

R.E.A.L. Independent Schools

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

Inspection dates

11–13 July 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and ensures that pupils make good progress from their various starting points. The majority of pupils achieve much more than they anticipate on entry to the school.
- Pupils make outstanding improvements in their behaviour and attendance once they have developed confidence in the exemplary care and individual support provided by staff.
- The school provides a safe environment in which staff ensure the well-being of individual pupils. Pupils thrive in the caring and positive ethos of the school.
- The small numbers of post-16 students enhance their qualifications and make strong progress with the development of their independence skills.
- Governors and school leaders have established exemplary arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. These have an increasingly positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The school has made excellent progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. These include improvements in the effective use of marking, the assessment of pupils' outcomes and provision for pupils' cultural development.
- Senior leaders have planned appropriately to review the recently revised assessment arrangements. They are aware that pupils' targets are not always sufficiently precise or challenging to support outstanding progress.
- Individual pupils' timetables provide appropriate and challenging experiences. However, not every pupil has similar access to the full range of personal, social and citizenship education.
- Staff implement rigorous arrangements to monitor and improve pupils' attendance. However, a small number of pupils have irregular attendance, mostly due to anxiety and emotional concerns.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress and teachers' planning by ensuring that:
 - pupils' individual targets are well matched to their starting points and to national expectations
 - there is sufficient challenge in learning activities to enable more pupils to make outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Improve the attendance and engagement of the small number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Ensure that all pupils have equal access to a common core of learning in personal, social and citizenship education.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The proprietor and senior leaders have ensured that the school meets all of the independent school standards.
- The proprietor and senior leaders are united in their unceasing drive for excellence. They have established a culture of continual review and development and shared this effectively across the staff. They have trained middle leaders appropriately to contribute to arrangements for classroom observation and the monitoring of quality.
- Staff are highly committed to the aims of the school and responsive to opportunities to contribute ideas and take the school's provision forward. The school embodies a culture of constant reflection and improvement.
- Staff who completed the inspection questionnaire, believe the school is well led and managed, and this view is endorsed by parents' responses to the Parent View questionnaire.
- A major strength of the school is the high quality of relationships between staff and pupils. This has a positive impact on pupils' ability to settle in school and to apply themselves to effective learning.
- Staff are dedicated to improving opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. Their concerted efforts and perseverance result in substantial improvements in behaviour, attendance and learning for the great majority of pupils. Staff are relentless in their work to improve attendance and outcomes for pupils who may be marginalised by their anxieties and lack of self-confidence.
- The school uses the services of a wide range of providers, both within R.E.A.L. Education and beyond, to create highly effective timetables for individual pupils. Pupils are taught, usually individually or in small groups, at a range of well-equipped venues. This enables the school to supplement its core academic curriculum with a stimulating variety of therapeutic, vocational and practical experiences. Courses include a wide range of suitably accredited qualifications.
- The curriculum provides a number of activities and events that contribute effectively to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including their understanding of fundamental British values. The school has improved this provision since the last inspection by the inclusion of a wider range of experiences to enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity. The structure of individual timetables does not guarantee all pupils equal access to the full range of personal, social and citizenship education.
- The school's improvement plan includes an appropriate review of the recently introduced assessment arrangements. Pupils' targets are not always sufficiently precise to enable a reliable assessment of progress against national standards or, occasionally, not sufficiently challenging to support outstanding progress.

Governance

- Governors provide systematic and well-focused challenge and support for senior leaders.

An environment of high expectations and continual improvement permeates all levels of the school, including work with individuals and groups of pupils.

- The extensive focus on monitoring, evaluation and review is an outstanding feature of the school. Senior and middle leaders produce files of significant evidence of improvement, which they share regularly with governors.
- Individual governors contribute high levels of expertise, for example in safeguarding, the curriculum, and health and safety. They use this expertise well to ensure that all staff are fulfilling the proprietor's high expectations.
- Governors have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the school's strengths. They work very effectively with senior leaders to develop plans for further improvement, and they monitor the implementation of plans rigorously.
- The governors oversee a systematic programme of staff performance review, which contributes effectively to the management of a disparate and dispersed staff team. All staff have access to a comprehensive programme of personal development and training.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Senior staff have produced a comprehensive safeguarding policy that has regard for the latest statutory guidance. Senior leaders manage any concerns about the safeguarding of individual pupils robustly and record actions taken comprehensively.
- All members of staff receive appropriate training in safeguarding during their induction. The school ensures that all members of staff also receive regular refresher training that maintains their awareness of current threats to pupils' welfare.
- Senior staff have developed strong and effective links with parents and a range of external agencies. The school provides parents with access to its safeguarding policy through its website, together with additional policies that inform parents about all aspects of pupils' safety and well-being.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across all subjects and year groups. Staff provide an appropriate induction period for pupils, which enables them to develop good understanding of pupils' various starting points.
- On entry to the school, many pupils have gaps in their learning and others need new motivations to engage and learn effectively. Staff are extremely skilled at inspiring them and developing their confidence to participate in learning. Staff manage pupils' behaviour appropriately in a manner that prevents disturbance and distraction for other learners.
- Staff work very effectively together to plan a curriculum and learning activities that develop pupils' knowledge and understanding progressively. They prepare imaginative and stimulating ways to engage pupils and to retain their interest. Pupils in a key stage 2 and 3 group, for example, enjoyed working with fidget spinners as they used multiplication, fractions and decimals to time their completion of tasks and create sequences of costs.

- Much of the teaching involves pupils in one-to-one discussion and recording of ideas. Tutors are very skilled at asking appropriate questions and challenging pupils to work things out for themselves.
- Teachers provide pupils with good opportunities to discuss and share their ideas with the group. This is often challenging for pupils who are learning to integrate into a working group, but staff are sensitive to their needs and manage relationships extremely well.
- Pupils enjoy the wide-ranging practical activities provided, for example through learning in science and horticulture. Pupils at key stage 4 enjoyed a high-speed revision lesson on the electro-magnetic spectrum. They responded extremely positively to the variety of practical activities, demonstrations and videos, using their previous knowledge to reinforce their learning and to ask appropriate questions.
- Key stage 3 pupils responded sensitively and with enjoyment to the opportunity to handle a dog and a rabbit, as they identified how to tell whether an animal is healthy. Within this practical learning, staff give good attention to the development of literacy, including the use of phonics to improve reading skills.
- Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and use this well to provide learning activities that develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and higher-level learning skills in a suitable sequence.
- The school has devised its own 'marking ruler', which provides staff with a clear understanding of the school's marking policy. Staff use this very effectively to provide written feedback to pupils and to use different levels of intervention, dependent on pupils' readiness for greater challenge. Staff use their marking of pupils' work effectively, together with continual oral assessment, to assess the levels at which pupils are working.
- The current assessment system is new and under review. Staff set individual targets for each pupil in each subject. Pupils understand these targets and know what is expected of them. The system is not yet refined enough to provide a sufficiently accurate assessment of whether each pupil is making good or outstanding progress from their starting points.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils enter the school with negative previous experiences of education. Many lack self-esteem and a willingness to respond positively to adults. These pupils require a period of adjustment to the expectations and values of the school. In time, cooperation and participation become the norm for the great majority.
- The excellent quality of relationships between staff and pupils enables pupils to develop respect for themselves and for adults. Staff demonstrate considerable patience and high levels of respect for differences between pupils. Pupils understand the school's expectations and respond very positively.
- Pupils are safe in school. Parents state that their children are happy and safe at the school. Staff at all the centres used by the school are trained consistently to undertake their responsibilities for the safety and well-being of pupils. Health and safety at all venues are a high priority and very effectively ensured.

- The school provides pupils with excellent opportunities to develop their awareness of how to live safe and healthy lifestyles, including a clear understanding of e-safety. Visitors to the school, specialist teaching in vocational subjects and the school's programme of personal, social and health education all provide pupils with challenging experiences of how to keep safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils with very varied personal characteristics and expectations of themselves rapidly develop respect for the staff and their fellow pupils. They demonstrate very strong improvements in their behaviour from their different starting points.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is extremely positive and respectful. Pupils quickly recognise that staff are courteous and considerate and they learn to voice their opinions and concerns in an appropriate manner. They develop self-discipline and an appropriate sense of duty to the school community.
- Staff are tolerant and resilient. They maintain positive attitudes and continual encouragement to enable pupils to overcome any resistance or unwillingness to cooperate.
- Incidents of bullying are rare. The school deals effectively with any incidents, enabling pupils to feel safe and confident around the school.
- The great majority of pupils demonstrate strong improvements in their attendance, often from very low starting points in previous placements. Staff are extremely diligent in stressing the need for regular attendance and are robust in following up any unexplained absences.
- A small number of pupils have irregular or unreliable patterns of attendance, often related to high levels of anxiety or emotional concern. The school engages with parents and external agencies to address any such persistent absence, but occasionally without sufficient success.
- Pupils value the wide range of opportunities to study vocational courses at off-site alternative provisions. They respond positively to the requirements to observe the health and safety requirements of these working environments. These courses, together with the additional qualifications gained, prepare pupils effectively for the transition from school to employment and training.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The great majority of pupils make consistently strong progress across a range of subjects from their various starting points. The majority of pupils enter the school with starting points below the expectations for their age due to disruptions to their previous education, sometimes including long periods out of school.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress towards the standards expected for their age. When pupils first enter the school, staff concentrate on establishing their positive engagement in learning. The majority of pupils achieve successful engagement through one-to-one working with staff before integrating into larger groups.

- The school uses off-site venues to work successfully with individual pupils who may be too anxious or unable to integrate rapidly into the demands of the larger school. The majority of pupils make good progress over time with the subjects on their individualised timetables.
- Pupils make good progress with their reading skills. Staff use phonics and suitable reading schemes appropriately to enable pupils to develop the ability to decode text and build up their confidence with familiar words. Staff apply these skills effectively across a range of subjects.
- Pupils gradually develop the confidence to read aloud in class. The majority of pupils demonstrate good comprehension and the ability to interpret complex meanings in texts. A number of older and more able pupils learn to read for pleasure.
- Pupils make good progress with mathematics. Younger pupils develop confidence with calculations, measurement and sequencing of numbers. Pupils at key stage 4 demonstrate the ability to solve problems successfully, using geometry and algebra.
- The rate of progress made by pupils, once they feel secure within the school, is close to the national average. Overall, pupils' progress in mathematics and reading is stronger than in writing. A number make excellent progress from their starting points.
- The most able pupils make good progress towards GCSE accreditation in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. In 2015 and 2016, a small number of pupils achieved Grade C GCSE qualifications in English, mathematics and information and communication technology.
- A number of pupils at key stage 4 demonstrate good progress in achieving level 1 or 2 awards in functional skills English, mathematics and information and communication technology. Similarly, pupils make good progress in a range of vocational subjects, including BTEC level 1 construction, sport, food technology and work skills, together with other nationally recognised qualifications in science, music and the pathway to independence AIM award.
- The school enables pupils to manage transitions between key stages successfully, despite their continuing emotional and social difficulties. The majority of pupils move on successfully to further studies or employment at the end of Year 11.

Sixth form provision

Good

- While the majority of pupils move on to further education or employment with external providers, a small number of students have progressed successfully into the school's post-16 provision.
- The school provides particularly well for pupils who are experiencing emotional uncertainty or anxiety at the end of key stage 4, or who have previously had long periods out of school, and who are not ready to move on to further education or employment with external providers.
- Staff create individual timetables for post-16 students. These provide good opportunities to continue with studies in English, mathematics or additional subjects in which the student may require further consolidation of their learning. Post-16 students are very appreciative of these opportunities to continue their studies in a familiar environment with staff that they know and trust.

- The school also provides access to higher levels of study, for example A-level or AS-level subjects. The flexibility of the school's curriculum and timetable structure enables appropriate specialist tutors to work with students as they work through these higher-level qualifications.
- Students' post-16 timetables also include an emphasis on vocational awards, including relevant work experience. The breadth of the school's provision enables individual students to continue their studies, for example in music technology or equine-related learning. This breadth enables students to develop skills for working life in a familiar environment, while also testing their ability to maintain suitable placements in the wider community.
- A major strength of the school's provision is its ability to respond effectively to individual students' strengths, interests and personal aspirations. Students have access to extensive careers advice, based on a deep understanding of their personal circumstances and aptitudes. Staff provide outstanding support to students throughout their post-16 studies and as they prepare for the transition to life in the wider community.

School details

Unique reference number	139603
DfE registration number	891/6023
Inspection number	10026053

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Proprietor	R.E.A.L. Foundation Trust
Chair	Brian Smith
Headteacher	Nikki Purcell
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,300
Telephone number	01623 490136
Website	realindependentschools.org
Email address	nicki.purcell@real-education.org
Date of previous inspection	28–30 January 2014

Information about this school

- The school provides full-time education for pupils in the age range seven to 19 years who experience social, emotional or mental health barriers to learning, together with associated behavioural difficulties. Most pupils were excluded, or at risk of exclusion, from their previous schools.
- The school is registered to admit up to 50 boys and girls. There are currently 50 pupils on the school roll, including a small number of post-16 students.
- The school operates on two sites. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 are educated primarily at the Old Fire Station in Blidworth. Pupils at key stage 4, and post-16 students, are

educated primarily at Concorde House in Mansfield.

- The school uses a number of other sites to provide for pupils who are not ready to learn in a formal classroom environment, and pupils accessing vocational courses. R.E.A.L. Education Limited, a separate company and provider of alternative education, owns or leases many of these sites. The two organisations share staff and learning resources.
- The school also uses the services of additional alternative providers to contribute to the education of selected pupils:
 - CAST Angling project, Newstead, Nottinghamshire
 - APTCOO, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire
 - Go Ape, Edwinstowe, Nottinghamshire
 - Woodside Stables, Nottingham
 - Brolay Care Farm, Scraptoft, Leicestershire
 - Birchwood Equestrian Centre, Alfreton, Derbyshire
 - Stonebridge City Farm, Nottingham.
- The school's previous inspection took place in January 2014.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning and scrutinised samples of pupils' work across the full age range of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the proprietor, governors, the headteacher and senior and middle managers to discuss their arrangements for the evaluation and oversight of the school's provision and outcomes.
- The inspector held discussions with a small number of pupils, parents and teaching staff. He also considered responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire submitted by 10 parents, and 22 questionnaires submitted by staff.
- The inspector scrutinised a number of school policies, procedures and extensive records of evidence in order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

David Young, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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