

Admissions Policy

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Version History

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1.00	01.09.2024	Original approved version.	Head of Centre	RBET Trustees
2.00	19.11.2025	Annual review and updates to admissions arrangements and terminology.	Head of Centre	RBET Trustees
3.00	15.09.2026	Annual review and update, including amendments to admissions roles and processes; provision information; Initial Assessment and settling-in arrangements; online safety requirements; laptop induction and records management.	Head of Centre	RBET Trustees

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1. Purpose

RBAir is committed to ensuring that admissions decisions are made fairly, transparently and without discrimination. Decisions will be made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the SEND Code of Practice and relevant safeguarding guidance. Reasonable adjustments will be considered throughout the admissions process.

2. Scope

The RBAir Admissions Panel consists of the Admissions and Compliance Manager, the Head of Centre (who is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead), Assistant Head, SENDCo and the Link Mentor Lead; they are jointly responsible for ensuring that all potential commissioning agents, parents/carers of prospective learners and the young people themselves understand the requirements for admission and continued attendance.

3. Policy statement, provision and safeguards

RBAir is a specialist setting offering a hybrid of online and face-to-face support for learners who are either not attending school (mainstream or other) or finding continued attendance at school damaging to their mental health.

RBAir provides for learners studying at KS3 and KS4. RBAir may admit young people who are chronologically outside those key stages but whose needs are best met by studying at either of these levels (e.g. a Year 12 learner who has missed a significant amount of their secondary education and needs to gain accreditation at GCSE level). However, all learners must be a minimum age of 11 (in Y7) and a maximum age of 18 on admission (RBAir also runs a Post-16 Programme).

Admission may be sought by a commissioning agent, most frequently a local authority or school.

Our expectations are that any young person offered a place at RBAir will:

- want to attend RBAir;
- do their best to attend each session on their timetable;
- treat the other learners and staff with kindness and respect, regardless of similarities or differences;
- work towards making social and academic progress whilst working both online and in person.

Additionally, all learners must complete the mandatory six-week online safety course, as referenced in RBET's Online Safety Policy (see section 'Educating learners about online safety'). If a learner does not complete the online safety course, despite all reasonable adjustments and support being provided, their placement may be terminated following a review. Ending a placement will involve all stakeholders in the decisions made, including the young person.

RBAir seeks to offer an environment, both in its Centre and online, within which learners can study successfully, and develop self-efficacy; we aim to provide a provision in which learners will feel physically and emotionally safe at all times. All learners in sessions with other learners must be able to contribute positively to the working environment and to follow the framework for behaviour set out in the Behaviour for Learning Policy.

4. The SEN Code of Practice

Under the SEN Code of Practice, if a local authority consults with RBAir regarding a young person with an EHCP, RBAir is not presently required to offer them a place, especially if:

- it would be unsuitable for the young person's age, ability, aptitude or needs;
- the young person's attendance would be incompatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources.

However, evidence will be considered on a case-by-case basis, decisions will be proportionate and based on current aspects of learner need and evaluation of risk.

5. Admissions criteria

Due to the highly individual nature of the provision at RBAir, it is not considered appropriate to have blanket admissions criteria: every young person should be viewed as an individual and assessed for suitability accordingly. It is extremely important that the admissions process should be open-minded, fair and non-judgemental. However, RBAir's core criteria requires that learners:

- Learners should be able to access learning materials independently. Literacy skills will be considered as part of the overall assessment of suitability
- Are able to engage with a Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 curriculum with the support and reasonable adjustments within the RBAir offer
- have reliable home internet connection;

- have access to a suitable learning environment that allows participation in online lessons, including having a responsible adult in the home whilst they are online with RBAir, depending on age and supports RBAir's safeguarding requirements.
- Be able to travel to RBAir's Centre for social re-engagement, enrichment, exams and other opportunities

Where a school has commissioned the placement, there needs to be a productive relationship between the commissioning school and the family/YP in place, for RBAir to provide a programme of education. As RBAir is classified as an 'Alternative Provision', it cannot hold a school roll and therefore the school maintains the young person on their roll and retains the responsibility for Safeguarding. This includes carrying out 'safe and well' checks if the learner is not attending their base school.

If the young person has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), the provision specified in the plan will be assessed in relation to the RBAir offer. If there are indicators, when reading a young person's paperwork that would mean that a place would usually be declined, e.g. on the basis that the young person's attendance would be incompatible with the efficient education of others, then the placement may be refused.

A placement will also be declined if a young person's needs cannot be met within the RBAir offer. The reasons for declining a placement may include:

- persistent, or extreme, physically aggressive behaviour;
- persistent bullying of peers (where previous intervention has failed to prevent this);
- persistent and regular tendency to abscond;
- safeguarding issues which indicate that the young person cannot work safely from the home

It is important that RBAir does not unfairly discriminate against young people and therefore the above criteria are put in place purely because of the vulnerable nature of our learners. Young people who have experienced trauma, abuse or bullying in the past would be further traumatised by exposure to the criteria referred to previously and therefore the education of these young people would be incompatible with the efficient nature of our other learners.

An important caveat to the above criteria is where a young person has demonstrated aggressive behaviour in the past only when highly stressed, for example when in an unsuitable mainstream environment, and their responses are the result of a diagnosis such as Autism, ADHD or high anxiety. Each case will be assessed in relation to the holistic needs of the young person.

There are also occasions when a referral is deemed to be inappropriate and we may advise that the young person's needs may be better met elsewhere. This includes where the young person's primary need is not a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) one - for example, a young person with moderate learning difficulties but no SEMH needs.

6. Admissions process

Referrals to RBAir are received and processed according to the following procedure. The average time that this process takes is up to six weeks.

- Referral is received from a school, Red Balloon Learner Centre, or the local authority SEN team accompanied by all relevant documentation (parents/carers can make a referral but as commissioner, they pay the fees).
- Referral is screened by means of an initial review of paperwork for obvious examples of unsuitability as described above: unsuitable referrals are declined at this point.
- Referrals which are not declined at the screening stage are discussed at a weekly Admissions Panel meeting. If all members agree that RBAir may be able to meet the young person's needs, the Admissions and Compliance Manager and Link Mentor Manager seek permissions to visit the family home to carry out an Initial Assessment (see below for further details).
- The Initial Assessment is circulated to members of the Admissions Panel, and a decision is made whether to offer a placement.
- If a referral is regarded as unsuitable, the Admissions and Compliance Manager will feed back to the commissioner with an explanation.
- If the Admissions Panel considers RBAir can meet needs, Subject Leads are contacted for staff availability to gauge a potential start date.
- Staffing for the provision is explored and the cost of the provision offered is calculated. Costings are submitted to the commissioner for their consideration.
- Once costings have been agreed by the commissioner, appointed staff will seek to carry out a laptop induction and complete any outstanding paperwork. A timetable request is made, and learner details are added to the MIS system 'Arbor'.
- Starting date is confirmed to all parties once all signed paperwork from the commissioner is received.

The Initial Assessment

The Initial Assessment is a detailed questionnaire covering areas such as mental and physical health, home life and behaviour. It is carried out with the young person's parent(s)/carer(s) by two members of RBAir's Admissions Panel. Ideally, they will meet the young person during the visit to ask them whether they know about RBAir's provision and whether they wish to engage with it.

If the young person indicates that they do not wish to engage with RBAir, the placement will not be pursued further. If the young person is unable to meet the admissions staff in person, another attempt will be made but further refusal may result in RBAir ending the process as this would signal that the young person is not yet ready to engage with our provision.

7. Unsuccessful referrals

If a referral made to RBAir is unsuccessful, an explanation will be communicated by the Admissions and Compliance Manager to the commissioner. If RBAir visited the home to carry out an Initial Assessment, the Admissions and Compliance Manager will also explain the decision to the parent(s)/carer(s).

RBAir hopes that no parent/carer/young person or commissioner will have cause to complain about the admissions process; decisions are carefully considered and communicated. However, if there are concerns, we advise that these are raised with the Admissions and Compliance Manager in the first instance. If the complainant feels that there has been discrimination, of any form, RBAir's Complaint Policy and procedure should be followed.

8. Laptop induction

After an offer is made and accepted, the Admissions and Compliance Manager, or a designated member of staff, will visit the learner's home to carry out a laptop induction. If the learner is able, they may come into RBAir's Centre to do this. The parent/carer is asked to be present so that all information can simultaneously be conveyed to them.

Learners are loaned an RBAir laptop, which is the only device allowed to access RBAir-related activity. Every RBAir device is configured to ensure that all users are safe, which includes Multi-factor Authentication. 'Smoothwall' is installed on all RBAir devices to

ensure robust monitoring and filtering is in place to block inappropriate content and detect potential threats.

Smoothwall's monitoring and filtering system is explained to both learners and parents/carers as part of the laptop induction, explaining that every keystroke is monitored and that alerts are sent to the Safeguarding Team where inappropriate language or behaviour is detected. The alert is automatically logged in our safeguarding software CPOMS. Smoothwall is also highlighted within the learner's Welcome Letter, and a link to the content of the online safety course is included in the parent's/carers Welcome Letter.

All learners and parents/carers are expected to sign an ICT Acceptable Use Agreement, which covers acceptable use in more detail. A placement cannot begin without a signed agreement in place.

9. Transition arrangements and initial settling-in period

Once a learner starts attending RBAir, a settling-in period of one-half term commences. This enables the opportunity to assess more thoroughly whether RBAir is able to meet the learner's needs. All learners will receive bespoke sessions for the first six weeks to enable closer assessment of needs and the building of initial relationships with staff.

The Link Mentor coordinates an initial meeting with all relevant staff named the 'TAYP' (Team Around the Young Person) and a baseline assessment is carried out. Having considered every relevant staff member's contribution and experience with the learner, RBAir will evaluate whether the provision is suitable to enable the learner to progress. This may mean adaptations to the timetable or the application of specific strategies. The Link Mentor and SENDCo may recommend a range of strategies to enable the learner to access the provision.

At the end of the settling-in period, the Link Mentor, SENDCo and Assistant Head decide whether it is possible to meet the learner's needs at RBAir and/or whether their needs are compatible with the needs of other learners. Any decision to terminate a placement at this stage will involve consultation with the commissioner, parent/carers, young person and any other relevant stakeholders and where all reasonable adjustments have been considered.

10. Records management

The Head of Centre is responsible for the safekeeping of this policy. This policy will be available for all staff on the website or staff intranet.

11. Legislation and guidance that inform this document

The School Admissions Code March 2021.