

School inspection report

14 to 16 October 2025

Red Balloon Norwich

289 Drayton Road

Norwich

Norfolk

NR3 2PW

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders demonstrate the required knowledge and skills to implement policies effectively and demonstrate a clear understanding of how to promote pupils' wellbeing and academic progress. All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and have been assessed as having high levels of anxiety, stress and trauma and are unable to attend other schools. Leaders have designed a suitably welcoming and nurturing environment that enables pupils to rebuild their confidence and to re-engage with learning and school life.
2. Trustees successfully support and challenge leaders to promote pupils' wellbeing. Trustees ensure that leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their responsibilities effectively, so that the Standards are met. However, at the beginning of the inspection, not all the required information was made available to parents on the website. This was rectified during the inspection.
3. Senior leaders reflect and act on their self-evaluation effectively. They take actions to enhance the curriculum and develop bespoke partnerships with local employers. These initiatives ensure that the choice of subjects is tailored to pupils' needs and aspirations and carefully aligned with opportunities on offer in the current job market.
4. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme is successful in developing pupils' appreciation of social and economic matters. The provision for relationships and sex education (RSE) meets statutory requirements. Pupils learn that every person is unique and deserves respect.
5. Teachers plan interesting activities that pupils enjoy, that meet their needs and inspire them to learn. The support for pupils and the positive relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils feel valued and safe. As a result, pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning.
6. Effective behaviour management approaches ensure that pupils behave well and are kind and respectful towards each other and with staff. Pupils develop their understanding of the need for rules and that behavioural choices have consequences.
7. Throughout the school day, pupils are supervised appropriately, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Risks which may affect pupils' welfare, health and safety are identified and mitigated.
8. Pupils understand that participation in physical pursuits, including through recreational and outdoor activities, will help them to lead a healthy lifestyle and boost their confidence and fitness. As a result, pupils' physical and mental health are supported well.
9. Leaders gather a range of information about the school's performance, particularly about pupils' achievement, behaviour and safeguarding. However, data is not routinely analysed for all pupil groups across the school to enable leaders to identify any trends and pinpoint precisely which strategies will improve pupils' outcomes.
10. Safeguarding is prioritised across the school and staff are well trained. Staff are alert to changes in pupils' mood or demeanour and know when and how to refer their concerns. The safeguarding team ensures that staff are kept up to date with any changes to statutory guidance. Safeguarding leaders cultivate professional working relationships with external safeguarding agencies and ensure that appropriate procedures to safeguard pupils are implemented effectively. They are vigilant to any

potential contextual safeguarding risks to the pupils. Pre-employment and recruitment checks are completed in a timely manner.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- check systematically to ensure that all the required information is consistently made available to parents
- develop the depth of analysis of achievement, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding data, with the aim of identifying trends and checking if different groups of pupils are disproportionately represented, in order to pinpoint precisely which actions will be the most successful in supporting pupils to improve their outcomes.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The board of trustees has appropriate experience and expertise of the SEND sector. They meet and visit regularly to challenge and provide support for staff. This enables trustees to have oversight of leaders' work and to ensure that leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their roles. Trustees and leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the Standards are met consistently, and the wellbeing of the pupils is actively promoted.
12. Leaders use a range of measures to gather information about the school's performance, particularly in the areas of achievement, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding. Leaders use this information effectively to form an accurate picture of individual pupil performance across these aspects. This, together with appropriate nurturing approaches, enables staff to know and understand pupils' individual needs well. However, currently, performance in these areas is not routinely analysed with regard to the different pupil groups across the school. This restricts leaders' ability to spot any emerging patterns or trends, to identify any groups of pupils who maybe disproportionately represented and to target strategies to improve outcomes.
13. Subject leaders have an effective overview of their curriculum areas and outcomes for pupils. The well-considered training and coaching programme, together with regular monitoring of teaching and pupils' work, is successful in improving teaching. This is achieved through focused visits to lessons, feedback coaching for individual teachers and specific training to enhance teaching strategies.
14. Leaders and trustees take effective steps to identify, manage and mitigate risk, especially regarding pupils' specific circumstances and vulnerabilities. Appropriate risk assessments are in place in relation to the curriculum, health and safety, extra-curricular and off-site activities, and safeguarding. Staff have a thorough understanding of risk management procedures, particularly those relating to individual pupils and their behaviour. Adjustments are made, when needed, so that changes are implemented consistently by the adults working with the young people. As a result, pupils can proceed with their learning and benefit from extending their experience in a secure environment.
15. Most of the required information is available on the school's website. However, at the start of the inspection not all the previous inspection reports were published on the school's website. Also, the anti-bullying and the online safety policies did not reference the latest government guidance. Practice in these areas is secure and compliant with statutory guidance. These policy oversights were rectified during the inspection.
16. Leaders and trustees ensure that inclusion and equality are central to the school's aims and ethos. A suitable accessibility plan is implemented effectively. Adaptations to the learning environment, classroom resources and individual learning programmes are made so that pupils can access all curriculum areas across the school site. The school fulfils its duties in meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have created an inclusive and accessible environment where pupils thrive.
17. The complaints policy is published on the website and is implemented effectively. Staff communicate well with parents so that any concerns are dealt with swiftly and in accordance with required timescales and stages.

18. Leaders cultivate productive partnerships with external agencies, so that pupils' needs are identified and supported in a timely manner. Effective working with safeguarding partners ensures an integrated approach to safeguarding pupils.
19. Leaders maintain close contact with parents through the annual review process. Parents receive regular reports and feedback on their child's progress and wellbeing. All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders furnish local authorities with the required information and a statement about how public funds are spent.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

20. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The curriculum covers all the required areas of learning and is designed to help pupils re-engage in their learning. The curriculum focuses on helping pupils to gain an increased sense of self-worth through developing their academic skills. The curriculum is suitably adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils and to enable them to be successful. For example, following requests from pupils, courses in Italian, Korean and Swedish have been added to reflect the interests and enthusiasms of the pupils at the school.
22. Pupils study a range of qualifications matched to their interests, abilities and aptitudes, including GCSEs and other accreditations. Pupils in Year 11 study courses in art, biology, child development, computer science, English language, English literature, hair and beauty, humanities, mathematics, PSHE and science. Pupils make good progress from their starting points, as shown in their examination results. As a result of this success, almost all leavers gain college or training placements.
23. Pupils enjoy a range of structured recreational activities such as chess, magic and wellbeing clubs. Staff encourage pupils to choose and pursue additional activities as they acquire new interests and skills, such as completing 1000-piece jigsaw puzzles. Participation in these activities enables pupils to find new and interesting ways to spend their leisure time, while developing their confidence and self-esteem.
24. Teachers plan activities which are appropriate to the needs of pupils. Staff use their expertise to explain new concepts. They pay close attention to how well pupils learn. Staff are quick to spot any emerging misconceptions and adapt their teaching in response. This helps pupils to make connections in their studies and remember new knowledge effectively. Teachers and learning support assistants support pupils well through encouragement and a nurturing approach to learning.
25. Careful consideration to the individual needs of pupils helps to remove any barriers to learning that pupils might have. Teachers adapt resources, such as communication cards, visual timetables and writing frames. These, together with consistent classroom routines and clear transitions, help to reduce pupils' anxiety and stress, and increase their concentration. When specific pupils need it, learning mentors provide one-to-one sessions to support pupils' bespoke needs by providing strategies that help them to return to lessons with their peers.
26. Teachers enable pupils to develop secure literacy skills. Pupils confidently analyse reading texts to write well-crafted paragraphs using technical language accurately, for example by explaining the etymological root of the word 'significance'. In mathematics, pupils learn how to apply their mathematical skills to real-life situations, such as calculating the cost of paint and materials, and comparing prices from different retailers when budgeting the price for decorating a room in their house. Teachers apply their good subject knowledge to effective questioning and discussions through which pupils develop their confidence in listening and speaking. Adults model the accurate use of vocabulary and grammar and develop pupils' skills in selecting the most appropriate level of formality in language to use for different occasions. The focus on developing these communication and mathematical skills help prepare pupils for adulthood and the workplace.
27. Members of the learning support team establish effective screening arrangements to assess pupils' abilities and aptitudes. They devise stimulating resources and advise staff on the most effective strategies that enable pupils who have SEND to access the curriculum.

28. An effective assessment system is in place to check pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers use this information to plan lessons that are pitched at a suitable level so that pupils' needs are correctly identified and met.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

29. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

30. Staff provide a nurturing environment which supports pupils' needs. They take great care to ensure pupils feel safe, confident and comfortable in the school. Through their kindness, patience and understanding, staff support and encourage pupils to re-build their confidence and to help overcome their previous difficulties.
31. The RSE programme, delivered during PSHE lessons, reflects current statutory guidance. Leaders consult parents regarding the curriculum content. Appropriate topics such as consent, emotions and resilience provide pupils with strategies to make positive choices and to make and sustain healthy and respectful relationships.
32. The 'active choices' curriculum provides a comprehensive programme of sports sessions and extra-curricular activities, including badminton, boxing, climbing, golf and swimming. These activities are delivered by specialist staff and carefully tailored to meet pupils' needs. The school provides many opportunities to engage pupils in sports and physical pursuits at off-site venues, including the local university's sports centre. Participation in these activities helps to develop pupils' self-knowledge, self-confidence, social skills and teamwork. Pupils learn how taking part in physical activities can have a positive impact on mental and physical health.
33. Staff use a range of effective strategies to reduce pupils' anxiety and stress. Staff appreciate that these emotions are often how pupils communicate their feelings, especially when they have difficulties in expressing themselves verbally. Staff are adept at reading these non-verbal signals to determine the most appropriate support to adopt. Staff deploy therapeutic resources such as plastic construction bricks and fidget toys to calm pupils and enable them to be in more control of their behaviour. There are also opportunities for pupils to attend animal therapy sessions at a local eco-farm. By engaging with animals, pupils learn to recognise and manage their feelings and emotions and begin to take responsibility for how they respond to different social situations.
34. The behaviour policy is implemented well. Positive behaviours are praised both verbally and in written form, such as celebration certificates presented each Friday during assembly. Pupils learn that inappropriate behaviour has consequences. Any poor behaviour is dealt with swiftly using learning conversations, natural consequences and restorative practice, rather than any punitive measures. Pupils understand that rewards and sanctions are designed to protect individual interests and promote a well-regulated society. In PSHE, pupils learn about the different types of bullying and the negative impact these can have on people's mental and physical health. As a result, relationships are positive and bullying incidents are rare.
35. Pupils develop an understanding of the spiritual and moral aspects of life, often experienced through art, cultural studies and outdoor activities. Pupils understand how the personal challenges they have encountered can have a profound influence on what they believe is important in life. As a result, they are respectful of each other's feelings and perceptions. If pupils become anxious, they can access safe spaces to take time out to reflect on their feelings and, when ready, return to their learning. This positive coping strategy benefits their mental and emotional wellbeing.
36. Pupils learn how to tolerate and respect people who may have a different experience of life to their own. They learn that articulating stereotypical or prejudiced viewpoints can be hurtful to others.

Through the PSHE and preparation for adult life (PFAL) programmes, pupils learn about different types of diversity and the importance of recognising and valuing people's individual identities, circumstances and choices. For example, pupils set up a postcard scheme between the school and a local care home to help promote communication across the generations and to reduce the harmful effects of loneliness.

37. Attendance and admission registers are suitably maintained and in line with current statutory requirements. Leaders monitor any non-attendance closely and work effectively to improve it where necessary. Leaders inform the local authority about any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of the year.
38. Supervision arrangements are effective. Pupils are suitably supervised throughout the school day, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Staff communicate well and in a timely manner with each other, regarding any updates or changes to pupils' supervision and are always on hand to support pupils' different needs.
39. A suitable medical room is in place to care for pupils who are ill, injured or have additional medical needs. Medicines are stored securely and administered in line with school policy. A range of qualified staff manage the medical facilities well.
40. The school site is well maintained. Regular health and safety audits and maintenance checks are undertaken to enable the school to be safe and secure. Effective procedures are in place to reduce the risk from fire. Trained fire marshals and regular fire drills ensure that staff and pupils implement the required evacuation procedures. An up-to-date fire risk assessment is in place. The school maintains appropriate records of health and safety and fire safety procedures and maintenance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 41. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

42. The curriculum provides pupils with a range of carefully planned opportunities to develop their economic knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils learn how national insurance, pay slips, mortgages, and credit and debit cards work. In PFAL lessons, pupils develop their money management skills by applying these to real-life economic scenarios, such as managing a household budget. These activities help pupils develop their financial literacy by learning how to manage their money and understanding the benefits of making sound financial decisions.
43. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. The carefully planned careers programme is based on nationally recognised benchmarks. Teachers guide and support pupils on different pathways and next steps. Leaders develop bespoke apprenticeships with local family-run businesses to support pupils into the world of work. Visits to careers fairs, colleges of further education and personalised advice from qualified staff enable pupils to have a clear idea of their next step.
44. In cultural studies, pupils gain an understanding of democracy, laws, legislation, and judicial and political systems by learning about Parliament, voting in elections and the role of the national broadcaster. These studies help pupils to learn about the benefits and securities that society can provide when its citizens respect democracy, abide by the law and contribute positively to their communities. Staff ensure that any discussions with pupils about political information are conducted impartially and without bias.
45. Pupils gain an understanding of local and national British institutions and services in contemporary society. Pupils visit local places of interest such as Norwich's cathedral, castle and mosque, and exhibitions and museums in London. Participation in these outings helps pupils to learn how public institutions can make a positive contribution to society.
46. Through PSHE lessons and their interactions with adults, particularly their key worker, pupils appreciate and understand the need for rules, rewards and consequences, to protect individual interests and maintain a well-ordered society. Staff model appropriate social behaviour. This enables pupils to distinguish between right and wrong and apply moral principles and values. Pupils learn strategies in how to interpret new social situations and choose the most appropriate behaviours that help build trusting relationships.
47. Tolerance and respect for individual differences are routinely promoted through the PSHE programme. Leaders provide a calm and nurturing ethos that aims to rebuild pupils' self-confidence so that they can form respectful relationships with their peers and staff and prepares them well for life in British society. Pupils listen to one another and are understanding of differences between people. Pupils develop an appreciation of the diversity of cultures, traditions and values other than their own by, for example, reading literature and through their art and cookery lessons.
48. Leaders encourage pupils to undertake leadership roles in the school, such as health and safety rep, lunchtime helper and club supervisors. Opportunities to take on responsibilities help pupils to appreciate the views and opinions of others as well as develop their own leadership skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

50. Trustees, leaders and staff work effectively together to secure a robust culture of safeguarding throughout the school. They regularly review the school's context and the needs of the pupils. Leaders take timely action to address any needs.
51. Leaders recognise that pupils with high levels of anxiety and who have SEND can be particularly vulnerable when navigating online platforms. Effective and secure internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place to help prevent pupils accessing inappropriate content. These systems are checked regularly. Online records confirm that any alerts are investigated swiftly, including the details and reasons for any actions taken.
52. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. For example, they know not to disclose personal information such as their identity or location, and to always have up-to-date virus protection installed on their electronic devices. They also learn how to recognise when something is not safe, such as an unfamiliar or unusual email or website address.
53. Pupils know they can always speak with a trusted adult if they have a worry or concern. An online concern box, accessible via a QR code, is also available for pupils to report any concerns should they feel unable to discuss matters directly with staff. Leaders use this system effectively to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.
54. Safeguarding leaders cultivate effective working partnerships with the two local authorities that commission places at the school. They seek advice or make timely referrals to relevant agencies, such as children's services and the local authority, as required. Leaders liaise closely with external agencies to understand emerging risks to pupils in the local area so that they can identify and mitigate risks and put in place robust safety plans so that pupils' needs are met.
55. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained. They ensure that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and are secure in their understanding of the importance of their roles in helping keeping pupils safe. They know how to report safeguarding concerns and follow up on outcomes, using a national whistleblowing helpline, if necessary.
56. Staff understand the requirements of the staff code of conduct. This policy clearly sets out leaders' expectations about how staff should conduct and present themselves, in person and online, both in and outside of school. Staff understand the necessary procedures they should follow should they need to raise a low-level concern about any adult working in the school. Safeguarding leaders respond swiftly and take suitable action when required.
57. Safer recruitment procedures are implemented effectively to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. The school records these checks in a suitably maintained single central record of appointments.
58. Safeguarding leaders keep detailed records of the decisions they make and communicate regularly with members of the pastoral and safeguarding teams. Staff maintain high levels of vigilance across the school and are alert for any signs of potential risks or safeguarding concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Red Balloon – Norwich
Department for Education number	926/6158
Registered charity number	1117092
Address	Red Balloon – Norwich 289 Drayton Road Norwich Norfolk NR3 2PW
Phone number	01603 622288
Email address	admissions@rbnorwich.org.uk
Website	www.rbnorwich.org.uk
Proprietor	Red Balloon – Norwich
Chair of trustees	Ms Emma Culley
Headteacher	Mr Mark Anderson
Age range	11 to 17
Number of pupils	40
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 September 2022

Information about the school

60. Red Balloon Norwich is an independent co-educational day school, located in Norwich, Norfolk. It caters for pupils who have missed extended periods of education in previous educational establishments. The school supports pupils who have experienced bullying, trauma, physical ill health and autism and those who have social, emotional and mental health needs, whose needs have not been met by mainstream schooling.
61. The school is a registered charity. The proprietorial body comprises of a board of trustees who oversee the educational, welfare and financial arrangements of the school.
62. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and they all have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
63. The school has not identified any pupils as speaking English as an additional language (EAL).
64. Currently, there are no pupils in the sixth form.
65. The school states its aims are for pupils to regain their self-esteem and grow as individuals to reconnect with education and learning. Through a blend of academic, vocational and wellbeing activities, it seeks to ensure that all learners leave with appropriate life skills and qualifications, that enable them to thrive in adulthood.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 October 2025

66. A team of two inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, all of which were accompanied by senior leaders
- observation of registration periods
- discussions with pupils and examination of samples of their work
- discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, other members of staff and three trustees, including the chair
- reviewed processes for attending enrichment, PE and sports activities at off-site facilities
- examination of curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

68. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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