

Red Balloon Learner Centre - Warwick

Independent school standard inspection report

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The Red Balloon Learner Centre (Warwick) is an independent day special school for students who have experienced severe bullying in their previous schools. Some students have additional needs, for example mild autism or post-traumatic stress disorder. Their education has been severely disrupted by their previous experiences. Placements are from local authorities or from maintained schools. The centre is housed in a residential property which was previously used as a guest house. It is registered for up to fifteen boys and girls from 11 to 16 years. Currently there are eight students between 11 and 17 years of age on roll, including four who have statements of special educational needs. The centre has recently applied to the Department of Education to allow students to continue their education up to the age of 17. The centre is part of the group of Red Balloon Learner Centres and is a registered charity. It aims to 'support the recovery of bullied children in order that they can return to mainstream education, further education or employment.' The centre was registered in May 2011 and admitted its first student in September 2011. This is the centre's first full inspection. There has been a succession of coordinators at the centre since opening. There is currently an interim coordinator in charge who is leaving the school at half term. The trustees are seeking to appoint a replacement.

Evaluation of the school

Red Balloon (Warwick) provides a satisfactory standard of education and care for students and is meeting its aims to support the recovery of bullied children. It is highly successful in improving students' personal development and aptitude for learning. It supports individuals well in developing their confidence and self esteem. Students' behaviour is outstanding. While the school is in breach of the requirements of registration, and there are some unmet regulations which require immediate address, there are no concerns for the welfare of the current students, who say they feel safe. The school's arrangements for safeguarding students and checking the suitability of staff are thorough and meet current requirements.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and provides students with experiences in all of the required areas of learning. It has only recently started working with students and the curriculum has served to meet their needs thus far. It is partially meeting the learning requirements of students with statements of special educational needs. However, there is limited initial assessment of students' learning needs undertaken and therefore staff are not using information on students' starting points accurately to plan effectively. The curriculum is by negotiation with the student, and where appropriate with the funder, but sometimes the breath of the curriculum is too narrow to ensure balance and sufficient coverage of the National Curriculum over the fullness of time or to ensure sufficient progress for each student. As staff know students well, they ensure that the curriculum is founded on the students' interests and successfully interweave learning across several different subject areas, allowing for the development of students' ideas and problem-solving skills. For example, an information and communication technology lesson (ICT) successfully interwove design, technology, speaking and listening. Renovation of the doll's house involved art, history, using and applying mathematical knowledge and fine manipulative skills. For older students, programmes of study are linked to external examination syllabuses for GCSE or AS level. Each tutor plans the curriculum for their own subject which is then overseen by the school's co-ordinator. There is some development of students' reading and writing skills, but not all opportunities to promote this are followed. The planning for mathematics is too 'ad hoc' and not sufficiently planned for progression. The curriculum places strong emphasis on developing students' personal, social and health education, which is informally planned and incorporated into the ethos of the school and to sessions of circle time which have a particular theme. There is no appropriate programme of careers education that is matched to students' needs and aspirations, nor have existing staff made use of any external partners to develop this.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory overall and enables students to make satisfactory progress. This is because relationships between adults, including volunteer tutors, are strong and students receive a great deal of individual support. There is strong evidence of skilled questioning to make students think and work things out independently. Learning is enjoyable as it is mostly based on students' interests and always upon their chosen course of study. However, planning is always very informal and there is no consistent method for assessing students' progress. Staff are not using what students already know and can do as their starting point. They only informally check what new learning has taken place or which learning has been consolidated during the lesson. Information gleaned is limited as the learning objective for the lesson is not always made clear, nor is the content sufficiently challenging. Students are unaware of what targets they are aiming for as this is not explained or presented in an individual education plan. They are not always required to record their work, so there is little marking or discussion about how the student could improve. Older students work through course books and study guides, but with few specialist resources, for example in science. Overall there are too few resources for developing students' physical skills, or their aesthetic and creative skills. Time is not always used well in lessons, and sometimes the pace

of learning is too slow. There is little use of assessment and no systematic framework in place by which students' performance can be evaluated. Students in Years 7 to 9 are unaware of the levels at which they are working or the levels they could achieve. Staff are unaware of how well students are progressing academically and do not maintain suitable records of achievement.

Despite the staff's limited experience of meeting statutory requirements for students with statements of special educational needs, they work very closely with a range of professionals from Warwickshire's Integrated Disability Service, who use the centre to also provide their own teaching and support. The centre has fulfilled the majority of the personal development targets for the students with statements, but work on the academic targets is only partially fulfilled. Recording against the negotiated targets is too informal and not effectively quality assured by the centre.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students all have negative experiences of their previous education which led to poor or non-attendance. Over time, with the strong support of centre staff to help deal with individual emotional needs and the warm, family-like environment, most students make significant progress in their attendance. Many are now enjoying school and feel more positive about learning. The close liaison with students' families and the good levels of individual support ensure that students' personal needs are met and barriers to learning are reduced. The school is highly successful in developing students' self-knowledge, confidence and esteem. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding because expectations are made clear without the threat of sanctions. Students respond well to adults who act as positive role models and manage the students well. There have been no formal complaints, incidents or accidents at the school. Students' knowledge of public institutions and services is not covered effectively through the curriculum and the opportunities for their spiritual and cultural development are few. For example, there are no visits into the local and wider community to experience places of interest or worship. Tolerance and harmony is a strong feature of the school and is promoted well. The school ethos is based on equalities and respect among peers and for adults. However, the school community is taking time to build due to low numbers of students and differing attendance patterns.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The procedures to safeguard and promote students' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory with some regulations which are unmet. The school has suffered from changes in leadership and therefore there have been weak systems for quality assuring the care and education of students. All required policies and procedures are in place, although these are not all followed in practice. Not all staff are trained in child protection and, due to recent staff changes, there is no designated child protection officer on site. A temporary arrangement with another Red Balloon Centre ensures there is interim cover and advice available. Appropriate arrangements have been made to implement a permanent solution to this situation. Similarly, there is

currently no named qualified first aider on site. One of the trustees who is present daily has received first aid training although the qualification is not up-to-date. The school has plans in place for rectifying this as soon as possible. The school has an equal opportunities policy in place which covers staff needs and an accessibility plan in line with the Equality Act 2010, which is focused on equal opportunities for students. Meeting students' emotional needs is a priority for the school and is enabled through close liaison between staff, parents and other professionals. The school has a comforting feel and students believe they are safe and that staff genuinely care about them. Some students however express that they are frustrated with the high turnover of co-ordinators which has affected the smooth running of the school. The school has failed to check that it complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and although the fire equipment has been recently tested and fire alarms are regularly checked, there have been no emergency evacuations of the premises to ensure procedures are clear for all. Risk assessment has not been upheld. Lunchtime is an important part of the school day where all visitors and volunteers are welcomed. This time ensures that meals are a sociable and pleasurable occasion and students say they enjoy the healthy vegetarian food. However, the school shares the domestic kitchen of the residents, which is far from ideal and meals are all prepared by volunteers, none of whom have received food hygiene training. Admissions and attendance registers are well maintained.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school complies with the regulations in respect of the checks it makes on the trustees, directors, prospective employees and volunteers with regard to their identity and suitability to work with children. The single central register is well maintained and contains all of the required information.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school has shared use of a privately owned residential property set in its own grounds. It has suitable teaching areas for effective learning to take place but a lack of specialist teaching facilities for science and the arts. There is a garden with a vegetable plot and a small number of animals. A nearby public footpath across farmland, together with the garden, provides facilities for physical education, play and recreation. Students use the property's kitchen and dining area. There is a reasonably resourced library area and each classroom has facilities for using a computer with internet access. There are sufficient toilets for the number of students and staff, although these need to be more clearly assigned to separate usage. There is a room suitable for students who become ill and which meets regulations. The premises and accommodation are secure and are suitable for the number of students on roll without compromising their safety.

Provision of information

The school provides most of the required information for parents and carers. However, it does not make available information on those who teach and their qualifications. It also does not currently supply sufficient information on students with a statement of special educational needs to the local authority as may be required for the purpose of the annual review of the statement.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy fulfils all the regulations. There have been no complaints to date.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

- ensure the curriculum policy is set out in writing and is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implement them effectively (paragraph 2(1))
- ensure that the education provided fulfils the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs (paragraph 2(2)(e))
- make provision for appropriate careers guidance for students (paragraph 2(2)(g))
- ensure the teaching involves well planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and appropriate management of class time (paragraph 3(c))
- ensure that all teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the students, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 3(d))
- ensure that classroom resources of an adequate quality, quantity and range and that they are used effectively, particularly for the teaching of science, physical education and the arts (paragraph 3(f))

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made.

- put in place a framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, and utilise information from such assessment to plan teaching so that students can make progress (paragraph 3(g))
- put in place a framework by which student performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents, and/or by national norms (paragraph 4).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (standards in part 2) and must:

- make provision to give students a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 5(d))
- support students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 5(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- ensure there are effective measures to ensure pupils' health and safety which have regard to the DfE guidance, including training and designating a child protection officer (paragraph 11)
- ensure, prior to any visits off site, that there are effective procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety on educational visits which have regard to DfE guidance (paragraph 12)
- fully comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13)
- ensure that the school fully implements its policy on first aid and that there is a named first aider on the premises (paragraph 14).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure there are there adequate facilities for the hygienic preparation, serving and consumption of food and that persons preparing food are suitably qualified to do so (paragraph 23(l)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make available to parents and prospective parents, details of teachers and their qualifications (paragraph 24(1)(b))

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for students who have experienced severe bullying		
Date school opened	24 March 2011		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 4	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1	Girls: 3	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£18,000		
Address of school	Northleigh House, Five Ways Road, Hatton, Warwick, CV35 7HZ		
Telephone number	01926 484203		
Email address	jonathan.chandler@warwick.rblc.org.uk		
Interim Headteacher	Jonathan Chandler		
Proprietor	Red Balloon		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

26 January 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Red Balloon Learner Centre - Warwick, Warwick, CV35 7HZ

It was good to visit your school this week. I am sorry that I did not get to see many of you. However, I would like to thank those of you that were kind enough to speak with me, either at school or over the phone. I really valued your opinions.

I understand why, for those of you who have had very difficult educational experiences prior to coming to Red Balloon, you are positive about the difference attending here is making. The school has a very homely feel and staff have your best interests at heart. Those tutors who give up their time voluntarily to teach you are committed to doing the best they can to ensure you are well equipped for the next stage of education and that you have every chance of success. There were some interesting things happening in lessons which you clearly enjoy.

The school is relatively new and there are some systems, such as planning lessons and assessment of your progress, that have not yet been fully thought through. Staff are not using what you can do already as a starting point to teach you. For those of you with statements of special educational needs, the school has not yet begun to check sufficiently well your progress towards your targets. The school is not providing sufficient careers guidance and there is limited equipment and resources in some subjects, such as science, physical education and the arts.

The school has suffered from changes of coordinators and currently there is no-one qualified in child protection, handling food or first aid. Staff have not sufficiently checked that all of the regulations have been met in respect of your continued health and safety. I have therefore asked that they immediately evaluate any current risk around the premises to staff or students, and that you all undertake a practice emergency fire evacuation. The school is more rigorous with its vetting of staff and volunteers and this is all in order. You confirm that you feel safe because the adults you work with care about you.

The school mostly provides the information it should to parents, but I have asked that it makes available the names of adults that teach you and their qualifications. I have also asked that it makes available information about your progress to the relevant local authority where they fund your place.

I do hope that you will all attend regularly and start afresh with your studies. I wish you all much success in your time at Red Balloon and in your return to mainstream education.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector