

Cranbrook School

Cranbrook School, Waterloo Road, CRANBROOK, Kent, TN17 3JD

Inspection dates

03/02/2016 to 05/02/2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is outstanding because

- Boarders thrive within a caring and nurturing environment which places their well-being and positive development at the very centre of its ethos. Their safety and welfare is protected and assured through the effective implementation of robust and up-to-date policies, procedures and guidance.
- Boarders take full advantage of a wide range of enriching experiences and pastimes. They flourish, personally and academically, and develop necessary life skills. Learning from taking appropriate risks equips them for the next stage of their lives.
- Warm and welcoming boarding accommodation is safe, secure and furnished to an excellent standard. Boarders enjoy freedom of movement around the premises and take full advantage of the resources open to them outside of the school day.
- Excellent catering arrangements provide boarders with a wide range of healthy meals and snacks. A superb balance of boarder's choices is blended with nutritional requirements. Regular consultation between the catering manager and the boarders is key to this success.
- The wider health needs of boarders are recognised and sensitively supported. Excellent arrangements and communication between nursing, learning support, teaching and boarding teams ensures a seamless approach to meeting individual needs. Boarders' well-being is everybody's business, albeit within the confines of appropriate confidentiality.
- Strong monitoring systems, effective leadership arrangements and robust governance is driving the school forward with a clear and visionary long-term development plan. The school knows its key areas of strength and weakness and sets out clearly its

targets and goals for continued improvement.

- All of the national minimum standards for Boarding Schools are met and some are exceeded.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- provide boarding house staff with clear training and guidance on their responsibilities for fire safety.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted conducted this inspection after giving three hours' notice. Inspection activities over three days and two evenings included; visiting all of the boarding houses, formal and informal discussions with boarders, sharing mealtimes with boarders and staff and observing and partaking in extra-curricular activities during boarding time. In addition, formal meetings and interviews were held with the head teacher, director of boarding, safeguarding lead, safeguarding governor, heads of boarding houses, parents, catering manager, estates manager, teaching departmental leads, boarding house tutors, matrons and ancillary staff. The scrutiny of a wide range of documentation with regards to boarding policies, procedures, complaints and boarders' files also led to randomly selected individual case tracking exercises to ensure rigour and transparency. 'Parent View' responses were also considered.

Inspection team

Sophie Wood	Lead social care inspector
Liz Driver	Social care inspector
Janet Hunnam	Social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Cranbrook School was founded in 1518 and is situated in Cranbrook, Kent. As the only state Grammar school in the country, the school converted to become an academy in 2012. The school's education provision is free to day and boarding pupils alike. Its boarding provision is charged at a much lower rate compared with the independent sector. There are six separate boarding houses; some within the school campus and some are a short walking distance from the main teaching site. There are 747 pupils on roll, of which 241 are boarders. The boarding provision caters for boys and girls aged 13 to 18 years.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

The vast majority of boarders thoroughly enjoy and benefit from the wide range of experiences and learning opportunities provided by the school. Excellent resources across sport, the performing arts, debating, exchange trips, fund raising and work experience placements encourage boarders to engage in varied extracurricular activities. Consequently, a thirst for learning beyond their curriculum studies is nurtured and encouraged, typically resulting in happy and confident young adults excitedly preparing for the next stage of their lives.

Younger boarders speak of fun activities, being with their friends and trying new experiences outside of the classroom. A small number refer to being homesick and trying to adjust to being away from home and friends. Boarding staff are keenly aware of the issue and work collaboratively with parents and carers to support new boarders to settle in. This approach covers older boarders who join the school later on; some of whom come from abroad.

Infrequent examples of fixed period exclusions and no permanent exclusions from the boarding provision since the last inspection demonstrates the efforts and creativity of the school to overcome obstacles. Such decisions are only made as a result of careful consideration, internal practice scrutiny and ultimately, in the best interests of the boarders. Boarders understand the behavioural expectations. These are clearly explained in the literature provided for boarders, their parents and carers and further supported by a detailed behaviour policy which is subject to regular review.

Comments from boarders included, "I love it here, there is always a lot going on, I've made so many friends" and "I can use the facilities after school to get the extra help I need with my studies." Undoubtedly, the additional learning support provided during boarding time positively impacts upon individual learning and success. Meticulous monitoring systems demonstrate that overall, boarding pupils frequently achieve beyond their predicted grades. The 'Parent View' results, obtained during this inspection further endorse these successful outcomes, with 87% confirming their child 'makes good progress.'

Notwithstanding its educational focus, the boarding provision is keenly aware of its role and responsibility towards boarders' personal and social development. Boarders say they form close and meaningful friendships with their peers; they are able to mix freely between the boarding houses, with appropriate supervision measures in place. Older boarders enjoy more freedom to leave the school site within a set of clear expectations about their whereabouts. Boarding staff recognise and appreciate the various stages of adolescence, and the challenges these bring. Consequently, rules, behavioural expectations and permissible risks change as boarders grow older and demonstrate greater maturity. Boarding staff said, 'we have a duty to protect their welfare balanced with preparing them for adulthood.'

The significance of strong, respectful relationships between the boarders and staff is seen by the school as critical in this regard. Boarding staff give care and affection combined with appropriate boundaries. Some boarders report dissatisfaction with the handling of specific incidents, where they judge rules and punishments to be unfair. Senior managers recognise the importance of consistent behaviour management and this is a routine agenda item at boarding team meetings. Heads of houses and matrons recognise the individual nuances of their own boarding houses and are therefore clear about how and why some differences remain; for example, bed times and freedom of movement to leave the school site.

All boarders spoken with during the inspection gave names of staff across the school whom they regard as trusted sources of support. This extends across the entire school team and includes boarding staff, teachers, the nursing team and the designated person. The school is particularly good at creating opportunities for boarders in difficult circumstances to have access to the staff members they are most comfortable with, regardless of where they typically work. For example, the deputy head teacher has a specific pastoral role and routine with some individual boarders because of their relationship with her. This approach places every member of school staff as being responsible for boarders' welfare and it fosters a collective and collaborative approach towards their care.

Safety aspects taught in school are further explored during boarding time. The nursing team has a strong teaching and advisory presence with regards to the personal, health and social education (PHSE) programme. Boarders are given sound and appropriate advice about taking responsibility for their own lifestyle choices and decisions; for example, smoking, alcohol and sex and relationships guidance. Such topical issues are also explored by inviting parents to attend information events on matters such as 'Teenagers and Alcohol' and 'Drug Awareness.' A current whole school approach is tackling e-safety and the risks of cyber-bullying. Boarders say there are some restrictions to internet sites but moreover, they are well advised about how to use technology safely and wisely.

They also report extremely low levels of bullying incidents or friendship issues. Common statements included, 'we are a close community' and 'we look after each other'. Other boarders said, 'if anything, the staff sometimes over react to mild disagreements because they are so keen to tackle bullying'. Staff make no apology for this. Their comments included, 'it is difficult enough being away from home. Their boarding house should always be their safe haven' and 'we are experienced enough to sense that minor squabbles can quickly get out of control'.

Boarders come from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences. There are increasing numbers of boarders with additional learning, psychological and emotional health needs, and sensitive background histories. Strong reflective practice in this regard has influenced the training provision for the boarding team. Courses and seminars reflect boarders' needs and equip staff with the skills and knowledge they require to effectively support and look after them. All boarding staff are first aid trained but their understanding of deeper health needs is strengthened by training on attachment, behaviour management and self-harm. Their primary care role is further complemented by the support of the special educational needs (SEN) and nursing teams who are increasingly available outside of school hours to provide direct work with individual boarders and more generic support and advice for the boarding team.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

An embedded culture of nurture and support provides boarders with a sense of belonging and feeling cared for. Staff across all departments, including ancillary staff, swiftly report concerns in order that issues are further explored and boarders supported. During this inspection, members of the domestic team described some individual boarders sensitively and with genuine concern about their welfare. Such practice exemplifies that all school personnel place boarders' welfare as central to their practice.

This ethos of care is further underpinned by the significant presence of the nursing and learning support teams. As highly valued resources, their input is respected and routinely sought by their teaching and boarding colleagues. Collaborative working places equal value on everybody's input when individual boarders require specific support. This results in comprehensive welfare plans, the details of which exceed the national minimum standards. These working documents explicitly describe areas of concern, how a boarder is being supported and by whom. More serious

concerns receive immediate attention as soon as they arise. Skilled school nurses maintain excellent links with external professionals, such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Appropriate referrals to such agencies are swift and, where necessary, vigorous. The nursing team wastes no time in securing the input required.

Boarders speak very positively about easily accessible health care services. A well- equipped medical centre employs qualified nurses who oversee health care arrangements with diligent precision. Consequently, specific health and welfare needs are competently and sensitively managed. Where appropriate and safe, boarders are supported to take responsibility to self-administer their prescribed medication, in line with their maturity; they learn to take responsibility. Additional support services include individual counselling sessions. Boarders confirm their confidence to arrange such appointments because they are discreet and confidential. They also value the encouragement and reminders they receive about complementary resources, such as an independent listener and various external helplines. Such practice encourages boarders to find the most appropriate and meaningful support that works for them and gives them the help they need.

Boarders are confident, grounded and happy. Their enthusiasm to contribute to this inspection demonstrates they are used to expressing their views and opinions. They are overwhelmingly positive about their life at the school. They are also candid about some of the recent changes to the boarding team, including a number of relatively new heads of houses. While this has been unsettling for some, the general consensus is that the changes have been explained well. Boarders effectively use consultation forums, such as student councils and boarding house meetings to ask relevant questions and to receive information. Older boarders particularly value the attendance of the director of boarding and the head teacher. They feel they are taken seriously. This positive regard is further demonstrated by an effective complaint's procedure which actively invites boarders to raise their concerns and to seek resolution. Comments from boarders included, 'things do get changed and if not, the reasons are usually well explained'.

Boarders feel valued. This is demonstrated by a culture of acceptance which is evident within the boarding houses. Each is unique in terms of décor, resources and the activities of the occupants. Boarders feel a real sense of ownership of their houses; they all say theirs is the best! One house is known as 'sporty' and another has a very traditional approach to staging its own play every year. Individual expression through dress, food, activities and hobbies is enabled and supported by staff. This approach encourages boarders to do likewise. They befriend, respect and support each other, regardless of differences. One member of staff said, 'they are particularly good at having a quiet word with us if they think someone is struggling. I'm very proud of my girls'.

Superior catering arrangements are worthy of wider dissemination to other schools. Overwhelmingly, the feedback from boarders commends this aspect which is steeped in consultation between the catering manager and the boarders. An excellent balance results in healthy and nutritious meals which factor choice, favourites and preferences alongside nutritional value. Within the boarding houses, kitchen areas enable boarders to prepare their own snacks and drinks, thus encouraging their independence. Staff said, 'teenagers graze, that's the reality' and 'it's a careful balance, potential food issues are always on the radar'. Sensitive monitoring arrangements ensure any concerns about eating are quickly identified.

A broad range of activities gives boarders various enriching opportunities to develop additional interests, talents and skills. Many boarders take full advantage of sport activities, combined with their use of a fully equipped gymnasium. The combined cadet force (CCF) is popular and more boarders are signing up to the Duke of Edinburgh Award. An exchange partnership with a school in India, rugby and hockey tours to Australia and the Caribbean and classics trips to Italy and Greece were enthusiastically described during discussions with the boarders. The school is a

busy hive of activity during evenings and weekends. Regular, staffed trips to the cinema, bowling, shopping centres and theme parks give boarders the opportunity to relax and enjoy time with their friends. Music and drama are areas of particular interest. The school's superb theatre is very well used and open to the public. Such initiatives, as well as many fund raising activities, place the school as a highly regarded feature of the local community. Thoughtful use of the pupil premium ensures those in financial need are enabled to benefit from all the school has to offer.

Recent financial investment has secured on-going refurbishment and redecoration to the boarding houses. In particular, many bathrooms have been upgraded and the overall quality of furniture and fittings throughout the provision is excellent. Ancillary staff take great pride in the maintenance, upkeep and cleanliness of the houses. Boarders enjoy the warm and homely feel this attention to detail creates. Robust security arrangements ensure the off-site houses are very well-equipped to ensure boarders' safety.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Securing the safety and welfare of boarders is at the very centre of the school's practice. Their well-being is threaded through all policies, procedures and guidance which dictate staff practices. A highly motivated and very experienced designated person for safeguarding drives her peers and colleagues to always consider the wider impact of societal changes, peer pressures and individual circumstances upon the boarders and day pupils.

This attention to detail is demonstrated through the embedded practice of regular welfare and pastoral meetings. Every staff member is encouraged to flag individual concerns, no matter how small. Early intervention secures proactive partnerships with parents, carers and appropriate external support agencies, where this is necessary.

Ever evolving child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures are diligently reviewed, updated and communicated by the designated person to all school staff. Recent changes to guidance and training includes, Prevent awareness, the school's Channel duty guidance and female genital mutilation (FGM). It is the diligent approach towards staff training and guidance which ensures staff's understanding of these topics and how they may manifest within a boarding environment. Consequently, boarding staff are able to speak with conviction and demonstrable understanding about key risks, such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation (CSE). Individual risk assessments and welfare plans flow from this skilled approach when such concerns are identified. Boarding staff, teachers, nurses and matrons all work collaboratively, sharing the responsibility and accessing external provision where required.

The designated person maintains her knowledge and expertise through excellent links and communication with the local authority education safeguarding team. Additional safeguarding leads have recently been appointed across the school; relevant training commensurate with the role is being undertaken. The safety and protection of boarders is high on everyone's agenda and practice. This includes the governing body, which benefits from regular safeguarding training. One member of the governing body has a lead responsibility for safeguarding and is driving targeted visits to the boarding houses to ensure feedback from boarders and staff, relating to safety and welfare is obtained.

Consultations and referrals to the local authority are swift and appropriate, securing the safety and welfare of individuals. During this inspection, the school's robust attendance systems quickly identified the unexplained absence of a day pupil. Immediate action secured their safety. Episodes of being absent or missing from the boarding provision are extremely rare and as demonstrated, swift action promotes boarders' safety.

The school fosters a collaborative approach towards the welfare of all of its pupils. Excellent support initiatives have identified pupils as befrienders, confidantes and links to wider support networks. Thoughtful, safe systems provide older pupils with the training, support and guidance they need to effectively advise those who choose to access these internal helplines. Comments from those who have used the service included, 'it was really helpful just to offload about the pressure of school work' and 'sometimes you just want to talk to someone who is like a big sister or brother, who can help you'. Other initiatives include the recent introduction of pupils becoming 'digital leaders' who are providing information to their peers about internet safety.

Refined reporting systems to the maintenance team ensures the safety of the physical premises. Boarders say they feel safe at school and in their houses. One historic example of a theft prompted the installation of additional surveillance measures. Boarders say they are reassured by the use of CCTV which does not unnecessarily intrude upon their privacy. Following consultation with the local fire officer, a planned scheme of works in relation to the replacement of fire doors within the boarding houses is underway. Boarders describe regular fire evacuation practises and records demonstrate that routine servicing and checking of fire safety equipment is up-to-date. Robust oversight by the estates team maintains a careful eye on the current fire safety works but there is limited direct involvement by the boarding team. This risks an imbalance of the responsibility in relation to fire safety and a recommendation is made to address this with the boarding team.

Detailed risk assessments about the premises, off-site trips and all boarding activities provide explicit guidance for staff to follow. This holds individuals to account and reinforces everyone's responsibility. Prescribed staffing levels ensure appropriate supervision is maintained, particularly in respect of potentially risky activities such as CCF and external trips. A pragmatic approach is applied towards all proposed activities. Each are viewed individually and this results in sensible and realistic decisions. Boarders are able to learn from taking measured risks and making mistakes.

Robust recruitment procedures serve to protect boarders from potentially unsuitable adults. Rigorous selection, vetting and interview processes are conducted by experienced, trained panel members. Boarders greatly enjoy having a role in staff recruitment too. Volunteer staff are not used within the boarding provision and any adult family members or visitors, connected with staff living on site, undergo comprehensive checks as well.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Significant changes since the last boarding inspection in 2012 include the school becoming an academy, reviewing its admissions criteria to start from Year 7 in the future and re-structuring the composition of the boarding team. Outstanding leadership is steering the whole school team through challenging times of change and some uncertainty. Overwhelmingly, boarding staff say they are well supported and embracing the changes.

A thorough review of the boarding structure has resulted in a revised hierarchy and sharper lines of responsibility and accountability. Reporting to the director of boarding, the heads of houses balance working together to ensure consistency with embedding an individual identity within their own houses. Peer mentoring arrangements are supportive and appropriately challenging.

Detailed monitoring systems enable the director of boarding, head teacher and governing body to maintain excellent strategic oversight without losing sight of individual boarding issues as they arise. This approach lays strong foundations to ensure measurable progress against a detailed longer-term development plan.

Comprehensive policies and procedures provide accurate guidance and instruction because they are reviewed and amended as soon as legislative and good practice guidance is published. Examples include the changing landscape of safeguarding and child protection issues, such as Prevent and CSE which were rapidly incorporated into revised whole school policies, procedures and training.

Excellent communication between boarding and teaching staff ensures all aspects of boarders' development and needs receive equal care, priority and attention. Targeted progress meetings effectively monitor individual progress and concerns across boarders' academic and personal development. This approach is enhanced by an on-going drive from the boarding team who regularly invite teaching colleagues to get involved with boarding initiatives, such as social and sporting events. Supervision levels are increased and boarders really value the relationships such events build with their teachers.

Formal complaints are uncommon, with many individual issues of concern satisfactorily resolved at informal stages. Open lines of communication are valued by parents whose comments included, 'I can always speak with someone quickly. I'm reassured' and 'I have confidence in being listened to'. Complaints records detail thorough investigation procedures and clear outcomes which involve the governing body where this becomes necessary.

A learning and development culture provides boarding staff with opportunities to continually build upon their childcare expertise and skills. Regular boarding reviews, effective appraisal systems and 1:1 meetings support and challenge individual and collective practices. Continuing professional development remains central to the process and every boarding staff member is supported in their learning. Diploma courses with the Boarding School's Association (BSA), self-harm awareness, attachment theory and a research project into the impact of the boarding experience upon young people are just some examples of the current learning being undertaken.

Governance and oversight is robust and challenging. Governors take a very keen interest in all areas of school life and hold heads of departments to account. They fully understand and embrace their individual and collective responsibilities. Consequently, a clear vision is driving necessary changes based upon a sound understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the school and the sector.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	137739
Social care unique reference number	SC060354
DfE registration number	886 5416

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Boarding School
Number of boarders on roll	241
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	13 to18
Headteacher	Dr John Weeds
Date of previous boarding inspection	04/10/2012
Telephone number	01580 711 800
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