

Beech Grove

Forest Drive, Nonington, Dover, Kent CT15 4FB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Beech Grove School is an independent school for 120 girls and boys aged between four and 19 years, offering boarding for up to 26 students aged 13 to 19. It is part of the Bruderhof community, an international Christian community with settlements in six countries. The school operates from the Nonington site in Kent. The school is one of two schools in England which are run by Church Communities UK, a registered charity run by a board of trustees.

The boarding provision was registered in July 2019. The headteacher at the time of registration remains in overall charge. This was the first boarding inspection since registration.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The boarding school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This is an outstanding provision that strives continually to reach the gold standard in all that they do. The Christian values that underpin the community are lived out in practice. Students warmly embrace these values, demonstrating an empathy for each other and the wider world. For example, one student was making a Christmas gift for a younger member of the community in her free time. Some students help elderly members of the public with chores or visit to sing songs for others who are feeling unwell. Students designed a handwashing prototype for a national charity, for use during national disasters. They then worked with the charity to present the idea to obtain a grant. The outcome is that a working model of the handwashing station is being distributed to eight countries.

Students thoroughly enjoy their boarding experience, including those who have come from abroad and those who have not been brought up in the Bruderhof community. Weekly boarders have chosen to be termly boarders so that they can continue to enjoy being with their friends and join in with activities at the weekends. They use an exeat system to visit their families every six weeks. A parent said, 'My child loves it there every day of every week. He is getting good grades, growing in confidence and trusts the house parents.'

Students speak in the most positive terms about their boarding experience, for example:

- enjoying the companionship
- sharing experiences
- feeling like sisters and brothers
- having lots of opportunities to have fun
- preparing for their future life
- learning how to be responsible
- supporting each other
- learning how to cook
- always having someone to talk to
- enjoying the family atmosphere.

Students have a clear voice. They have trusted adults that they can speak to. They speak affectionately of their house parents and other staff. Senior leaders go to great lengths to ensure that students know the independent listeners and how to contact them as known trusted adults and not as strangers. Students requested improvements to their indoor recreation room and staff acted on this. Staff supported

students to use their skills to bring about the improvements to their facility. Students and staff alike are proud of the result.

Students have a wide range of activities in which they engage enthusiastically. The facilities are of an excellent standard. There is a mixture of fun, learning and recreation. Many of the activities contribute to students' preparation for adulthood and life in the wider community. The highly impressive furniture and nursery equipment factory is used for students to gain work experience.

Students have many opportunities to develop their independence. They engage enthusiastically with domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking. They embrace other opportunities through the 'Navigating our world' strategy. Students lead a luncheon conversation with business leaders, developing their communication skills and confidence in talking to significant people in the wider world. A parent said, 'I have really seen my child flourish and develop in this setting.' Students have clear plans and ambition for adult life.

Students are given great opportunities for success in their academic studies. Results in core subjects show that the success rate is more than twice the national average. Students go on to apprenticeships, universities or work of their choice. Staff support them to pursue their dreams, no matter what their chosen career or where it is in the world.

Catering is excellent. Much of the food that is enjoyed is grown and prepared on the vast site. Mealtimes are held in a family atmosphere, with students and staff both commenting positively on the experience.

Students' health needs are met. They have easy access to key services with a registered GP, pharmacy and dentist on site. They talk to trusted adults about their thoughts and feelings, confident that they will provide the necessary support. Students are in excellent physical, mental and emotional health.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Students are safe in the boarding school. Their behaviour is exemplary. Incidents are rare and when they do occur, these are low level, such as being late for breakfast. Safeguarding leads adopt an approach of, 'It could happen here.' They use safeguarding simulations and quizzes to prepare staff for every eventuality. Staff demonstrate a detailed knowledge of what to do in the event of any concern. They have considered every aspect of daily life and activities, ensuring detailed risk assessments are in place to keep students safe.

Key staff tightly monitor the security of the site. They are ready to respond to any concerns across the large site. Equally, an on-site fire team is on hand to respond to any fire emergencies. The overall safety and well-being of students is closely and effectively protected across the extensive and complex site.

Safer recruitment practice is adopted. Staff are appointed from within the Bruderhof community after careful consideration and completion of the necessary checks. However, the reasons why a candidate is selected are not always recorded in writing. This is not in strict accordance with statutory guidance.

Leaders and managers have developed excellent relationships with external partners who provide training in their relevant specialism. For example, the police have provided training for staff on how to identify signs of a child being groomed. Senior leaders ensure that the provision subscribes to relevant agencies so that they are up to date with the most recent research and kept informed of local safeguarding information.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers show exceptional leadership. They demonstrate strong, confident, clear and principled leadership with clear structure and lines of accountability for boarding staff. They have reviewed the national minimum standards, social care common inspection framework and statutory guidance, as well as working with other boarding schools, to apply and marry their understanding of boarding practice with the ethos of the Bruderhof community with great success. They use a self-evaluation process to continually review and improve practice.

Senior leaders demonstrated exceptional leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. They produced a bespoke comprehensive risk assessment, so all knew how to keep safe. The strategies were successful, with minimal disruption to students. The school and boarding provision were able to remain open during lockdowns. A student said, 'They were very supportive and kind to me in this time of lockdown. They helped us cope with the restrictions and presented them in such a way that it was obvious to us boarders that it was for our own safety. I have nothing bad to say about this time of COVID-19.'

Boarding staff are of high calibre. They exude confidence and competence. They are enthusiastic about their role in boarding, being highly vigilant and sensitive to students' needs. Boarding staff are respectful of students' wishes and feelings. They display an openness and eagerness to learn so that they provide the best experience of boarding for students.

Senior leaders make effective use of the software that they have installed, as well as ensuring excellent daily communication with all staff, to monitor the well-being of students. They have the necessary structures to ensure that each student's individual needs are identified and met in a timely way. Academic staff and boarding staff work exceptionally well together. Consequently, students enjoy excellent mental and emotional health. A staff member said, 'The communication between staff members is exceptional. The support is always good and the atmosphere is positive.'

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the service. They plan to build on the successful start to boarding and increase numbers, including accommodating a larger cohort of students who have not been brought up in a Bruderhof community.

This is a school that provides an exemplary quality of care, led by outstanding leaders, which means that students have exceptional outcomes because of their boarding experience.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve? Recommendations

- Senior leaders should ensure that all information considered in making decisions for staff appointments is clearly recorded.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: 2543646

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Timothy Maas

Type of school: Boarding school

Telephone number: 01304 842 980

Email address: beechgrove@bruderhof.com

Inspectors

Keith Riley, Social Care Inspector (lead)

John Pledger, Social Care Inspector

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