

Inspection of Red Balloon Worthing Learner Centre

52–54 Windsor Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2LY

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The school provides pupils and their families with a lifeline and a route back into education. This is particularly crucial for pupils who have had very negative experiences of education or have been out of school for an extended period before joining Red Balloon Worthing.

Redeveloping pupils' sense of well-being and social engagement is central to the school's work. Pupils told inspectors that they felt listened to and heard. Pupils appreciate the way that staff adapt the school environment and learning in response to their needs. This enables pupils to learn successfully alongside their peers and to redevelop their sense of belonging and self-worth.

Each pupil has a bespoke education programme that is designed to meet their individual needs and enables them to re-engage with school life. The school's curriculum has been carefully designed to help pupils to understand the value of what they are learning at school. As a result, pupils achieve well.

The school has a comfortable and homely feel. Pupils are greeted warmly in the mornings by staff who know them very well. A daily breakfast is provided as part of pupils' transition into school. Pupils enjoy the carefully supported social times, particularly lunchtime, when pupils, staff and leaders enjoy a home-cooked lunch together.

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

The school is very successfully reintegrating pupils who have previously disengaged from education. When pupils first begin to attend, staff and leaders at all levels work to reassure pupils that their feelings of safety and their well-being come first. The school ensures that staff understand pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and are able to adapt their approaches to take account of pupils' SEND. The school's work is effective in bringing about positive, long-term change in pupils' attendance and engagement in learning.

Leaders have developed a strong personal development programme that forms a vital part of the school's education offer. This encompasses regular well-being sessions, a range of therapies, personal, social and health education, and relationships and sex education. Each pupil has an identified mentor, whom they meet regularly. Pupils particularly appreciate these ongoing opportunities to reflect and plan and to share any worries they might have. They engage with the programme well, and it has a positive impact on their mental health, well-being and capacity to engage with other aspects of school life, including the school's academic curriculum.

When pupils are ready, they embark on the school's broad and ambitious academic curriculum. The school works with individual pupils to plan their curriculum based on their starting points, their interests and their ambitions for the future. A central

principle of curriculum design in the school is that pupils will co-construct their individual curriculum pathways with staff, and that pupils' interests will be incorporated into curriculum thinking.

Since September, more pupils at an early stage of learning to read and write have joined the school. The school has introduced a phonics programme to support these pupils. Additional teachers with primary-phase experience have been recruited to support these pupils to acquire the foundational literacy knowledge and skill they need to access learning successfully across the curriculum.

In the strongest subjects, teachers have a keen awareness of what pupils already know and remember, as well as what they need to learn to make progress through the planned curriculum. Teachers in these subjects are able to weave together the co-constructed curriculum with the essential knowledge that pupils need to acquire in each subject. Teachers in these subjects take account of each child's starting points. In these subjects, pupils are achieving very well.

In a small number of subjects, the curriculum has not yet been fully redeveloped to take account of the starting points of pupils at an earlier stage of learning to read and write. Pupils are sometimes presented with learning that is too challenging and does not build on what they know and understand. Leaders are aware of this and are redeveloping the underlying curriculum in some subjects to ensure that they enable teachers to align their teaching with the individual starting points of all pupils.

Leaders have developed an exciting and enriching programme of trips, visits and off-site activities for pupils. This programme has been designed to support learning but also to broaden pupils' horizons and cultural understanding. Pupils have recently, for example, enjoyed two trips to the theatre. As pupils have developed their inner confidence, the school has planned for more activities to take place off site. Pupils told inspectors that while they initially felt very anxious about off-site activities, they now look forward to them. The school ensures that pupils receive careers guidance and advice about next steps. Staff know each pupil well and adapt their advice accordingly. Leaders have plans to further strengthen their careers advice programme.

Leaders at all levels and those responsible for governance share a clear vision for the school. They are determined that Red Balloon Worthing will provide an inclusive education that enables every pupil to thrive. The school works effectively to ensure that the independent school standards are consistently met. Those responsible for governance know the school and its pupils well. Together, the governing board and the proprietor body maintain clear and effective oversight of all key areas of the school's performance and hold leaders to account effectively. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a small number of subjects, the curriculum has not been designed or is not being successfully adapted to meet the needs and starting points of all pupils. This is particularly the case when pupils arrive at the school without the foundations in reading and writing they require to access the curriculum successfully in other subjects. Leaders need to continue their work to refine curriculum thinking in these subjects so that teaching can be more precisely aligned to pupils' starting points.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	149217
DfE registration number	938/6012
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10286483
Type of school	Special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Red Balloon Educational Trust
Chair	Carrie Herbert
Headteacher	Kim Anderson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,000
Telephone number	01903 331704
Website	www.redballoonlearner.org
Email address	worthing-admin@rbet.ac
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened to pupils in September 2022. This was the school's first standard inspection.
- The school caters primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils may also have other needs. Pupils have often previously had negative experiences in education settings and may have experienced bullying or other trauma. Many pupils have not attended school for a period of years prior to joining Red Balloon Worthing. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and are placed in the school by the local authority.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the chair of the school's governing board and the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, art and the curriculum to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects and reviewed schemes of work for some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to check compliance with health and safety laws (including fire

safety). Inspectors considered the school's approach to risk management. Inspectors also checked the relevant policies and the school website.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The school has requested to increase the maximum number of pupils from 20 to 25. The school is well equipped to manage this modest increase in pupil numbers and feels that slightly larger class sizes (of around five pupils) will provide pupils with increased opportunity for positive social interaction in the school.
- The school comprises two adjoining houses on a quiet residential road. The accommodation consists of a number of well-lit and airy teaching areas, an art room, a music room, a food technology room and a science laboratory. The largest room is used as a dining hall and communal space.
- The school's spacious garden consists of a lawned area, a decking area, a vegetable plot, and mature shrubs and trees. The school also uses local leisure facilities and outdoor spaces to provide pupils with additional opportunities for time outdoors and physical exercise.
- The school building provides ample space to accommodate the 25 pupils proposed.

Information about the material change inspection

- The lead inspector considered the implications of the proposed increase in pupil numbers when looking at evidence relating to the school's compliance with the independent school standards. This included considering whether arrangements for safeguarding, health and safety and supervision (part 3) and accommodation (part 5) would remain fit for purpose if the material change request were to be granted.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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