



Information for Interested Parents, Carers and Others

Revised April 2010



Red Balloon Learner Centres have one fundamental aim:

“To recover children who have been bullied”

We do this by raising their self-esteem, getting them back on an academic track and, once they have recovered, supporting their return to mainstream school, or their entry to higher education or employment.

Each Centre is an independent charity with its own Board of Trustees, that offers a safe bullying-free environment, sets clear boundaries for behaviour, and provides a full-time academic, pastoral and therapeutic educational programme.



Introducing Red Balloons

Red Balloon Learner Centres are run mainly in domestic houses. Herbert House in Cambridge has been running since late 1996. There are Red Balloons in North West London at Harrow and in Norwich. New Red Balloons have opened in Merseyside and Preston, and RB-Warwick will open in 2010.

Red Balloons are “intensive care” units designed to help a child recover from the impact of serious and persistent bullying and the damage this has done to their self-esteem and ability to learn and concentrate. Student care and a positive approach to learning are uppermost in the teaching methods.

The period children spend at a Centre is dictated by their needs. Once an individual can “breathe” without support they want to leave “intensive care”. The aim is to get these children their life back.

Who can come to Red Balloon?

Red Balloons have been set up to recover children who have been so badly bullied that they cannot attend school. We also take children who have suffered emotional trauma and are therefore unable to access education effectively in a large educational establishment. Some of these children have statements of educational need. Our provision is also suitable for children of asylum-seekers and refugees who have been bullied. We provide all our students with a safe learning environment.

However, to be accepted at a Red Balloon the student must:

- want to come and be able to attend regularly
- be willing to learn and make academic progress
- behave with respect and consideration at all times towards other students, the staff, the property, the resources and any pets we might have.

Our experience shows that children who come to Red Balloon only because their parents or other relatives encourage them to do so and not because they want to do not settle down, and ask to leave after a short period of time. Children who do want to attend develop a personal commitment, build relationships with staff and students and become eager to achieve.



Students with Statements of Educational Need

We are able to offer places to children who have been bullied and who have statements of special educational need, provided that they satisfy the general conditions of admission.

Students who have been assessed as having specific social, behavioural or emotional needs can all benefit from the safe learning environment and the extensive pastoral programme that is offered.

The objectives of the statement are addressed, constantly reviewed and modified after meetings with the student, parents or carers and a representative from the Student Assessment Service.

Individual learning and educational programmes are maintained for all Red Balloon students. It has been found repeatedly that when a statement suggests that a student has learning difficulties, those learning difficulties disappear once the student's emotional and behavioural needs are addressed.

For students who are deaf, hearing impaired, blind or visually impaired additional appropriate provision will be made available.



Red Balloon Student Perspectives



“The Red Balloon provides me with a safe learning environment with small groups and one to one sessions.”

“The fact that it’s in a house makes it a calm and friendly place to be.”

“We have team building sessions such as circle time, creative arts, drama and excursions to interesting places.”

“I really like having lessons in the garden and on the sofa in the community room.”

“We go out of the Centre to have sports such as tennis, rounders, basketball and swimming.”

“If you have a problem with another girl or boy it is dealt with straight away.”

“Sometimes it seems as though there are more teachers than students at the Centre.”

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“I have enjoyed my time here immensely and look forward to the months ahead. I have made good friends with everyone. Everyone has the amazing ability to not only have fun but to care for one another. I have had a difficult time at home and at school but have found that honesty is the best policy. I have worked hard in all lessons and have tried my utmost to complete my work correctly.”

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“Singing and cooking lessons have been very beneficial. My basic cooking skills improve and I use some of the recipes at home, which everyone has enjoyed tasting. My vocal range has expanded, my confidence has grown and my ability and strength have soared. My Art project is steaming ahead and I cannot wait to complete it. English lessons have been very enjoyable and I have got on well with the teachers. My Maths lessons have been challenging but I have learned a great deal. Our regular counsellor has been very supportive and she has helped many people at our Centre. The students here more than understand about each other’s needs and problems. I cannot wait until the rest of the year ahead and want to thank all of the volunteers for their time.”



Personal Development

In addition to academic studies, a great emphasis is placed on social, emotional and personal development.

Many of our children arrive with little self-confidence, few friends, poor social skills and low self-esteem.

We tackle these issues directly in a variety of ways through: circle time, conflict resolution, anger management, role-play, improvisation, appropriate reading material, and workshops.

Circle Time encourages each participant to talk about how they feel about certain issues.

Conflict Resolution – explicit teaching of students who are upset with each other about resolution, compromise and tolerance.

Anger Management – specially targeted groups learn what anger is, how it affects them and how to express it safely.

Role Play – students enact situations in which they can try out ways of behaving.

Improvisation – challenging drama where children are faced with difficult situations.

Ethics – exploring pertinent issues such as bullying, relationships, family life, emotions, life skills, keeping oneself safe, sexual and racial harassment, ways of dealing with unwanted behaviours.



Through social activities, such as theatre outings, picnics, trips abroad, unstructured games such as chess and Uno during lunch breaks, students begin to practice the social skills many of them ceased to use effectively when they were bullied.

The Curriculum at Red Balloon



The curriculum at Red Balloon – Cambridge has had more than 14 years to grow. Other Red Balloon Learner Centres aim to offer the same depth and variety of study as soon as they can.

The curriculum is broad-based and children have the opportunity to choose which subjects they study.

Within each subject, they can negotiate with their teachers the area to be studied, the process (through discussion, reading, video, experiment, survey, writing, art, etc.) and the product (a play, a story, an essay, a painting, a presentation, a project, a poster, a diary), and by whom and how their work will be assessed. Teaching is in one-to-one or small-group sessions.

In Years 10 and 11, careers education and life skills are an important part of the curriculum. GCSEs (academic and vocational) and, in certain cases, AS/A levels can be taken.

Students can work towards the Arts Award, which is accredited by the QCA. In some cases they can attend Increased Flexibility courses at a local further education college while still at Red Balloon.

Art	Guitar	Piano
Biology	Hebrew	Physical education
Chemistry	History	Physics
Cooking	ICT	Psychology
Drama	Subjects offered include	Russian
Ethics	Japanese	Textiles
Farsi	Language Arts	Singing
Film-making	Mathematics	Sociology
French	Media	Spanish
Geography	Music	

National Curriculum

A wide range of curriculum areas is offered to all students at Red Balloon Learner Centres.



However, taking into consideration the fact that many of the students have not been attending school for weeks, months or even years in some cases, and that when they did last attend the lessons were sometimes traumatic and frightening because of the other students' behaviour, we consider that what they learn is less important than how they learn.

Therefore the process of the teacher negotiating with the child what they research, read, write, listen to and speak about is an essential component. It would not be sensible to have a specified curriculum document to follow.



Each teacher finds out what a student has previously covered in a curriculum area and then negotiates a topic to be studied in the forthcoming days or weeks.

Whilst it would be inappropriate, even impossible, to follow the National Curriculum to the letter, in general Red Balloon staff use it as guidance.

During the course of any project unexpected areas of interest may be explored and researched as deemed important by the student or staff member.

Supporting the Education of Bullied Children

Red Balloon offers appropriate support and personalised curricula for all its students. Providing one-to-one tuition, as well as an extensive whole group programme of PSHE, it is able to respond rapidly and effectively to the assessed needs of all newcomers. Among the relevant features are the following:



- Students are admitted at any time of the year;
- Once referred, students and their carers or parents are interviewed within one week, and if they satisfy the conditions of admission are offered a place, which can be taken up within two or three days;
- Staff are recruited as and when particular needs are evidenced, and provided an enhanced CRB check is obtained can start work immediately;
- Red Balloon has established cooperative working relationships with its referring Local Authorities and Children's and Young People's Services, and makes use of training programmes that those bodies provide;
- Therapists are available for all our students, being of particular help to young people who have suffered trauma, both short-term and long-term;
- Family therapy is provided for those families which request it, for a small contribution;
- Cultural, religious, ethnic and racial diversity is welcomed and embraced at Red Balloon;
- Our Ethics programme addresses issues of discrimination, harassment, dignity and respect for others;
- Regular and frequent communication is established with the parents and carers of all our students;
- Extra provision can be made for students for whom English is an additional language, including competent interpreters, alternative forms of written material, and learning support assistance;
- The curriculum followed by students is negotiated with them individually.

The Referral Process

In 'Every Child Matters' the Government states that students who cannot attend mainstream school have the right to be educated full-time. If your child has been severely bullied and is unable to attend school as a result, and you would be interested in exploring the possibility of a place at a Red Balloon, there are a few steps you need to take:

- speak with the Headteacher or Head of Year of your child's school
- follow the school's Complaints Policy

The least you can expect from your child's school is that they keep your child **safe** from the **bullying behaviour**. If the school cannot guarantee this, ask for a referral to be made to the Local Authority or Children's Services. Do not be persuaded to take him or her "off roll".

If the Headteacher is unwilling to make a referral, contact your local authority (the most appropriate department is likely to be **EOTAS** - Education Other Than At School) and arrange a meeting. In the event that you find the local authority unhelpful, please contact our office, on **01223 366052**, and we will try to help and advise you.

Students who attend Red Balloon can be funded in two ways:

- by the appropriate local authority;
- by parents or other private means

Once an agreement concerning funding is obtained, Red Balloon will arrange a meeting with the child and the parents or carers. The child will be shown round and the conditions of admission will be explained. These are:

- 1) A place is available;
- 2) We consider that we can help the child;
- 3) The child wants to come and will attend regularly;
- 4) The child wants to learn and make academic progress;
- 5) The child will behave with respect and consideration towards the other students, the staff, the property and any pets that we have.

During the interview they will be asked about their interests, including what they like to read, what sports they enjoy, subjects they would like to study and then, when all their questions have been answered, will be asked to go home, discuss the matter with their family and friends, and let us know if they would like to attend.

If they would like to come, we will arrange the starting date as soon as possible, usually within three days of the interview. Some young people like to have a "taster" day before deciding for certain, and that can be arranged.

As a parent, carer or other interested person you may visit Red Balloon, but we are reluctant to invite a child to visit in case funding cannot be found and the child is disappointed.

Useful Contacts

Red Balloon Learner Centre Group (Registered Charity No. 1109606)

49 New Square, Cambridge CB1 1EZ Tel: 01223 366052 www.redballoonlearner.org.uk

Chief Executive: Dr Carrie Herbert carrie.herbert@group.rblc.org.uk

Consultant Coordinator: Ruth Loshak ruth.loshak@group.rblc.org.uk

Group Administrator: Jane Bishop jane.bishop@group.rblc.org.uk

Red Balloon Learner Centre – Cambridge (Registered Charity No. 1070224)

Herbert House, 57 Warkworth Terrace, Cambridge CB1 1EE Tel: 01223 357714

Coordinator: Jessica Lechner jessica.lechner@cambridge.rblc.org.uk

Administrator: Mara Hawkins mara.hawkins@cambridge.rblc.org.uk

Red Balloon Learner Centre – Norwich (Registered Charity No. 1117092)

76 Earlham Road, Norwich NR2 3DF Tel: 01603 622288

Coordinator: Angela Francis angela.francis@norwich.rblc.org.uk

Administrator: Louise Fisher louise.fisher@norwich.rblc.org.uk

Red Balloon Learner Centre – NW London (Registered Charity No. 1109947)

13 Kenton Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 2BW Tel: 020 8864 6433

Coordinator: Alexandra Flatman alexandra.flatman@nwlondon.rblc.org.uk

Administrator: Heather Badru heather.badru@nwlondon.rblc.org.uk

Red Balloon Learner Centre – Merseyside (Registered Charity No.1126548)

16 Oakfield, Liverpool L4 2QH Tel: 07723 573741

Coordinator: Tracy Doran tracy.doran@merseyside.rblc.org.uk

Red Balloon Learner Centre – Preston (Registered Charity No. 1130569)

22 Ribblesdale Place, Preston PR3 1NA Tel: 01772 827917

Coordinator: Carol Hargreaves carol.hargreaves@preston.rblc.org.uk

Red Balloon Learner Centre – Warwick (Registered Charity No. 1135483)

Northleigh House, Five Ways Road, Hatton, Warks. CV35 7HZ Tel: 01926 484203

Coordinator: Helen Tovell helen.tovell@warwick.rblc.org.uk