

Inspection of Red Balloon Educational Trust – Norfolk

76 Earlham Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 3DF

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 January 2025

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?

Pupils join Red Balloon having had previous negative experiences of education. The school takes time to understand pupils' individual needs prior to joining. Consequently, staff provide the specific support each pupil needs to transition successfully into the school.

Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations. Individualised curriculums are typically well matched to pupils' specific needs and interests. The enrichment offer further enhances the curriculum. Trips, such as to Norwich Castle or local places of worship, help pupils to learn more about the topics they study.

Kindness and nurture underpin everything that happens here. This begins in the morning, when staff greet pupils at the front door with a smile. Pupils happily put their slippers on before settling into lessons or going to read in a comfy chair. The warm, homely environment further helps pupils to feel comfortable and secure. Lunchtime is a particularly positive time of the day for pupils. They love to come together as one to enjoy a home-cooked meal while chatting or playing games with staff and their peers. All of this builds the trusting relationships that have created the positive ethos that permeates the school. This helps pupils to achieve well and begin to re-engage with their education.

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

The school is passionate about providing pupils with the individualised curriculum they need. The school has broadly decided on the important content pupils will learn while at school. Staff match this content to pupils' specific needs and interests. For example, in geography, staff identify places in the world which pupils would like to learn about. They then use these interests to teach the important knowledge pupils need to secure.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use information contained in each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan to support pupils' individual social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff carefully check pupils' understanding to identify any gaps in pupils' social development. They then adapt the curriculum to provide pupils with bespoke teaching to understand how to make useful social connections. This helps pupils to develop their social skills. In some other areas of the curriculum, checks on learning are used less effectively. When this happens, the school expects pupils to complete work before they have secured the important building blocks of knowledge they need to do so.

Many pupils value the dedicated reading time. The school identifies pupils who need more help with their reading. Effective, additional support helps pupils to develop their confidence and fluency. Pupils enjoy settling down to a good book from the well-stocked library. Many also appreciate reading within lessons. These skills help pupils to access learning in other subjects.

Pupils behave well. They forge strong relationships with staff and with each other. Staff help pupils to learn to manage their feelings and emotions. This helps to create a positive atmosphere around the school. Most pupils arrive with significant gaps in their attendance. The school works with families to begin to remove the barriers pupils have to attending regularly. Typically, pupils improve their attendance over time. The school has recently introduced new initiatives aimed at improving attendance further. These are effective.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum teaches pupils important knowledge to prepare them for their futures beyond the school. Pupils develop their understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship. Teaching in PSHE has a strong focus on keeping pupils safe. This includes when online. Pupils understand how to conduct themselves appropriately online, such as when using social media.

The school provides pupils with one-to-one careers guidance and support. Key workers help pupils to identify what they would like to do when they leave Red Balloon. Staff work with pupils to plan actions to get to their next stages. This supports pupils to identify what they need to do to successfully transition to their next destinations.

The school has stabilised, following a period of turbulence in leadership. Many leaders are new to their posts. The proprietor is currently installing a governing body to monitor the performance of the school. Staff value the greater consistency that leaders have brought about recently. They also value the ongoing professional development which the school provides them with. This helps staff to provide effective support to pupils.

While leaders have brought about improvements, quality assurance processes are underdeveloped in some important aspects of the school's work. The school has not established a clear approach to how it will evaluate the impact of its work across some key areas. This means it does not have as secure an understanding of where things are working well, or where it may need to target future school improvement priorities.

The proprietor ensures that the school meets the independent school standards (the standards). This includes schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The school site is well maintained and conducive to supporting pupils with their specific social, emotional and mental health needs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school does not consistently use assessment to inform and adapt learning. Sometimes staff provide pupils with work to complete before pupils have the prior knowledge they need. This can make it hard for pupils to access this work. The school should ensure that all staff understand how to use assessment to inform future teaching choices.
- The school has not developed a systematic approach to how it will evaluate the impact of its work across key areas. This means the school does not have as secure an understanding of where to target some school improvement priorities as it could. The school should ensure it has systems in place to accurately evaluate all areas of its work. This is so leaders at all levels better understand where to prioritise future school improvement.

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	150112
DfE registration number	926/6036
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10342216
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Red Balloon Educational Trust
Chair	Carrie Herbert
Headteacher	Louise Fisher
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,000
Telephone number	01603 327856
Website	www.redballoonlearner.org/locations/red-balloon-educational-trust-norfolk
Email address	louise.fisher@rbet.ac

Information about this school

- This is the first standard inspection since the school opened in January 2024.
- Red Balloon Educational Trust is registered to admit up to 20 pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years. The school does not currently provide a key stage 5 education, but a small number of pupils can stay on past key stage 4 to retake Years 10 and 11 should they need to.
- The school operates from one site located at 76 Earlham Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR2 3DF.
- The proprietor body is Red Balloon Educational Trust. There are currently four other Red Balloon schools and Red Balloon of the Air, an online provision.
- There have been changes to leadership since the school opened. The current headteacher took up their post in November 2024. An executive headteacher responsible for this and other Red Balloon schools joined in January 2025.
- The proprietor body is in the process of establishing a governing body to monitor the performance of the school.
- All pupils have an EHC plan relating to their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Most pupils have had significant periods of disruption to their formal education prior to joining the school.
- Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority.
- The school does not currently use any 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 evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 held meetings with the chair of the proprietor body, the executive headteacher, the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and staff.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects; English, mathematics, humanities and PSHE. Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, considered curriculum information, visited lessons, reviewed evidence of work and spoke with pupils.
- Inspectors met leaders, looked at curriculum documentation, reviewed evidence of work and spoke with pupils about some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- To check compliance with the standards, inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils. They visited classrooms and had a tour of the school site, reviewed pupil information, school policies and records relating a range of aspects of the school, such as behaviour and health and safety.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with some parents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. Inspectors also spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff. Inspectors also met with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Charlie Fordham

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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