

# Cranbrook School

Cranbrook School Academy Trust

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## 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 on the school campus and some are a short walking distance from the main teaching site. At the time of inspection, there were 221 boarders. The boarding provision caters for girls and boys aged 13 to 18 years.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### Inspection dates: 5 to 7 March 2024

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The boarding school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 15 May 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

Children who board at this school mostly benefit from doing so. They are mainly positive about their experiences and the support that they receive from staff. However, several significant shortfalls in respect of leadership and management and health and safety have led to a judgement of requires improvement to be good. Although recent changes provide assurance that leaders and managers have the capacity to oversee the necessary improvements, some shortfalls had not been identified by the leadership team.

Children feel listened to. Leaders and managers encourage them to share their views. However, some children and some staff do not know who the independent listener is. Consequently, the safeguarding function of the independent listener is significantly reduced.

The systems for managing the administration of medication are inconsistent across the boarding houses. Senior leaders have already recognised this and have an improvement plan. Medication is managed effectively in some of the boarding houses, however, there are occasions when medication is not recorded accurately, which could lead to errors.

The accommodation provided for one year group in one boarding house includes internal CCTV facing some external doors. There has been little reflection on whether the safeguards provided by these cameras could be achieved in a less intrusive way.

There is a well-planned transition and welcome process for new children when they first join. This includes open days, orientation on arrival and a family and boarders event during the first weekend. Plans to support children when they leave the school help to ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Children are supported with their schoolwork. This includes senior boarders mentoring younger boarders and additional support for children to do preparatory work in a calm and quiet space.

Children benefit from healthy and nutritious meals that meet their dietary preferences and cultural needs. The school council has made suggestions about the food which have influenced changes.

Children enjoy shared activities and games. They benefit from a good range of experiences, including a wide range of interesting clubs and sporting activities.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Leaders and managers generally take appropriate action in response to concerns. There are areas that require improvement for children to receive consistently good enough help and protection.

A small number of children were identified as having experienced bullying in the boarding houses. Feedback from children about the effectiveness of responses to bullying is mixed. While leaders have been active in attempting to prevent bullying, in at least one instance this has persisted. In one particular instance, a risk assessment relating to sleeping arrangements was not sufficiently clear or detailed in relation to how staff will monitor children to prevent bullying, despite bullying having been a known concern.

Some staff report a lack of confidence or consistency in managing behaviour. There is a lack of training in respect of managing bullying. Managers recognise this but at the time of the inspection had yet to provide training for staff.

The use of consequences is inconsistent across the boarding houses. This means that there are varying expectations for children and their experiences of behaviour management differ. The leadership team is aware of this and is in the process of developing a working group to review approaches to the use of consequences.

The safeguarding leads identify and monitor risks, including low-level concerns. When concerns are identified that require liaison with the local authority designated officer, these are shared appropriately.

Safeguarding leads are alert to risks relating to criminal exploitation. When these are identified, they are shared promptly with the appropriate authorities. Staying in boarding has helped one child to become significantly safer.

Staff manage incidents of self-injurious behaviour well. Children are provided with support from in-house and external services as necessary. Children have access to a counselling service and a medical centre on site. There are adults and professionals available for children to talk to.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The director of boarding is carrying out this role in addition to their substantive role as a head of house. This does not provide enough capacity to oversee the service effectively. Lines of accountability are not always clear. These shortfalls have been recognised by new leaders and managers and plans are in place to make changes.

The new senior management team is aware of most of the areas of concern. However, several issues, including fire-safety concerns, were not known until they

were identified by inspectors. The response to these concerns during the inspection provided assurance that there is the capacity to take the necessary action. However, there have been several areas where improvement is necessary and internal monitoring arrangements have not identified shortfalls. Leaders and managers were unaware that actions identified in fire risk assessments as high priority had not been completed. In addition, there are no records of the actions taken in response to electrical safety checks. During the inspection, an action plan was devised and shared with the local fire service.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that all required safer recruitment checks are consistently carried out. Although references are gathered as part of the recruitment process, the information is not always verified with the person who has provided the reference.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that staff always receive the support necessary to help them carry out their roles effectively. This includes a lack of training in some areas and an inconsistent approach to monitoring boarding practice. This has contributed to some staff dissatisfaction and staff having concerns about their capacity to provide a good service. In addition, despite the school's policies referring to the importance of a trauma-informed approach, several boarding staff are unfamiliar with the concept and have not had training in this approach.

Leaders and managers are child focused. Several recent changes have been made in response to children's requests and suggestions. For example, children asked for more flexible approaches to spending time with friends who were not boarding. This was acted on. Leaders and managers also supported the creation of a girls' football team.

There is a good approach to tolerance, equality and diversity. Special days celebrate different cultures and raise awareness of heritage, background and culture.

## **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 complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and ensures alerting systems are accessible and there are clear evacuation plans for all children subject to their needs. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 10.2)
- 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, and they are provided a safe environment in which they can live and learn. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 9.2)
- Any instances of bullying are dealt with effectively. Staff take steps to help pupils to overcome the impact of bullying. All school staff are trained to recognise bullying and know who to go to, if required, in order to ensure bullying is dealt with. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 16.2)
- The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person'. Children know who this person is, know how to contact them and feel comfortable talking to them. The person is easily accessible. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 11.4)

### **Points for improvement**

- School leaders should ensure that a night-time fire drill takes place annually in each boarding house.
- School leaders should ensure that approaches to the use of consequences are consistent and reasonable across all boarding houses.
- School leaders should ensure that when references are obtained as part of the recruitment process, these are appropriately verified.
- School leaders should ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the sleeping arrangements in boarding houses, considering privacy and risks.
- School leaders should ensure that staff receive good regular reviews of their boarding practice, with opportunities for training and continual professional development in boarding.
- School leaders should ensure that approaches to medication recording further reduce the potential for errors.

## **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:** SC060354

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** David Clark

**Type of school:** Boarding school

**Telephone number:** 01580 711 800

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## **Inspectors**

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