

Inspection of R.E.A.L Independent Schools

The Old Fire Station, Mansfield Road, Blidworth, Nottinghamshire NG21 0PN

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 September 2022

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
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| The quality of education | Good |
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| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
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| Personal development | Good |
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| Leadership and management | Good |
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| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | 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?

Leaders' vision that 'every child has a future' lies at the heart of this school. Pupils enjoy learning in a safe and welcoming environment. They follow programmes designed specifically around their needs and interests. They develop strong working relationships with staff. Staff are skilled at motivating pupils and keeping them focused on their learning. Pupils are optimistic about what they want to achieve and their future career aspirations.

Almost all pupils see marked improvements in their attendance and behaviour over time. Pupils learn to manage their emotions and feelings very successfully. For example, some pupils reduce their anxieties by reading to Martha and Nellie, the school's cocker spaniels. Bullying is unusual and dealt with swiftly. Pupils respect each other's differences and know that their opinions are valued.

Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences as a member of this school. They say that staff listen to them, care about them and give them the confidence to be successful. Parents and carers typically agree. One explained how, 'Since coming to R.E.A.L., my child's confidence has skyrocketed.' Another described how the school has given their child 'a sense of worth'.

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

The majority of pupils have previously had a poor experience of education. Staff spend a lot of time getting to know each pupil when they join this school. They check carefully what pupils already know and what pupils enjoy doing. They identify the curriculum pathway that is best suited to each pupil's needs. Leaders make sure that pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan targets are taken into account. Some pupils benefit from receiving their education at home or in the local community initially. This helps them get used to attending school regularly. Many soon transition to spending more time on the school's site. Pupils appreciate staff involving them in making decisions at each stage.

Pupils study a broad range of academic courses. Many also follow vocational programmes delivered by alternative providers. These programmes often relate to pupils' particular interests. They provide some pupils with necessary therapeutic support. The curriculum offer prepares pupils well for their next steps. Almost all pupils secure an appropriate education, employment or training placement when they leave school.

The curriculum content is well thought out in most subjects. In mathematics, leaders have identified exactly what pupils need to know and when. Teachers break this content down into smaller chunks. This helps pupils deepen their knowledge. Opportunities to revisit what they know allow pupils to remember important information. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly and correct any misconceptions before moving on.

Leaders are in the process of reviewing the curriculum in a few subjects. They are making sure that what they want pupils to learn is identified precisely and arranged logically. New English and science curriculum plans are being implemented. However, some staff's subject knowledge is not as secure as it needs to be. Some subject leaders do not have sufficient oversight of their areas of responsibility.

Training has improved staff confidence in encouraging pupils to read. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to read. Staff regularly emphasise key subject vocabulary that pupils need to know. Pupils often talk about the books they enjoy. They benefit from visits from authors and a talk about reading from a local football team player. However, a few pupils cannot read as well as they should. Leaders have resourced an appropriate phonics programme to support these pupils. However, staff's knowledge of how to teach phonics is not secure. This also has an impact on how well these pupils write.

Staff build strong relationships with pupils. They are very skilled at helping pupils learn how to self-regulate. Pupils are extremely positive about the support staff give them and are determined to do well.

Personal development is a fundamental part of the curriculum programme. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to build their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils get involved in the local community, raising funds to send aid to Ukraine and providing afternoon tea for elderly residents in a local care home. Pupils learn about living independently, including budgeting and shopping. They benefit from a well-developed careers programme that helps prepare them for the world of work. However, pupils do not have a thorough understanding of different cultures and faiths.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They say that sharing curriculum plans and resources has helped to reduce their workload. Staff appreciate the many opportunities they have to improve their practice and develop their careers.

Governors and the proprietor board are extremely well informed. They provide leaders with robust challenge and close support. They carry out their own visits to check on the quality of all aspects of the provision. This critical-friend approach helps leaders to keep improving the school.

Both school sites are well looked after. Policies are up to date and reflect the latest national guidance. The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The safeguarding policy and the relationships and sex education and health education policy are available on the school's website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. For example, they know about staying safe using mobile devices and about knife crime.

Many pupils are educated for some, or all, of each week off site. Leaders track these pupils closely to make sure that these pupils are safe.

Staff know the factors that may put pupils at risk of potential harm. They use the online recording system effectively to raise a concern. They know what they need to do if they are concerned about an adult's behaviour towards a pupil.

Leaders work closely with external agencies when pupils need extra support.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have made significant progress in promoting a love of reading. However, they have not ensured that all staff have the necessary knowledge and expertise to be able to teach pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read. These pupils do not get the help they need to become confident and fluent readers. Leaders must ensure that there is a coherent and consistent approach to the teaching of early reading, including the teaching of phonics.
- Some subject leaders do not have a close enough oversight of their area of responsibility. They do not know precisely what needs to get better or how to bring about the improvements necessary. Senior leaders need to provide subject leaders with the right support so that they have the knowledge and expertise they need to be effective in their roles.
- The curriculum is not planned as thoroughly in a few subjects as it is in others. In these few subjects, leaders are still in the process of identifying what pupils need to know and when. Pupils do not learn these subjects as well as they should. Leaders need to complete their curriculum reviews to ensure that each subject is planned thoroughly. They need to provide non-specialist staff with the support they need to be able to deliver these revised curriculum plans effectively.

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

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| Unique reference number | 139603 |
| DfE registration number | 891/6023 |
| Local authority | Nottinghamshire County Council |
| Inspection number | 10213175 |
| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 44 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 8 |
| Proprietor | R.E.A.L. Education Limited |
| Chair | Adrian O'Malley |
| Headteacher | Nikki Purcell |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £50,950 |
| Telephone number | 01623 490136 |
| Website | www.realindependentschools.org |
| Email address | nikki.purcell@real-education.org |
| Dates of previous inspection | 11 to 13 July 2017 |

Information about this school

- R.E.A.L. Independent Schools is an independent special school. The proprietor of the school is R.E.A.L Education Limited.
- The school is located on two sites. Blidworth is the site where the school is registered. It provides education for pupils in key stages 2 and 3. Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 are located in Mansfield at Concorde House, Kestral Road, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18 5FT.
- The school is registered to provide full-time education for up to 55 pupils. There are currently 44 pupils on the school's roll. A significant number of these pupils attend one of the other schools run by R.E.A.L. Education Limited to receive most of their education.
- The school provides education for pupils aged between seven and 19 years. Currently, there are no pupils aged below ten years on the school's roll.
- A small number of students on the school's roll are above the compulsory age of education. These students pursue a curriculum that is appropriate to their needs, including preparing them for adulthood.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. Most pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Many pupils have social, emotional or mental health needs. Some pupils have been excluded permanently from other schools. Some have not attended school for a significant period of time prior to being enrolled at this school.
- Pupils travel to the school from several local authorities, including Nottingham City, Nottinghamshire, Derby City and Derbyshire local authorities.
- The school uses 12 unregistered alternative providers for pupils to receive some of their education. Eight of these unregistered alternative providers are run by the proprietor but are separate to the school. Four of them are run by other organisations. The school also uses three registered alternative providers. These are other schools run by R.E.A.L. Education Limited.
- The headteacher has been in post since 2013. She has had oversight of all four schools run by R.E.A.L. Education Limited since September 2020.
- The current headteacher is stepping down from the role in December 2022. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2022 to work alongside the current headteacher. He will take over the role formally in January 2023.
- The chair of the proprietor board joined R.E.A.L. Education Limited in September 2021. He took over the role of chair in March 2022.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place from 11 to 13 July 2017.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with safeguarding leaders to examine safeguarding records, the school's system for recruiting staff and the school's single central record. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors did deep dives in four subjects: English, including reading, mathematics, science and PSHE education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with teachers of the subject to discuss the curriculum, visited lessons, looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke with pupils about their learning. Inspectors listened to some pupils read.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during social times and spoke formally with groups of pupils.
- The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair and the vice-chair. She also met with the owners of R.E.A.L. Education Limited and the chair of the proprietor board.
- Inspectors spoke on the telephone with representatives of two of the unregistered alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans, a variety of policies, information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, examples of pupils' EHC plans and individual risk assessments for pupils.
- Inspectors took into account responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also noted responses to the staff survey and the pupil survey.
- In order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors considered relevant documentation and reviewed facilities at both of the school's sites.

Inspection team

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Imtiaz Patel | Ofsted Inspector |
| Dave Gilkerson | His Majesty's Inspector |

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