

Cranbrook School

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

Assurance visit

Information about this boarding school

Cranbrook School is a co-educational state-funded boarding and day grammar school in the market town of Cranbrook, Kent. Founded in 1518, the school converted to an academy in 2012. There are six separate boarding houses; some are within the school campus and some are a short walking distance from the main teaching site. At the time of inspection there were 234 boarders. The boarding provision caters for girls and boys aged 11 to 18 years.

Visit dates: 5 to 6 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 15 May 2018

Previous inspection judgement: Outstanding

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Young people enjoy good relationships with staff, describing their boarding experience in positive terms, such as, 'It's like a family atmosphere.' Another young person commented favourably on the range of things to do at weekends. Young people are well grounded and respectful.' A parent said, 'I have to say how impressed I am with the provision of activities provided at the weekends since the return to school.' A staff member said, 'It is a wonderful place to work.'

Young people have responded positively to restrictions due to COVID-19, enjoying some of the changes, such as having breakfast in their own individual boarding house. One young person said, 'Being in a bubble has improved the house spirit.'

Young people benefit from relationships with staff, who advocate for them. Staff are relentless in pursuing other professionals for the necessary documentation that provides guidance for young people who require additional support. Staff are innovative in working with other agencies, such as charities, to ensure that young people can access the school and get the support that they need.

The introduction of an external counselling service is now embedded in practice. The mental health first-aiders' strategy has been relaunched. Young people appreciate the various services that are available to them, and say that the staff care about their mental and emotional well-being. It is noteworthy that the external counselling service is available to young people and staff. This has been particularly pertinent during COVID-19.

The safety of children

The designated safeguarding lead is demonstrating sound leadership, ensuring that young people are fully protected. She has ensured that all the recommendations from an external safeguarding audit have been implemented. Senior house staff consider the wider issues in young people's lives and how these might impact on young people's welfare, especially their mental health. Good internal and external communication, effective safeguarding systems and the ethos of keeping young people at the centre of practice mean that young people are kept safe.

Senior leaders have been meticulous in their approach to risk assessments regarding COVID-19. They commissioned external health and safety professionals to oversee their risk-reduction measures and acted on the subsequent recommendations. Senior leaders conduct regular audits to ensure that staff apply the control measures in practice. This is a senior leadership team that uses written risk assessments as effective tools to ensure that the environmental and human behaviour changes that

are needed as a result of COVID-19 keep young people, staff and visitors as safe as possible.

Behaviour management strategies are clear. There are high expectations that young people will adhere to the necessary changes due to COVID-19. Young people have responded well to this expectation; they say that sanctions are proportionate and fair for any misdemeanours.

Staff are well versed in all aspects of safeguarding and the indicators that young people may be at risk. They have acted swiftly and decisively when they have had concerns, taking advice from other agencies when necessary, to conclude that young people are not being exposed to significant harm.

Overall, the single central record meets the required standard. In some cases, staff do not record tutors' qualifications on the database. This is not strictly in accordance with statutory guidance.

Leaders and managers

The senior leadership team's approach to managing the risks presented by COVID-19 is impressive. Standard operating procedures for reopening the school were detailed and included a specific one for boarding. Overseas students were able to have a 14-day quarantine period in the boarding accommodation prior to the start of term. Staff have managed bottlenecks where people congregate during the day, such as lunchtimes, exceptionally well, to reduce the risk of infection. The use of showers has been thought through carefully to maximise the time they are available to young people, while maintaining the additional standards of cleanliness that are required. Access to other essential areas, for example the medical centre, has been amended, to keep everyone safe when needing such a service.

A parent said, 'I have been impressed with the boarding provision, particularly during these difficult times. The welcome back after lockdown was wonderful. My child loves being there and is being really well supported during the lead-up to exams this term.' Another parent said, 'During this time, the staff have been very accommodating, flexible and supportive, dealing with all issues calmly and efficiently.'

Senior leaders have listened to the recently formed boarding parents' group. They recognise the need for clear communication such as regarding the planned improvements to the hot water supply in some buildings, and the reasons for delays. They have co-opted the parent of a boarder to sit on the governing board. They have also appointed an inclusion governor and have further plans to review equality and diversity policies and provide training in unconscious bias.

Senior leaders have conducted their own self-evaluation as well as commissioning external experts to conduct boarding audits. They have identified strengths and weaknesses and are developing action plans for improvement, for example to the boarding accommodation. They have plans to widen specific training in boarding for

staff. A minority of teachers commented on the challenge of meeting their teaching and boarding responsibilities while maintaining a good work-life balance.

Key staff have addressed the recommendations that were made at the previous inspection. Boarding features in appraisals, and additional electrical equipment brought in by young people is safety tested.

Governors speak in the most positive terms of the headmaster and especially the leadership he has shown over the summer during the COVID-19 pandemic, to enable the school to reopen in the new academic year.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Record all tutors' qualifications in the single central record.
- Consider the work-life balance of teachers when allocating boarding duties especially during the current pandemic.

Boarding school details

Unique reference number: SC060354

Headmaster: Dr John Weeds

Inspectors

Keith Riley, Social Care Inspector
Sophie Wood, Regional Inspection Manager

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