



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Red Balloon Norwich

September 2022

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School's Details

School	Red Balloon Norwich
DfE number	926/6158
Registered charity number	1117092
Address	Red Balloon Norwich 289 Drayton Road Norwich Norfolk NR3 2PW
Telephone number	01603 622288
Email address	Redballoon.norwich@gmail.com
Head of centre	Mrs Lisa Andrews
Chair of governors	Mr Daniel Kelly
Age range	11 to 17
Number of pupils on roll	23
Inspection dates	21 to 23 September 2022

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Red Balloon Norwich is an independent co-educational day school. It is one of four members of the association of Red Balloon Learner Centres. The school was established in 2006, originally in a church hall, and recently moved to its current premises in a residential suburb near Norwich city. Some pupils initially start their education at the school remotely as 'Red balloon of the air' participants, before attending the school on-site. The proprietor is the chair of governors and the board of trustees who oversee the educational, welfare and financial arrangements of the centre. Since the previous inspection, the school appointed a new head of centre in August 2022.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to place the student voice at the centre of all learning, enabling them to identify and make progress along their bespoke learning paths. It seeks to support pupils' personal development and help them to develop good learning habits, self-efficacy and a positive sense of wellbeing, enabling them to become confident, curious, resilient, collaborative and thoughtful learners.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds, living within a 15-mile radius of the school. The school's own assessment indicates that pupils have a very wide range of abilities, but abilities are broadly average. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, social anxiety and mental health issues, and all receive additional specialist help. The school has 23 pupils with an education, health and care plan. No pupils have English as an additional language. Given the bespoke nature of the educational provision, the school provides individual programmes which develop knowledge, skills and interests.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Additionally, this visit serves as a material change visit to assess the school's proposal to [specify nature of material change and any relevant background information about school's provision].

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school does not meet all of the required standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 Some pupils take GCSEs, but the small numbers involved prevent reliable comparisons to be made with national averages.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The school's safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively in most areas, including liaison with external agencies to meet the needs of those pupils at risk or in particular need. However, the school's recruitment arrangements do not pay sufficient regard to the statutory guidance contained in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE) September 2022, when carrying out checks before staff take up an appointment. The school cannot show that it has consistently obtained and recorded references as required.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety in paragraph 6 and 8–16, the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 (accessibility plan), and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met, but that in paragraph 7 [safeguarding] is not met.**

Action point 1

The school must ensure that appropriate checks of references are undertaken prior to staff starting work [paragraph 7(a) and (b)].

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school has not undertaken all the required recruitment checks in a timely manner for all staff. Checks of qualifications, right to work and overseas checks are appropriate. Medical fitness checks have not always been undertaken before staff began work at the school.
- 2.12 The school undertakes the required checks for supply staff and proprietors.
- 2.13 A central register of appointments is kept as required.
- 2.14 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school in paragraphs 19 to 21 are met, but that in paragraph 18 [suitability of staff] is not met.**

Action point 2

The school must ensure that all checks, including medical fitness, have been completed before staff commence work at the school [paragraph 18(2)(c)(ii) and (3)].

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.15 Suitable toilet and changing facilities and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.16 The school does not provide suitable showers for use of pupils aged 11 or over who receive physical education.
- 2.17 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation in paragraphs 24–29 are met, but that in paragraph 23 [toilet and washing facilities] is not met.**

Action point 3

The school must ensure that suitable showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education [paragraph 23(1)(c)].

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.18 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.
- 2.19 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.20 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are

communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.21 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.22 The proprietor does not ensure that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.23 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school in paragraph 34 is not met.

Action point 4

The school must ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities use their skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively to promote the well-being of pupils and so ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c)].

3. Recommendation with regard to material change request

- 3.1 It is recommended that the request to change the address of Red Balloon Norwich to 289 Drayton Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR3 2PW is not granted at the present time. Currently, planning to use the new proposed building does not meet ISSR Part 5, Premises and accommodation, paragraph 23(1)(c), because there are no showering facilities for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education.
- 3.2 In addition, not all the required recruitment checks are not undertaken on new staff.

4. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

4.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils' academic achievement is good in relation to their starting points.
- Pupils demonstrate a good level of information, communication and technology (ICT) skills.
- Pupils' communication skills are strongly developed throughout their negotiated curriculum.
- Attitudes to learning are strong throughout the school.

4.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.

- Pupils develop very high levels of confidence and self-esteem compared to when they started at the centre.
- Pupils show great maturity in making decisions in preparing themselves for their next steps.
- Pupils' social development and collaboration across the school community are very strong.
- Pupils know how to be safe and healthy.

Recommendations

4.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Raise pupils' attainment by ensuring that targets set across all subjects, particularly for younger pupils, are clear, challenging and measurable in line with subjects that do this effectively.
- Strengthen pupils' writing across the curriculum so that they can extend their written responses and deepen their achievement across all areas of learning.
- Strengthen pupils' spiritual development by including more opportunities for philosophy, religion and ethics across the curriculum and school life.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

4.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

4.5 School records show that, over time, students' rates of progress have increased. To a large extent, this has been as a result of pupils developing the social skills required to relate to others and to participate in classroom activities. When this works well, pupils make the strongest progress because their education is not disrupted. All of the parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching, including any online provision, enables their children to make progress. Those pupils who are educated at the school for longer periods make excellent progress from their starting

points. The majority of pupils achieve Grade 4 or above in English and mathematics. Some pupils achieve Grade 9 in these subjects along with high achievement in a few other different subjects, including functional skills or Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) in media and child care.

- 4.6 Pupils are very confident and competent users of ICT. Their strong ICT skills enhance their learning across the curriculum. For example, in Year 10 they designed a pixel art character as part of an art project on creating characters and themes for a game design. Pupils' skilful use of ICT enables them to explain their understanding confidently, remain connected with their peers and have important opportunities to learn collaboratively. For example, in a Year 10 football short course pupils could illustrate and explain the use of four defenders, with the right back playing high line, to draw in wingers from the opposition. Pupils improve their understanding of the wider world and economic understanding by using the internet effectively.
- 4.7 The majority of pupils have effective communication skills because of the strong focus placed on developing their interpersonal and literacy skills. Although many pupils, initially, have difficulty in verbalising their emotions or feelings, they increasingly develop their communication skills and engage enthusiastically in circle time, drama, debating club, playing board and card games and sports. Those pupils who are reluctant communicators are helped to contribute to lessons by the positive encouragement of their classmates and teachers. As a result, pupils listen attentively and use specialist vocabulary in their written work and spoken responses. This was demonstrated in a science lesson in Year 11 when pupils described friction as an opposing force. Pupils across the school actively engage with reading and demonstrate good levels of understanding. This is shown by pupils' views and recommendations about a book they have read, such as *The Labyrinth from the Nightfall Gardens* trilogy by Allen Houston. These summaries displayed a fascination for the characters and plot in an ancestral home, shrouded in fog and mystery. Some pupils produce very high-quality written descriptions and explanations across a range of subjects. However, there is variation in pupils' writing because their learning is limited by the number of opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum.
- 4.8 Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. This is a considerable achievement given the intermittent or late start to their secondary education. They work effectively both in collaborative and independent work. Older pupils increasingly take responsibility for initiating and organising their own learning. They understand about learning in different ways and appreciate that the centre embraces this through negotiated timetables. This was shown by their enthusiasm for interesting and inspiring project work. This enables pupils to draw upon their own interests which helps them be successful in their learning. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that this made learning stimulating, exciting and fun. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school equips their children with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life. They recognise how interventions have led to longer-term improvements in behaviour and more positive attitudes towards learning at home. Pupils appreciate how they have improved engagement in learning. They are better prepared to face challenges they initially find difficult through the support of learning mentors and teachers.
- 4.9 Pupils display good subject knowledge, skills and understanding in English, mathematics and a small number of other qualifications they have chosen to study. They deepen their learning in these subjects because work is well matched to their individual needs. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that the school's approach to providing a personalised range of subjects and activities meets their interests and abilities. Many pupils make accelerated rates of progress and any gaps in their understanding are closed. Pupils willingly demonstrate meticulous attention to detail and use of technical skills in creative subjects. For example, they embellished denim jackets for their pet dog or toy teddy bear using textile techniques. Pupils talk confidently about anti-authoritarian art, such as in the beat generation of the 1950s, the hippie generation of the 1960s and more modern examples, such as Banksy. Targets set in English, mathematics, history and art raise progress and attainment because they are clear and

measurable. Target setting is not as well-developed across other subject areas, particularly for younger pupils, and this limits some pupils' progress and attainment.

- 4.10 Pupils show a good level of ability in applying their numeracy skills across the curriculum. They make strong progress in mathematics because of the relevant learning activities provided. These activities engage pupils positively in their learning. For example, pupils in Year 8 confidently calculated speed given the distance covered and the time taken, or used three dice effectively to complete three-digit addition and subtraction. In a lesson in Year 9, pupils confidently interpreted symbolic representation, greater than and less than, to generate questions and determine correctly an unknown number between 0 and 50. Pupils demonstrate and transfer their mathematical skills to other subject areas effectively such as in science, design and technology and food technology such as measuring quantities. Older more able pupils show high levels of mental mathematics such as rapidly stating the answer to squared numbers. They also confidently calculate exterior and interior angles for irregular polygons and problems involving parallel lines. As a result, they gain much greater confidence in their own ability as they develop advanced numeracy skills.
- 4.11 Pupils have effective study skills. They show confidence in researching topics and ways of analysing text or theories through a blend of online and face-to-face education that supports their ability to question different hypotheses. Pupils demonstrate higher-order thinking skills when they are encouraged to tackle challenges independently. For example, in a science lesson in Year 11, when suggesting the reasons for the shape of a graph, pupils showed how the speed of a parachutist changes with time. Pupils with anxieties and complex needs used a range of research skills in a calm and relaxed manner. They used the multi-function room and art facilities effectively to challenge their own thinking skills and enjoy their learning. In a wellbeing lesson in Year 8, pupils had a heated discussion about the meaning of positive relationships.
- 4.12 Pupils engage effectively with the healing power of nature through gardening projects and animal care. They thrive on individual timetabled support with trained therapists, such as talking, art or textile skills. Pupils who spoke to inspectors talked positively about creative activities such as visual arts, mindfulness walks and non-competitive sports. For example, in an art lesson in Year 11, pupils confidently created paintings to represent menacing characters and demons in the context of an animated musical comedy '*Hazbin Hotel*'. Some pupils achieve bronze, silver and gold art award through projects such as Jumanji posters and work in the context of currently popular films or documentaries. Pupils gain higher-level social skills through work experience or work-related learning.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 4.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 4.14 Pupils have excellent levels of self-awareness and display realistic personal understanding. They grow in self-confidence as they progress through the school through a range of activities, such as wellbeing lessons, one-to-one mentoring and counselling. Pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to make further progress. Those who spoke to inspectors said they develop their self-confidence and social skills in a nurturing informal atmosphere. As a result, pupils have the confidence to move forward and improve their learning and performance at a higher level than when they started attending the centre. All of the parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that their children's particular individual educational needs are met effectively. They value the work undertaken at the school and recognise how this improves their children's wellbeing as well as supporting their educational progress. Pupils value the time they have with the school staff and speak very highly about the adults they work with and the support they need to flourish and to believe in themselves. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stages in their education through effective and on-going communication with local colleges. Key priorities of leadership and governance ensure that all pupils proceed to employment or local colleges to take courses suited to their needs. Work

experience and college placements give further practical opportunities for developing self-esteem and life skills.

- 4.15 Pupils make effective decisions about their own development because they are encouraged to follow their individual interests and strengths. They understand the ramifications of these decisions. Pupils' starting points show a lack of belief that they can either manage their own learning or make 'rational' decisions. However, they learn to manage their emotions more effectively. They understand very clearly that they can make their own decisions, with no fear of judgement, and that these will have a positive impact upon their future happiness and success. Pupils choose what they wish to study and what they want to achieve. As a result, they feel empowered to follow their interests and set themselves ambitious targets for their own success. In wellbeing lessons in Year 11, pupils demonstrate their ability to use different breathing techniques during periods of anxiety by practising how to control their breathing when blowing bubbles.
- 4.16 Pupils work well with others. This collaboration and effective development of social skills is encouraged by the range of opportunities they have to work in a variety of groupings across the school. Pupils gain confidence in a harmonious atmosphere that helps them to build resilience and belief in themselves once more, empowering them to be the best they can be. They develop their social skills effectively in a safe environment after initially finding group work challenging. Those who spoke to inspectors consistently said that they liked their teachers and lessons. Pupils develop the confidence to overcome their challenges, develop resilience and feel ready to re-engage with the world through the school's aims which focus on face-to-face psychological therapy, social re-engagement and education. This contributes significantly in helping pupil to re-engage with their classmates and the school community. In many cases, this is the first time they have worked alongside classmates for many months, or even years. It helps them to increase interaction with other young people of the same age, building important social skills.
- 4.17 Pupils feel very safe in school and parents overwhelmingly agree that this is the case. All pupils and parents who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school provides a safe environment. Pupils say that they know who to seek help from if they are concerned. They are particularly well informed about the dangers of cyber-bullying and know what actions to take if this occurs. Pupils heal emotionally and develop resilience against any hurdles they may face in the future because of regular support sessions. These ensure they are supported with their mental health and personal wellbeing. Pupils show a good understanding of healthy living and know about healthy eating and the importance of exercise.
- 4.18 Pupils celebrate holidays and cultural events from around the world. They show respect and tolerance for others and debate different lifestyles when generating a range of advantages and disadvantages. In a humanities lesson in Year 9, pupils confidently presented arguments for why they believed, or not, that God created the world. Pupils have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. They value the opportunities for self-expression in a range of areas including in art and creative skills lessons. They said that some lessons included 'wow' moments, opportunities to discuss ethical issues and a chance for reflection, but this was not consistent across the school.
- 4.19 Pupils are self-disciplined, take responsibility for their behaviour and show respect for each other and their teachers. Pupils are polite and confident. They demonstrate positive relationships between members of the school community during activities such as circle time, wellbeing and citizenship lessons. During break and lunchtimes pupils encourage each other to join in with playing games or doing a jigsaw. They respect the wishes of those who want to sit quietly and do their own individual activity. Pupils use restorative justice techniques to reflect upon their own behaviour and that of their classmates. This results in a cohort that has a strong moral code and genuine clarity re. 'right and wrong'.
- 4.20 Pupils value the opportunity to be involved in taking on responsibility such as showing new pupils around the school. Those who were initially red balloon of the air, talked positively about home visits

by mentors which helped them to leave their house. This happened in gradual steps, sometimes by standing outside the front door, and then moving on to walking the dog, or travelling into town. Pupils said that this gave them the confidence when ready, to attend the centre and take part in wellbeing activities or developing their social skills, in a supportive environment. Pupils eat freshly cooked lunches, celebrate birthdays, play games and share their daily news in the open-plan dining area, where staff and pupils come together. Pupils develop life skills, such as learning how to travel by bus independently or use a cashpoint. They attend college open days, plan the route and familiarise themselves with the campus, including identifying where to find help or a quiet space. This helps to develop their self-confidence and social skills when the pupils find themselves in new situations.

- 4.21 Pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of different cultures, religious beliefs and backgrounds through a well-planned personal, social and health education programme. They value each other's social, emotional and cultural differences. Pupils are sensitive to the needs of others and show a good understanding of and respect for those with different feelings and attitudes. Shared difficulties, feelings and ways of tackling anxieties lead to strong friendships within the school community. There is a basic acceptance and support of a person, regardless of what they say or do. An ethos of tolerance and respect pervades school life. Pupils strongly value and respect each other being particularly supportive in their views of the LGBTQ+ community.

5. Inspection Evidence

- 5.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors and the designated safeguarding governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Desmond Dunne	Reporting inspector
Ms Lisa Maynard	Compliance team inspector (Director of estates, ISA group of schools)
Mrs Claire Hewitt	Team inspector (Former head, GSA school)