RedBalloon
Educational Trust
Red Balloon of the Air

RBAir Special Educational Needs (SEN) Information Report

2026/27

The aim of this information report is to explain how we implement our SEND policy.

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1. The Red Balloon of the Air SEND Team

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2. Description of Learners and the RBAir Approach

Description of Learners

Learners who come to RBAir experience, or have experienced, significant difficulties in managing their mental health. This commonly results from diagnosed conditions such as Autism, ADHD and other associated emotional and clinical issues. Access to education has generally been affected by a reduced capacity to self-regulate acute anxiety, manage

environmental and social demands, and cope effectively with mainstream learning environments. Impact on academic progress and attendance has been considerable, and, in some cases, learners have not been in an education provision for extended periods of time.

At RBAir, we recognise that many Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) conditions and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are linked to experiences of trauma. Our approach is therefore underpinned by trauma-informed practice, ensuring our environment is safe, nurturing, and supports recovery and learning**.**

The Delivery of Education at RBAir

In order to meet the full range of needs of our learners, RBAir adopts a multi-modal delivery method, combining both online and in-person approaches. This supports the process of re-engagement with learning and enables the young person to work at their own pace to access the most appropriate pathway to recovery.

RBAir aims to provide the following:

- **A safe and predictable environment**
  Whether online or in person, we establish routines and clear boundaries, reducing uncertainty and supporting learners to feel secure.
- **A 'relationships first' approach**
  All staff prioritise building strong, trusting relationships, recognising that positive connections are key to healing from trauma and developing confidence in learning.
- **A trauma-informed approach**
  All staff are trained to recognise that behaviour often communicates underlying emotional needs or trauma and therefore respond with empathy and curiosity, rather than with any punitive intent. De-escalation and restorative practice form the approaches to resolving any issues relating to behaviour, both online and in person.
- **Trained staff**
  Our team receives ongoing professional development for SEND, trauma-informed practice, safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion.
- **Personalised support**
  We develop individual support plans, which may include mentoring, counselling, and regular wellbeing check-ins, all tailored to each learner's needs.
- **Whole-provision culture**
  Trauma-informed values underpin our policies and daily practice, ensuring all learners feel valued, understood and safe.
- **An engaging and enriched curriculum**

Whether online, in person, or combined, the learning experience for young people is designed to be responsive, flexible and engaging, enabling learners to begin to appreciate the benefits of re-engaging with education.

- **Family and multi-agency involvement**
  We work closely with families and external professionals to ensure holistic, joined-up support for every learner.

The RBAir Approach

All learners at RBAir are recognised as having SEND requirements whether they have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) or otherwise. In line with the SEND Code of Practice, we support and currently provide for a wide range of needs including those with:

- **communication and interaction barriers,** for example between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals and difficulties of communication and interaction associated with anxiety and other SEMH difficulties;
- **cognition and learning difficulties**, for example dyslexia, dyscalculia, gaps in learning, working memory difficulties, processing difficulties and difficulties associated with high anxiety. Due to the multi-modal nature of our provision, we may be unable to meet the needs of those who require extensive multisensory approaches to learning, or those whose cognitive functioning is unsuited to an online learning platform;
- **social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties,** for example anxiety (social and generalised), depression, low self-esteem, low resilience, sleep difficulties and learners who have experienced trauma. We may be unable to admit learners if safeguarding risks are too high.
- **some sensory and/or physical needs,** for example physical impairments, sensory sensitivities. Young people who have visual/hearing/sensory or physical barriers to learning, will be properly assessed in terms of the adjustments needed to aid their engagement in the RBAir provision.

RBAir will always consider referrals for learners with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), but will only admit a learner if we, together with the learner and their parent(s)/carer(s), believe it possible to meet the needs identified within the Plan. The online aspects of our provision require that the young person has sufficient English language, reading and written communication skills to engage safely and effectively with the provision.

RBAir's curriculum is organised and delivered according to the starting points of learners and the nature of their needs as outlined in their individual EHCPs. The multi-modal delivery approach incorporates both online and in-person experiences depending on how the programme has been co-created by RBAir, learners and their families. This negotiated process ensures that at admission, the learner has the best chance of successful re-engagement with education.

3. Identification of Learners with SEND and Assessment of Need

RBAir understands that all learners have had difficult experiences which may prevent them from accessing mainstream education. They have not all been formally assessed for learning difficulties at the point of entry. The majority have been diagnosed or are seeking diagnosis for SEMH difficulties or have experienced difficulties of a social and emotional nature in their previous setting. Many of our learners have significant gaps in education, due to prolonged periods out of school and a total loss of confidence in their ability to learn.

We aim to assess each learner's current skills and levels of attainment on entry via our 'Baseline 10 Assessments' which build on information and data provided from previous settings, where appropriate. Learners may have experienced considerable difficulty with assessments in the past and a careful balance is established between understanding learners' current learning levels with the promotion of re-engagement in the learning process. Therefore, teachers will carefully utilise regular informal assessment in the course of sessions for all learners and identify those whose progress:

- is significantly slower than that of their peers starting from the same baseline;
- fails to match or better the learner's previous rate of progress;
- fails to close the attainment gap between the learner and their peers;
- widens the attainment gap.

This may include progress in areas other than attainment, for example social needs, and progression towards Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.

When deciding whether further special educational provision is required, RBAir will start with the desired outcomes, including expected progress and attainment, and the views and wishes of the learner and their parent(s)/carer(s). We will use this to determine the support that is needed and whether we can provide it by adapting our core offer

(English, maths, mentoring, therapy and a 'community' session), or whether something different or additional is needed.

4. Learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Learners with English as an additional language (EAL), as with any learner, will have strengths and weaknesses in different skills. On admission there will be an initial meeting with the parent(s)/carer(s), and an interpreter may be sought if necessary. This meeting is important in gaining understanding of the learner's starting point and context, and to get to know them as an individual. Information to clarify would include:

- personality, for example whether they are normally shy or outspoken;
- proficiency in their native language, and whether they have any issues with articulation or fluency;
- educational background, including whether they have attended school before and whether they may have an existing special educational need or disability (SEND);
- experience of language at home, including how proficient the learner's parent(s)/carer(s) are in English.

This will enable the identification of the skills the learner needs to develop in order to effectively access the curriculum. These identified needs will also be informed by the demands of the curriculum. Due to the multi-modal nature of RBAir's provision, learners will need sufficient English language skills to engage safely and effectively with the provision.

Learners who have English as an additional language (EAL) are not deemed to have special educational needs unless they have an associated learning difficulty. However, reasonable adjustments and levels of support will be available in order to support effective communication for learning.

5. Consulting and Involving Learners and Parents(s)/Carer(s)

The bespoke nature of RBAir provision enables learners to co-create their own curriculum. Staff will have an early discussion during the admissions process with the young person and their parent(s)/carer(s), identifying whether they need further special educational

provision, or planning how known SEN needs will be met. These conversations will make sure that:

- everyone develops a good understanding of the learner's areas of strength and difficulty;
- learner voice and opinion carries weight and validity and that learners should be encouraged to voice their opinions and express their worries or concerns;
- we take into account the parents'/carers' concerns, consider their experiences to date and endeavour to work within a systemic framework, to help the whole family through challenge;
- everyone understands the agreed outcomes sought for the learner;
- everyone is clear on the next steps.

The learner will be assigned a 'Link Mentor' as their key contact for working with RBAir. This role is unique in nature and provides a consistent and informed point of contact to ensure that each learner's needs are met.

6. Assessing and Reviewing Progress Towards Outcomes

The SEND Monitoring and Review Cycle

The Graduated Approach, as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice 2015, is a continuous cycle of support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), consisting of four key stages: Assess, Plan, Do, Review.



At RBAir this support cycle is a continuous process to which all staff contribute and plan for across the academic year. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and the points of review are set to complement the reporting procedures in place for assessing progress in learners.

On admission, a learner's needs will be assessed by the SEND Team where an up-to-date Individual Provision Plan, (IPP) (see the SEND Policy for further details) will be formulated based on information gleaned during the process of admission, a thorough appraisal of the EHCP, and through relationship building with the learner and their family.

At three points in the year, the IPP for the learner will be reviewed and adapted to respond to any changing needs and/or views.

For learners with EHCPs, Annual Reviews are held at least annually in accordance with statutory requirements and in partnership with learners, parent(s)/carer(s) and relevant professionals.

The subject teacher, Link Mentor and therapist will work with the SENDCo to carry out a clear analysis of the learner's needs. This will draw on:

- teachers', Link Mentor's and therapist's assessment and experience of the learner;
- previous progress and attainment and behaviour;
- other staff assessments, where relevant;
- the learner's development in comparison to their peers and national data;
- the views and experience of parent(s)/carer(s);
- the learner's own views;
- advice from external support services, when relevant.

RBAir consistently monitors effectiveness of staff input and learner progress through a range of means to ensure that it can maintain a flexible and speedy response to changing learner needs.

The SEND Team evaluates the effectiveness of provision for learners with SEN by:

- reviewing learners' individual progress towards their goals each term;
- using online chat groups for staff to share important information regarding good practice, progress or difficulties, and to work together to find solutions;
- focus meetings for generating and putting in place new strategies;
- using annual learner experience questionnaires;
- using learner profiles and provision maps to measure progress;
- holding IPP reviews for all learners, and statutory Annual Reviews for those with EHCPs.

RBAir's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and SEND Team has many years of experience in supporting young people with a wide range of additional needs. They have considerable experience in autism, SEMH and therapeutic provision prior to working for RBAir.

RBAir SENDCo stays up to date with key issues and development relating to SEND and ensure the programme of staff training keeps staff informed and skilled when working with learners. The Exams Access Arrangements Co-ordinator supports the SENDCo for exam access arrangements.

7. Quality of Teaching

Teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of all their learners. RBAir's curriculum is organised and delivered according to the starting points of learners and the nature of their needs as outlined in their individual EHCPs. The multi-modal delivery approach incorporates both online and in-person experiences depending on how the programme has been co-created by RBAir, learners and their families. This negotiated process ensures that at admission, the learner has the best chance of successful re-engagement with education. The Designated Teacher responsible for any Looked After Children at RBAir will oversee their specific provision plans and ensure that effective communication with social care and other professionals enables the delivery of high-quality education.

Link Mentors support learners' access to the wider community and act as a bridge between home and school. They use a graded exposure approach to encourage learners to meet with other learners and experience activities outside the home in preparation for future transitions. They also support work relating to home routines, social communication and interaction, healthy lifestyles and positive behaviour.

Therapists work alongside teachers, Link Mentors, the learner and their family, and, where appropriate, other mental health practitioners, and may offer support to family members where this is needed. Not every learner wishes to engage with therapy or may be ready for talking / communication-based approaches. Therapy is offered on a case-by-case basis. Due to the nature of our provision, most additional support comes through our teams of Link Mentors and therapists.

8. Adaptations to the Curriculum and Learning Environment

Academic subject teaching takes place online or in-person either 1:1, in pairs or small groups. Teachers use the Microsoft suite to present lessons and shared activities. Teachers use 'Teams Audio', which allows for verbal communication. Not all learners are ready for this to begin with. Reasonable adjustments are made on an individual basis to

remove barriers to learning and participation and to ensure learners can access all aspects of the provision. The following adaptations are made to ensure all learner's needs are met:

- targeting our curriculum to ensure all learners are able to access it, for example by grouping, 1:1 work, teaching style, content of the lesson;
- adapting our resources and staffing ;
- using recommended aids, such as laptops, coloured overlays (real or virtual), visual timetables, larger font, use of highlighter pens;
- modifying our teaching, for example giving longer processing times, reading instructions aloud, using clear frameworks for organisation of work;
- as part of an adapted learning environment, learners are given rest breaks as a normal way of working.

Where learners come to RBAir for face-to-face sessions, the environment is carefully managed to allow for any sensory sensitivity, and plans are made to reduce anxiety, e.g. photographs of teaching spaces may be sent beforehand. Link Mentor sessions will facilitate the process at the learners' pace.

The majority of our learners have anxiety around social interaction. The activities planned aim to create opportunities for learners to engage with and develop friendships with other young people and to have positive experiences outside of their homes. Where appropriate, subject teachers will offer some face-to-face work in Centre to support learning; Link Mentors will arrange supported social gatherings; and all learners are encouraged to attend our online community activities. All extra-curricular activities and visits are available to all learners.

No learner is ever excluded from taking part in these activities because of their SEN or disability.

9. Access Arrangements for Examinations

Access Arrangements for all internal and external assessments are important adaptations for learners to ensure that they have equal opportunities to their mainstream peers to achieve their best. All adjustments are determined by the SEND team, and the Level 7 Accredited Assessor for RBAir.

Assessing need

RBAir offers multiple entry points during the year, and teachers endeavour to understand the learning needs and levels of their learners within the first term. This is carried out using our 'Baseline 10 Assessments' which provides a 360-degree overview of the learner, where areas of strengths and areas for development are established.

The majority of our learners have EHCPs and careful consideration is given to how those specific needs can be met and the adjustments needed to access the curriculum.

Process

RBAir's 'Baseline 10 Assessments' help us to ascertain whether access arrangements / support may be needed. Where needed, further Lucid Tests may be offered to identify potential learning difficulties, especially dyslexia and working memory issues. Teachers make ongoing observations and complete evidence sheets in order for the SEND team to complete the necessary JCQ processes in accordance with national deadlines. RBAir also offers the opportunity to carry out further cognitive tests if these are needed for additional evidence/advice. RBAir's Level 7 Accredited Assessor completes assessments and recommendations in accordance with JCQ requirements.

Regular meetings are held with the Exams Officer, Teaching Team and SEND department to check arrangements and ensure robust evidence is in place.

Parent/Learner data sharing and consent forms are generally sent out in the Autumn Term and received by the Spring Term. Any new learners joining at different points in the year will also be required to complete the same consent forms and agree to data sharing. Access arrangements are then applied for online via the JCQ Portal by the deadline in March.

Administration of Exams

Examinations are carried out at RBAir's registered exam centre in Milton (Cambridge), where learners will have been supported to attend mock exams and become familiar with the environment. During both mock and formal national examinations, these settings are organised to ensure that the experience is a positive one. The exams are spread across small quiet rooms, are sensitively lit, and learners are able to access supervised rest breaks and the use of laptops if desired. Invigilators and support staff are fully trained in how to support the different access arrangements for learners, including those needing home invigilation. All information is kept on file in accordance with data protection and available for any inspection.

External Learners

For those learners not attending Red Balloon provisions, who would like to use the RBAir Examination Centre(s) to sit exams, any access arrangements requested will require the same evidence and compliance with JCQ regulations as all internal RBAir learners. The SEND team will determine the evidence thresholds that need to be met and will use their own assessor to ensure that practice across the provision has parity and follows statutory processes.

10. Supporting Learners in Transition to Other Provisions and Preparation for Adulthood

RBAir works with parent(s)/carer(s) and learners to decide which information to share as part of any transition with the school, college, or other setting the young person is moving to. Transitions for our learners can be extremely challenging, and we understand that it is vital that any transition or change for a learner is supported with appropriate planning and preparation.

All learners have access to career support sessions with our Pathways Coordinator and/or Pathways Assistant, supporting preparation for adulthood outcomes including further education, employment, training, independence and participation in the community. For Year 11+ learners, individualised careers and transitions sessions specifically aimed at supporting movement to a new phase or setting is offered. Working with the Pathways Team, Link Mentors support pre-visits to possible settings, liaise with new settings and the SENDCo ensures that all support measures that are needed will be in place for when the learner starts.

11. Use of Equipment and Facilities

All learners are issued with a laptop and headphones that can be set up to individual preference regarding coloured screens, font sizes and volume. For exams, all learners have the choice of using a laptop. Reading pens are available for those who meet criteria for extra support to read an exam paper but do not wish to use a human reader.

Normal ways of working for all learners involve using a laptop for all learning, the availability of a quiet calm space for working in, and the provision of a prompt for completing tasks.

We have links with local authority specialist equipment departments who can advise on further issues such as voice programmes for tablets and phones to support verbal communication. If a learner needs specialist equipment to reduce barriers to learning, these may be accessed through the EHCP annual review processes.

12. Working with other Agencies

RBAir works with a variety of agencies to provide support for learners with SEN. These include:

- Educational Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists and independent assessors
- Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, mental health services such as CAMHS and YOUnited
- Local Authority support services and health and social care bodies

13. Complaints about SEND provision

Any complaint regarding SEND provision is taken very seriously.

When parent(s)/carer(s) have concerns around RBAir's provision, they are encouraged to speak with their child's Link Mentor in the first instance or if concerns relate specifically to SEN, they should contact the SENDCo or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

Parent(s)/carer(s) of learners with disabilities have the right to make disability discrimination claims to the first-tier SEND tribunal if they believe that our provision has discriminated against their child. They can make a claim about alleged discrimination regarding:

- exclusions
- provision of education and associated services
- making reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services.

14. The Local Offer

Due to RBAir working with a range of local authorities, different support services are available in different regions. The Local Offer applicable to each learner will depend upon their commissioning Local Authority.

For further information please refer to the relevant Local Offer and local SENDIASS (SEND Information, Advice and Support Service), which offers impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parent(s)/carer(s) who have a child or young person with SEND, or if parent(s)/carer(s) have concerns that their child has special educational needs.

SENDIASS also offer impartial and confidential information, advice and support to young people and children with SEND (or who have concerns they may have special educational needs).

Alternatively, IPSEA (Independent Provider of Specialist Education Advice) offers independent legal advice, support and training to help get the right education for children and young people with special educational needs.

'Local Offers' are the best place to find information on support groups, events and activities in your area.

We understand that young people and their parent(s)/carer(s) often experience difficult challenges in life, and that finding the right support is not always easy. Please click on this link: **Additional Support - RBAir** to find a list of organisations with links to their websites that may be useful.