

R.E.A.L Independent Schools

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

Inspection dates	28–30 January 2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good.

- Students make good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and in other subjects because the quality of teaching is good.
- Staff ensure that each student has an individual timetable, with learning activities matched accurately to their level of development and academic ability.
- Students make good progress in improving their behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Students are well cared for. Staff develop positive and supportive relationships with students and understand their needs.
- The leadership and management of the school are good. Leaders have accurately identified how the school can improve, and have successfully ensured that all of the regulations for independent schools are met. Parents and carers hold the school in high regard.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Students do not make outstanding progress. Teachers' marking does not always give students enough guidance on how they can improve their work, particularly in mathematics.
- Students are not given enough opportunities to learn about others who come from backgrounds different from their own.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance does not consider in enough detail data on students' engagement and progress in learning.
- Leaders, other than the headteacher, need to develop their skills in helping to improve the quality of teaching and be given more frequent opportunities to carry out this work.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was made without notice and was conducted as an emergency inspection in addition to being a full inspection. This was because concerns had been raised the registration authority about the safety of students and staff, and the quality of leadership and management, within one of the vocational group settings.
- Seven lessons were observed, taught by six different teachers. One of these was observed jointly with the headteacher. Drop-ins were also made to other learning activities, being delivered by teachers and teaching assistants, for short periods of time.
- Inspectors met with headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, and with representatives of the proprietorial board of directors, including the Chair. A range of school policies, records and students' work was examined, including logs of students' behaviour, information about students' progress, and procedures for keeping students safe.
- Inspectors reviewed responses on twelve Ofsted questionnaires completed by members of staff. There were an insufficient number of responses made to the online questionnaire, Parent View, at the time of the inspection for inspectors to consider the views of parents and carers. However, inspectors contacted a number of parents and carers by telephone to gather their views about the school. Inspectors also analysed the responses on surveys completed by students and by the local authority.

Inspection team

Jeremy Spencer, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joanne Harvey

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- R.E.A.L Independent Schools caters for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, many of whom have additional learning needs. All places are purchased by local authorities to make provision for hard-to-place students. Most students have been excluded, or were at risk of exclusion, from their mainstream schools.
- This is the school's first inspection since its registration. The school was first registered in February 2013 and opened to students in September 2013. The school is registered for up to 45 students. At the time of the inspection there were 43 students on roll, in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. There were no Key Stage 5 students on roll.
- Almost all students have a statement of educational needs. Four students are looked after by the local authority. Almost all students are from a White British background, and there are no students at an early stage of learning to speak English.
- The school operates on two sites. Students in Key Stages 2 and 3 are educated primarily at the Old Fire Station, in Blidworth. Students in Key Stages 4 are educated primarily at Concorde House, in Mansfield. Students who are assessed and found not to be ready to learn in a formal classroom environment, and students accessing vocational courses including mechanics, are also educated at number of other sites. Many of these sites are owned, or leased, by R.E.A.L Education Limited. R.E.A.L Education Limited is a separate company and is a provider of alternative education for over 100 part time pupils, aged between 7 and 19 years, who are on roll at other schools. The two organisations share staff and learning resources.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers' marking clearly and consistently outlines how students can improve their work, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve students' personal development by providing them with more opportunities to learn about different cultures and faiths in local and wider communities.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - developing more sophisticated and refined systems to track the progress and engagement of students, to support leaders in improving the quality and efficiency of their evaluation of the school's performance
 - ensuring that learning managers and subject leaders improve their skills in monitoring and improving the quality of teaching to help it become outstanding.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Students' achievement is good. This is demonstrated through work in students' books, observations of students' learning in lessons, and through the school's own information about each student's progress. They make good progress from their starting points as the result of good teaching and a carefully tailored curriculum that successfully meets their needs. Furthermore, good teaching ensures that there are no significant differences between the achievements of different groups of pupils, including those who are looked after by the local authority.

The school has only been open to students for little more than one term. Consequently, it is not possible to comment on students' performance in national tests at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4. However, the school has entered students for national tests at the end of this year, including at GCSE level for Year 11 students. Students' assessments indicate that they are making good progress in improving the grades they are likely to achieve at the end of the academic year.

Students undergo comprehensive assessments on entry to the school to identify gaps in their learning. Their attainment on entry to the school is typically below average, because students have often missed large chunks of their education in the past for a variety of reasons. Once gaps in students' learning have been identified, individual programmes of activities are planned for them to help them to catch up.

Students' books indicate that they make good progress in developing writing skills. This is well-supported by the school's strong focus on helping students to improve their speaking and listening skills. During the inspection, students were observed being rewarded and praised by staff, and by their peers, for listening carefully to others. Staff were also observed encouraging students to speak in full sentences during discussions. The raised expectations of staff were successful in motivating students to articulate their sentences with greater care and thought. This then translates through into students' written work. Students' records indicate that they make good progress in improving their reading skills. Inspectors listened to students read during the inspection. Students were able to demonstrate an understanding of the text through their detailed discussion of its meaning. Students' mathematics books also indicate that they make good progress from their different starting points. However, slightly less progress is evident in their mathematics work than in English. Students demonstrate good progress in other subjects and, where applicable, off-site courses in each of the different key stages.

Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors during the inspection were pleased with the progress their child was making. One carer commented, 'The school has worked wonders for my grandson. He could barely read or write when he first came here, but is now only just below average for his age.'

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Students' behaviour and personal development is adequate. While students make good progress in improving their behaviour, their awareness and understanding of people from different faiths and cultures are underdeveloped.

Most students arrive at the school having experienced difficulties in managing their behaviour in their previous schools. Their self-esteem is often very low and they lack confidence as a result. Inevitably, many students continue to struggle to manage their behaviour at times. However, students' records and the school's behaviour logs indicate that behaviour is improving. Discussions with parents and carers also suggest that students' behaviour improves over time. One parent commented, 'My child communicates with other children better than before and can sort out

problems with other children much more effectively.’ Staff develop good, supportive relationships with the families of students who attend the school.

Staff assess accurately when students are not ready to engage in learning alongside others or in formal classroom settings. When this is the case, staff either work alongside students at home, or begin to engage them in working in other public settings, for example in public libraries. Teachers and other staff skilfully support students in working through their negative feelings about themselves and school. As a result, most students become increasingly engaged in learning. They make good progress in improving their readiness for learning alongside others, and ultimately towards their re-engagement into mainstream school, or further training or employment.

Students in the school are largely from a White British background. They learn about public institutions and services in England, and develop a respect for the law. They are less well prepared than they could be for integration into the wider world. Although some activities are planned by staff to help improve students’ awareness and understanding of those who come from backgrounds different from their own, these are not sufficient to ensure students’ good progress in this area of development.

Staff ensure that provision for students’ spiritual, moral and social development is good. For example, there are frequent moments of reflection in lessons for students to think about their own behaviour and to highlight any positive behaviour they have observed in others. A ‘friendship token’ reward system facilitates this well in Key Stages 2 and 3. Individual behaviour charts in the Key Stages 2 and 3 classroom are continually monitored by staff, with each pupil working at a level between one and five. Five on the chart reflects students’ sustained excellent behaviour; one on the chart reflects unacceptable behaviour. If students sustain a level three or higher on the chart by the end of the day, they are rewarded with ‘golden time’ during which they are able to choose from a range of enjoyable activities. This system is highly valued by students and promotes their good moral development. It also helps to ensure that classrooms and other areas of the school are calm and orderly places. This underpins the good quality of teaching and the good progress students make. Frequent praise for students’ work and efforts in Key Stage 4 helps to build their self-esteem and develop a positive attitude to learning. Students’ improved attitudes to learning in all key stages are reflected by their improved attendance.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good. This ensures that different groups of students make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully to meet the needs of individuals being taught in one-to-one situations or the different needs of students in each teaching group. Teachers use assessment well. They have a good understanding of the National Curriculum level at which each student is working at, and link this into their planning. Teachers share clear learning objectives for each lesson with students. In the lessons observed during the inspection, this helped to engage students in learning and make their learning purposeful.

Learning activities are interesting and engaging for students. This helps to sustain their interest and promote good behaviour in most lessons. Parents and carers told inspectors that their child enjoyed lessons at the school. One parent commented, ‘I have never seen my boy enjoy lessons so much anywhere else. He is really eager to come to school.’ Inspectors observed students in Key Stage 4 being inspired by their media projects, as they mixed video and music clips. Students in Key Stages 2 and 3 showed great enthusiasm as they used handheld computer devices to help them design a new outdoor play area for the school.

Teachers mark students’ work frequently and often write encouraging comments to acknowledge learners’ achievements. The school’s marking policy has recently been reviewed and this has led to greater consistency in teachers’ use of marking symbols and codes, which are understood by students. However, teachers do not indicate often enough how students’ work could be improved,

particularly in mathematics. This means that marking does not make as much impact as it could do in helping students to make better progress.

Teaching assistants make a good contribution to students' learning. They judge skilfully between when it is best to intervene in learning and when it is best to allow students to work independently. They continually seek ways in which they can acknowledge students' achievements and raise learners' self-esteem.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good. It provides students with experience in all of the required areas of learning and is based on the National Curriculum. Staff plan individual timetables for students to ensure that the subjects and topics they learn about are balanced to meet their needs, and help them to make good progress. There is a strong focus on developing students' skills in English and mathematics. However, there are also a range of appropriate vocational learning activities available to students including mechanics, media studies, outdoor pursuits and food technology.

Teachers plan the curriculum carefully and aim to 'consider the development of the whole person'. They do this well and the school's personal, social, health and citizenship programme prepares students effectively for adult life. However, staff acknowledge that the curriculum should be further strengthened to improve students' understanding of those from different backgrounds and with different beliefs.

The curriculum is enriched by opportunities for students, at more advanced stages of engagement, to attend extra-curricular activities. For example, some students attend clubs at local schools and others attend local youth clubs. They are accompanied by school staff in doing so to ensure their safety and well-being. Opportunities for work experience are included in the school's curriculum to help learners prepare for adult life.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Inspectors found no evidence to support and justify the concerns raised, prior to the inspection, to the registration authority about the welfare, health and safety of students at the school. All of the independent school standards relating to students' welfare, health and safety are met. All safeguarding policies, including those for child protection, health and safety, and for behaviour management and anti-bullying, meet requirements. They provide good guidance for staff and are implemented consistently. Designated child protection officers and all staff are trained regularly, and at the required level. Students are supervised effectively and records of serious incidents are kept meticulously. Rigorous checks are carried out on the recruitment of staff, including those who have lived or worked abroad and those whose services are provided through an agency. All these checks are recorded, as required, on a single central register.

Risk assessments, especially of students' behaviours, are thorough and detailed. They include, for example, detailed procedures for staff to follow when transporting students between sites and are tailored to take the needs of each individual student into account. Comprehensive risk assessments have also been carried out on the different sites used for learning activities. Staff have an up-to-date working knowledge of the risks involved in different situations, and have full faith in the school's systems to manage risks. All students and members of staff and spoken to during the inspection said that they feel safe at the school.

Leadership and management**Good**

The quality of leadership in and the management of the school is good. Inspectors found no evidence to support and justify the concerns raised, prior to the inspection, to the registration authority about the school. The proprietor has ensured that all of the independent school regulations are met. The accommodation and the complaints procedure meet the regulations. The school makes all of the required information available to parents, carers and others through the school website and the school handbook. In a short space of time, since the school opened to students, the proprietor and the school's senior leaders have successfully built a team of loyal and committed staff, who ensure that students receive a good standard of education and achieve well. Staff questionnaire responses indicate that they are highly positive about the school. Discussions with parents and carers, and responses on a survey completed by the local authority, indicate that they are all pleased with the school's performance.

Leaders work hard to provide equal chances for all students to succeed. Students appreciate the opportunities they are given to make a fresh start in this school and the ways in which it tailors the learning for them.

Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the school accurately and have identified how the school can improve in a suitable action plan. Inspection evidence aligns with leaders' findings. Leaders rightly identify that the school's systems to track students' progress and their engagement in learning require refinement. The school's current systems do not make it easy to identify the smaller steps of progress that students make. This makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve the school in sufficient detail.

The headteacher has worked hard to check the quality of teaching and support its improvement. For example, she has observed teaching, checked work in students' books and checked teachers' planning. She has used the information to group staff together to share the strengths of their teaching to help others to improve. However, the skills of other leaders, including learning managers and subject leaders, in helping to improve the quality of teaching are more variable. The school acknowledges that to improve the quality of teaching to outstanding, the capacity of these leaders to improve the quality of teaching needs to be increased. This process has already started through the use of external trainers and peer support but requires further consolidation. The school also acknowledges that these leaders need to be given more frequent opportunities to undertake work to improve the quality of teaching.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	139603
Inspection number	439268
DfE registration number	891/6023

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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	Special School
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	R.E.A.L Education Limited
Chair	Brian Smith
Headteacher	Nikki Purcell
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Annual fees (day pupils)	£36,501
Telephone number	01623 490136
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