

Earlscliffe (Sussex Summer Schools Ltd)

Sussex Summer Schools Ltd, 29 Shorncliffe Road, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2NB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Earlscliffe is an independent college in Folkestone that offers university preparation for 15- to 19-year-olds from all over the world. There are currently 104 students on the school roll. At the time of the inspection, 94 students were boarding. The head of boarding has been in post for 14 months and has a relevant qualification as required by the national minimum standards. The boarding provision was last inspected in May 2017.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 October 2021

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 16 May 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students talk with affection and respect about the staff at the school. Students feel that they always have someone to speak to about any issue, be it practical, emotional or academic.

Students are proud of their community and talk about the inclusive and supportive culture that they feel everyone is a part of.

Students feel valued and listened to. There are plentiful examples of positive student engagement, including the student council, regular house meetings, student surveys, and students leading reviews into practice at the school. A student was also invited to contribute to conversations around e-safety, delivering a lesson to peers on safe management of personal data online.

Evidence of academic progress is exceptional. Compared to other schools in the area, the academic achievements of students at the school are top of league tables, which is impressive given that most students are studying in their second language.

A passionate coordinator of extracurricular activities has created a broad range of opportunities, which students are enthusiastic about. These include access to the arts, culture, leisure and sports. Community engagement and charity work are encouraged.

Students' independence is promoted but staff always maintain a keen eye on sensible levels of security. Students are permitted to take risks and develop their confidence.

Health is managed expertly. A new school nurse is currently being recruited; in the meantime, staff have backfilled this position and maintained a good service. Staff were able to talk about numerous positive examples of supporting students' mental health and more complex health needs.

A recently recruited special educational needs and disabilities coordinator has been a great addition to the team. She has promoted the integration of support across education and boarding. Staff value this and it has helped to create consistent support for students with additional learning needs.

Students are well prepared for their move on from the college. Preparation for their adult lives at university is effective. Students report back on the positive experiences they have had learning at the school. Students keep in touch after they have left, and it was positive to see some excellent feedback on their lives after leaving the school.

The head of boarding has led on some very positive work around promoting safe spaces for students to express their identity. Gender-neutral toilets are in operation

and the school uniform is also now gender neutral. Students are encouraged to express themselves in a welcoming and inclusive space.

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

The designated safeguarding lead promotes an active and well-informed culture of safeguarding across the whole staff team.

Students feel safe and protected at the school. The management of any disputes between students is effective and staff reflect and learn from incidents to improve practice. In a recent complaint about a dispute between two students, staff acknowledged that their interventions could have been swifter and more decisive, and this has been reflected in new approaches to managing conflict.

The effective use of recording systems and regular points of contact between the education and boarding teams identify signs and indicators that students may be experiencing emotional or practical problems. Effective team-working then ensures that clear strategies are put in place to support students' well-being. There are many examples of where this approach has resulted in positive outcomes for students.

Individual risks are managed effectively, with good use of interdepartmental networks, meetings and communication to ensure that students with additional vulnerabilities are monitored effectively and kept safe.

Students have regular access to independent trips into the nearby town and surrounding areas. Students could benefit from a more clearly defined assessment of risk in the community to enable them to better understand how to keep themselves safe.

More vulnerable students, with mental or physical health issues, have clear care plans that enable staff to take all necessary steps to support them and meet their needs.

The school has nurtured all necessary links with local safeguarding teams and there have been examples of some good partnership-working to promote the safety of students. In one case, the head of boarding liaised with the local authority to gather information about relevant safeguarding legislation in a student's country of origin. This enabled the school to put in place safeguarding measures for the student both at the school and at home.

Students live in an inclusive environment that celebrates difference. This minimises incidents of discriminatory behaviour, and breaches of this culture are dealt with strongly and effectively.

Positive behaviour is rewarded and actively promoted across the school. Students are leading on a review of rewards and delivering their findings to the staff using data from questionnaires.

The school takes all necessary precautions to protect students in the virtual sphere and provide them with the knowledge and tools to keep themselves safe. Students own this and take an active role in promoting information about e-safety and good practice.

The school manager has put in place comprehensive and effective COVID-19 safety measures. Students' safety and health have been prioritised. Complex travel arrangements have been managed well to ensure that the school is compliant with all current legislation and guidance around students who are travelling from red list countries and require quarantine. When students were unable to attend the school during national lockdown, a vibrant and comprehensive programme of both curricular and extra-curricular activities operated successfully. The school has not had any transmission of COVID-19 between students or staff throughout the pandemic to date.

Some staff have commenced employment without the necessary safer recruitment checks specified in both the school's own policy and the relevant guidance in 'Keeping children safe in education' (2021). In one case, a staff member was lone working in direct contradiction to a risk assessment that stated they would be supervised at all times. Other staff have not had their references verified by the school to ensure that the data therein is accurate.

Growth and expansion at the school have put pressure on the maintenance staff and school manager, and not all repairs are being completed in a timely manner. New systems to improve this are bedding in and staff reflected on the hard work that is going into improving this area of practice.

Fire safety measures were found to be lacking. Risk assessments were out of date and in some cases not available. For example, a science laboratory had been installed in a building that also operated as a boarding house and the associated risks had not been adequately assessed. An external fire risk assessment had been completed in 2019, which highlighted several high-priority issues for the school to address. In some cases, these important measures took up to a year to complete.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Senior leaders at the school are enthusiastic about their roles and committed to providing a high-quality experience for boarders. However, the growth in numbers of students and the expansion of the school site, since the last inspection, have hugely increased the scope of their respective portfolios. At present, too few people are holding too much responsibility for core tasks and this is leading to stress and pressure on the leadership team and subsequent impact on the effectiveness of the team's practice. This is not a reflection on the team's competence as leaders, but simply a lack of capacity to deliver all the tasks that have been allocated to them to a high standard.

Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses at the school and have developed positive plans to redistribute tasks and create a team-based approach that promotes shared responsibilities. While governors do have oversight of practice at the school, this has not identified or prevented some of the shortfalls found at this inspection.

Planning and support are managed very effectively. Leaders know students well and adapt their care and support to ensure that students flourish and achieve positive outcomes.

New students are welcomed and integrated into the school effectively, and staff work sensitively to support students who may be struggling to settle or missing home.

There is a strong emphasis from leaders on ensuring that progress is monitored and students achieve the best outcomes possible. There is plentiful and strong evidence of the positive impact of the school on students' personal and academic development.

The point raised at the previous inspection for improvement around the development of boarding staff has been dealt with. New systems for staff appraisal and supervision and a focus on continuous professional development have already led to significant improvements, which staff value.

Leaders ensure that training for staff is promoted effectively. Given the constraints of COVID-19, compliance levels have been well maintained, with effective use of online learning and virtual spaces for staff to engage in training. Face-to-face training opportunities are now returning and staff were complimentary about the learning opportunities available to them.

Parents feedback via the Parent View portal and email was overwhelmingly positive. They feel that the quality of support and learning for their children is very good.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for boarding schools:

- The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured. (NMS 6.2)
- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. (NMS 7.1)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS 14.1)

Recommendations

- Ensure that monitoring and oversight capture any shortfalls in practice or breaches of the national minimum standards effectively.
- Ensure that the school completes a location risk assessment to support the safety of students in the local community.

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: SC469113

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Joss Williams

Type of school: Boarding school

Telephone number: 01303 253951

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Inspectors

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector
Helen Simmons, Social Care Inspector
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