forms the bedrock of our provision.

We will always consider referrals for students with EHC plans, but will only admit a student if we, together with the student and their/her/his parent(s)/carer(s), believe it possible to meet the needs identified within the plan. The online provision utilises a text-based facility which in turn uses a 'chat' function, and therefore requires that the young person has a functional level of reading and writing to be able to access the provision successfully.

## **2. Identification of students with SEND and Assessment of Need**

Red Balloon of the Air understands that all students have had difficult experiences preventing them from accessing mainstream education at the present time. They have not all been formally assessed for learning difficulties at the point of entry. The majority have been diagnosed or are seeking diagnosis for Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties or have experienced difficulties of a social and emotional nature in their previous setting. Many of our students have significant gaps in education, due to prolonged periods out of school and a total loss of confidence in their ability to learn.

We aim to assess each student's current skills and levels of attainment on entry, which will build on previous settings and Key Stages, where appropriate. Students may have experienced considerable difficulty with assessments in the past and a careful balance is established between understanding students' current learning levels with the promotion of re-engagement in the learning process. Therefore, teachers will carefully utilise regular informal assessment in the course of lessons for all students and identify those whose progress:

- is significantly slower than that of their peers starting from the same baseline;
- fails to match or better the child's previous rate of progress;
- fails to close the attainment gap between the child and their peers;
- widens the attainment gap.

This may include progress in areas other than attainment, for example, social needs, and progression towards Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.

When deciding whether further special educational provision is required, we will start with the desired outcomes, including expected progress and attainment, and the views and the wishes of the student and their parents. We will use this to determine the support that is needed and whether we can provide it by adapting our core offer, or whether something different or additional is needed.

### **3. Students with English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

Students with English as an additional language (EAL) will have a wide variety of needs, and will have strengths and weaknesses in different skills. On admission there will be an initial meeting with the parents and an interpreter may be sought if necessary. This meeting is important in gaining understanding of the student's starting point and context, and to get to know them as an individual. Information to clarify would include:

- Personality, for example, whether they are normally shy or outspoken
- Proficiency in their native language, and whether they have any issues with articulation or fluency
- Educational background, including whether they have attended school before and whether they may have an existing special educational need or disability (SEND)

- Experience of language at home, including how proficient the student's parents are in English

This will enable the identification of the skills the student needs to develop in order to effectively access the curriculum. These identified needs will also be informed by the demands of the curriculum. Due to the online nature of RBAir provision and the text-based communication system, students will need a functional level of reading and writing skills in English to be able to access the provision appropriately.

#### **4. Consulting and Involving Students and Parents**

The bespoke nature of RBAir provision enables learners to 'negotiate' their own curriculum. Staff will have an early discussion during the admissions process with the young person and their parents, identifying whether they need further special educational provision, or planning how known SEN needs will be met. These conversations will make sure that:

- everyone develops a good understanding of the student's areas of strength and difficulty;
- student voice and opinion carries weight and validity and that students should be encouraged to voice their opinions and express their worries or concerns;
- we take into account the parents' concerns, consider their experiences to date and endeavour to work within a systemic framework, to help the whole family through challenges
- everyone understands the agreed outcomes sought for the child;
- everyone is clear on what the next steps are.

The young person will be assigned with a Link Mentor as their key contact for working with Red Balloon of the Air. This role is unique in nature and provides a consistent and informed point of contact to ensure that each young person's needs are met.

#### **The Role of the Link Mentor**

Link Mentors are the key links in Red Balloon of the Air. Their involvement with the student and family are pivotal for the success of the student's time at Red Balloon of the Air.

Their responsibilities include:

- getting to know and building rapport with the young person and their parents in offering face-to-face, online and/or telephone support to students and families
- developing trusted and professional working relationships with all those involved with the young person;
- negotiating personal plans, including the Individual Provision Plan (IPP) with students and families in conjunction with the SEND department, working with students and staff

to monitor and measure progress against these plans;

- monitoring provision for each young person alongside SEND, teaching and wellbeing staff, proposing and discussing adjustment where needed;
- supporting and facilitate the social and personal development of students;
- liaising with other agencies (health professionals, CAMHS/EWMHS, School SENDCos etc.) in support of students' needs;
- recording and providing reports, feedback, and letters of support as required.
- providing the main communication link between RBAir teachers, therapists, staff, the family, to support the monitoring of progress through the curriculum
- working with the student on progression towards their emotional, social and educational outcomes. This could be online, in a Mentor session at home, at the centre, or in an activity outside the home

RBAir works in partnership with parents and students to ensure appropriate support services are in place for each student, and consent is sought prior to engagement of additional services. Parents, students and staff are able to raise concerns at any time and regular reviews ensure that progress is monitored and responded to.

## 5. Assessing and Reviewing Progress Towards Outcomes

SEND support should arise from a four-part cycle, known as the graduated approach, through which earlier decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised. This will lead to a growing understanding of students' needs and what supports them in making good progress. This approach matches the action planning cycle identified in our assessment policy (plan, do, evaluate, repeat).

It is essential to allow sufficient time for the action (do) 'element' to become embedded. The subject teacher, Link Mentor and therapist will work with the SENDCo to carry out a clear analysis of the student's needs. This will draw on:

- teachers', Link Mentor's and therapist's assessment and experience of the student;
- previous progress and attainment and behaviour;
- other staff assessments, where relevant;
- the individual's development in comparison to their peers and national data;
- the views and experience of parents;
- the student's own views;
- advice from external support services, when relevant.

The assessment will be reviewed regularly.

All teachers and staff who work with the student will be made aware of their needs, via the **Individual Provision Plan**, the IPP (see SEND Policy). All staff will have access to the plan and will be aware of the outcomes sought, the support required, and any teaching strategies or approaches that are recommended.

RBAir constantly monitors effectiveness of staff input and student progress through a range of means to ensure we are able to maintain a flexible and speedy response to changing student needs.

The SEND Team evaluates the effectiveness of provision for students with SEN by:

- reviewing students' individual progress towards their goals each term;
- using online chat groups for staff to share important information regarding good practice, progress or difficulties, and to work together to find solutions;
- focus meetings for generating and putting in place new strategies;
- using annual student experience questionnaires;
- using student profiles and provision maps to measure progress;
- holding annual reviews for young people with statements of SEN or EHC plans, and annual IPP reviews for those without.

Our qualified SENDCos have many years of experience in supporting young people with a wide range of additional needs. They have considerable experience in autism, SEMH and therapeutic provision prior to working for RBAir.

In the last academic year our SENDCos have delivered training to staff in; Autism, Mental Health First Aid, EHCPs/IPP and Adapting Teaching on slides, for a range of different needs and Exams and Access Arrangements compliance. We are in the process of developing a rolling training programme for SEND that relates to existing staff needs.

RBAir SENDCos stay up to date with key issues and development relating to SEND and ensure the programme of staff training keeps staff informed and skilled when working with students. A full time Assistant SENDCo is responsible for the operational aspects of the SEND Team, including the management of the Annual Review process, supporting Exam Access Arrangements and liaison with parents and staff.

## **6. Quality of Teaching**

Teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of all the young people in their groups. High quality teaching is one of our key three strands in supporting students who have SEND. This will be differentiated and tailored for individuals. Where appropriate we may be able to offer some face to face teaching as opposed to online teaching as part of a programme to broaden student experience and social exposure. Whenever possible, teachers respond to student interests and work to build confidence through scaffolding success and introducing challenges at appropriate points. The Designated teacher responsible for Looked After Children at Red Balloon of the Air will



oversee their specific provision plans and ensure that effective communication with social care and other professionals enables the delivery of high quality education.

Link Mentors support students' access to the wider community and act as a bridge between home and school. They use a graded exposure approach to encourage students to meet with other students and experience activities outside the home in preparation for future transitions. They also support work relating to home routines, social communication and interaction, healthy lifestyles and positive behaviour.

Therapists work alongside teachers, Link Mentors, (and where appropriate other mental health practitioners), the young person and their family, and may offer support to family members where this is needed. Not every student wishes to engage with therapy or may be ready for talking /communication based approaches. Therapy is offered on a case by case basis. Due to the nature of our online teaching provision, most additional support comes through our teams of Link Mentors and therapists. We do not have teaching assistants.

## **7. Adaptations to the Curriculum and Learning Environment**

Most academic subject teaching takes place online either 1:1, in pairs or small groups. Teachers use Google Classroom and Google Slides to present lessons and shared activities. Teachers are able to use the 'Live Chat' option in Microsoft 'Teams', which allows for communication. Not all students are ready for this to begin with. The following adaptations are made, to ensure all student's needs are met:

- differentiating our curriculum to ensure all students are able to access it, for example, by grouping, 1:1 work, teaching style, content of the lesson, etc;
- adapting our resources and staffing;
- using recommended aids, such as laptops, coloured overlays (real or virtual), visual timetables, larger font, use of highlighter pens.
- differentiating our teaching, for example, giving longer processing times, reading instructions aloud, using clear frameworks for organisation of work, etc.
- As part of an adapted learning environment, students are given rest breaks and extra time as a normal way of working
- Students who have English as an additional language ( EAL) are not deemed to have Special Educational Needs unless they have an associated learning difficulty. However reasonable adjustments and levels of support will be available in order to support effective communication for learning.

Where students come for face to face sessions at the Satellite Centre, the environment is carefully managed to allow for any sensory sensitivity, and plans are made to reduce

anxiety, e.g photographs will be sent before hand, online sessions with staff ahead of their visit, Mentor sessions to plan and explain step by step what will happen during the visit.

The majority of our students have anxiety around social interaction. The activities planned aim to create opportunities for students to engage with and develop friendships with other young people and to have positive experiences outside of their homes. Where appropriate subject teachers will offer some in-centre face to face work to support learning, Link Mentors will arrange supported social gatherings, and all students are encouraged to attend our on-line community activities. All extra-curricular activities and visits are available to all students. No student is ever excluded from taking part in these activities because of their SEN or disability.

As far as possible we aim to positively support students with disabilities.

- If a student has a known disability, careful planning takes place to allow access and manage any potential areas of sensitivity or difficulty.
- Our ethos of unconditional positive regard prevents disabled students from being treated less favourably than other students.
- We ensure that all students have access to any specialist equipment they may need and seek to actively reduce known barriers to learning.

## **8. Access Arrangements for Examinations**

Access Arrangements for all internal and external assessments are important adaptations for learners to ensure that they have equal opportunities to mainstream peers to achieve at their best. All adjustments are determined by the SEND team, and the accredited Assessor for RBAir. The arrangements are organised as follows:

### **8.1 Background**

Many of our students have had significant disruption to their learning and may have been out of education previously. Therefore, it is likely that historical information may not be available to fully understand student needs in relation to academic learning. In preparing for examinations there may be only a short window of time to fully prepare students for accreditation.

All our students access the majority of their learning at home online using laptops, and come into their local Satellite Centres for some face to face teaching, social activities and for exams.

## **8.2 Assessing need**

RBAir offers multiple entry points during the year and teachers will endeavour to understand the learning needs and levels of their students within the first term. The majority of students have EHCPs and there is careful consideration given to how those specific needs can be met and the adjustments that need to be made in order to access the curriculum.

Many of our students have EHCPs for Autism and other SEMH as their primary needs. These often do not identify in enough detail the secondary Cognition and Learning needs sufficiently to know if additional support is needed. Some plans are clear and make the arrangements explicit.

## **8.3 Process**

In order to derive information regarding learning needs, new students are given Lucid Exact tests in their first term, to gain a benchmark of where Access Arrangements/support might be needed. Teachers make ongoing observations and complete evidence sheets in order for the SEND team to complete the necessary JCQ processes in accordance with National deadlines. We also have the opportunity to carry out further Cognitive Tests if these are needed for additional evidence/advice. One of our SENDCos is a L7 specialist assessor.

Regular meetings are held with the Exams Officer, Teaching Team and SEND department to check arrangements and ensure robust evidence is in place.

Parent/Student data sharing and consent forms are generally sent out in the Autumn term and received by the Spring term. Any new entrants, joining at different points in the year, will also be required to complete the same consent forms and agree to data sharing. Access Arrangements are then applied for online via the JCQ Portal or through email for Functional Skills by the deadline of March 31st.

## **8.4 Administration of Exams**

Examinations are carried out at registered centres in Milton, Cambridge and Danbury, Essex, where the students have been supported to attend mock exams and become familiar with the environment. During both mock and formal national examinations, Centres are organised to ensure that the experience is a positive one. The exams are spread across small quiet rooms, are sensitively lit and students are able to access supervised rest breaks and the use of laptops for longer questions. Invigilators and support staff are fully trained in how to support the different access arrangements for students, including those needing

Home Invigilation. All information is kept on file in accordance with data protection and available for any inspection.

### **8.5 External Students**

For those students not attending Red Balloon provisions, who would like to use the RBAir Examination Centre(s) to sit exams, any Access Arrangements requested will require the same evidence and compliance with JCQ regulations as all internal RBAir students. The SEND team will determine the evidence thresholds that need to be met and will use their own Assessor to ensure that practice across the provision has parity and follows statutory processes.

## **9. Supporting Students in Transition to Other Provisions and Preparation for Adulthood**

Transition information with the school, college, or other setting the young person is moving to. RBAir staff will agree with parents and students, which information will be shared as part of this. Transitions for students can be extremely challenging and it is vital that any transition or change for a student is supported with appropriate planning and preparation. This can be for students who start to visit a Community Hub, or want to start a college placement, return to mainstream with support, or start in a new specialist setting. Some students need support with transitions even between lessons, and teachers and Link Mentors will put in strategies to mitigate anxiety around changes in subjects or teachers, or deviation from a planned schedule.

The Wellbeing Framework and the RBAir Step4ward Programme identifies the skills and knowledge a student will require to make a successful transition into adulthood and into future settings, and all staff work to support the students in achieving those goals.

For Year 11+ students a transitions programme specifically aimed at supporting movement to a new phase or setting is offered. Link Mentors support pre-visits to possible settings, liaison with new settings and the SENDCo ensures that all support measures that are needed will be in place for when the student starts.

## **10. Use of Equipment and Facilities**

All RBAir students are issued with a laptop and headphones that can be set up to individual preference regarding coloured screens, font sizes and volume. For exams, all students have the choice to access formal exams using a laptop. Reading pens are available for those who meet criteria for extra support to read an exam paper but do not wish to use a human reader.

At the centres face to face meeting spaces are carefully managed by staff to help students manage their anxiety and sensory difficulties.

Normal ways of working for all students involve using a word processor for all learning, the availability of a quiet calm space for working in and the provision of a prompt for completing tasks.

We have links with Local Authority specialist equipment departments who are able to advise on further issues such as voice programmes for tablets and phones to support verbal communication. If a student needs specialist equipment to reduce barriers to learning these may be accessed through the EHCP annual review processes. However Red Balloon of the Air is unable to secure specialist equipment from any Local Authority based services, due to it's Independent status.

## **11. Working with other agencies**

Red Balloon of the Air works with the following agencies to provide support for students with SEN:

- Educational Psychologists and private Psychologists and Assessors
- Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Mental Health services such as CAMHS/EWMHS
- Red Balloon of the Air works closely with a range of other bodies, including health and social care bodies and local authority support services in meeting students' SEND and supporting their families.

## **12. Complaints about SEND provision**

Any complaint regarding SEND provision is taken very seriously.

Complaints about any aspect of RBAir provision should be made to the Headteacher in the first instance. The parents of students with disabilities have the right to make disability discrimination claims to the first-tier SEND tribunal if they believe that our provision has discriminated against their children. They can make a claim about alleged discrimination regarding:

- exclusions;
- provision of education and associated services;
- making reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services.

When parents have concerns around RBAir's provision, they are encouraged to speak with their child's Link Mentor in the first instance or if concerns relate specifically to SEN they should contact Hannah Curry (Lead SENDCo) [hannah.curry@rbair.org.uk](mailto:hannah.curry@rbair.org.uk).

### **13. The Local Offer**

Because we work with a range of local authorities, different support services are available in different regions.

Parents are referred to their Local Offer and to their local SENDIASS (SEND Information, Advice and Support Service), which offers impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers who have a child or young person with SEND, or if parents have concerns that their child has special educational needs. SENDIASS also offer impartial and confidential information, advice and support to young people and children with SEND (or who have concerns they may have special educational needs), or to IPSEA (Independent Provider of Specialist Education Advice) which offers independent legal advice, support and training to help get the right education for children and young people with special educational needs. Parents may be signposted to the National Autistic Society (NAS) for specific support around autism.

Cambridgeshire's local authority's local offer is published here:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/local-offer/about-cambridgeshire-s-local-offer> Other area's Local Authorities Local Offers are available online.