

Cranbrook School

Cranbrook School, Waterloo Road, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 3JD
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Cranbrook School was founded in 1518 and is situated in Cranbrook, Kent. The school converted to become 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. There are 746 pupils on roll, of which 222 are boarders. The boarding provision caters for boys and girls aged 13 to 18 years.

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 May 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **Outstanding**

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Date of last inspection: 3 February 2016

Key findings from this inspection

This boarding school is outstanding because:

- Boarders celebrate and enjoy the diverse and rich mix of backgrounds from which they come. This is an inclusive and welcoming boarding provision.
- Boarders make excellent progress which is, in some cases, spectacular, particularly when bearing in mind their starting points.
- The diverse choices of enriching activities and opportunities on offer encourage

the growth, responsibility and maturity of boarders.

- The leadership team reflects on practice and responds to any shortfalls swiftly. Governors play an active part in the running of the school and boarding. Senior leaders are inspirational, confident and ambitious and continually challenge and improve practice.
- Boarding is seen as a central and much valued part of the school, and all members of staff are passionate about ensuring that the boarding experience is enriching and rewarding.
- Boarders' welfare and safety is given a high priority. The school's safeguarding team is diligent and works very hard to ensure that all students are safe and protected.
- Excellent pastoral support ensures that all students have their emotional well-being promoted to a very high standard.
- Staff receive up-to-date and relevant training to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver an excellent standard of care.
- Close and very well-organised liaison between boarding staff and staff in the rest of the school ensures that each boarder's individual needs are known and that effective support packages are put in place where needed.

The boarding school's areas for development:

- Staff should have the boarding element of their role better explored during reviews and appraisals. Matrons in particular should review and discuss their role and effectiveness regarding their interactions with boarders and their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Communicate to all boarders the expectations that electrical equipment needs to be checked prior to it being used in the boarding houses.
- Review safeguarding concerns so that any historical incidents can be checked and passed on to safeguarding agencies for follow-up if that has not already occurred.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that appraisals for all staff explore their role in boarding in more depth.
- Review all safeguarding issues to ensure that they have been resolved.
- Ensure that all boarders understand the need to have electrical equipment checked to ensure its safety.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: Outstanding

Boarding is an integral, rich and thriving part of the school community. A diverse mix of boarders form a community which is enriching for those involved and provides an excellent range of opportunities to develop their strengths and interests. A strong sense of belonging and esprit de corps helps boarders to care for each other and take pride in their school and their achievements.

Boarders make excellent progress, which is, in some cases, remarkable when taking into consideration their starting points. The multidisciplinary support, often developed into bespoke packages of care, enables boarders to develop and meet their potential. Boarders who initially may have struggled with their work and have found the boarding experience challenging have, over time, become role models for younger boarders. Boarders have used their insight and experiences to nurture and support other members of their boarding community.

The relationships between boarders and staff are excellent. These have developed over years and form a basis of trust and mutual respect. All members of staff in the boarding houses, as well as the wider school community, have excellent insight into the boarders' needs and circumstances. Staff are all aware which individuals, at any given time, are in need of additional attention and guidance; this leads to a strong sense of belonging and stability. A boarder said, 'They have become my second family.'

Boarders are able to take part in enriching, varied and exciting activities. These encourage the growth of their confidence, awareness of the world and opportunities to develop social and team skills. A boarder said, 'There's always something to do, we don't have time to be bored.' Boarders' views are sought at regular house meetings, which gives them a voice and opportunity to influence the running of the houses. For example, bed and study times have been changed and outings arranged which the boarders have requested. This helps them to feel that they have an active part to play in their community and they learn to voice their preferences and opinions in a mature and responsible manner.

Excellent support is given to boarders who need extra mentoring and coaching in order to improve their academic performance. Of particular note is the development of a new sixth form study facility, which is unanimously appreciated and valued by the students. The bespoke support to any student who needs it is a significant strength of the whole school. It embeds and actively promotes the ethos of valuing students and enables them to achieve to their full potential.

There is excellent provision to meet boarders' health needs. A medical team on site is readily available to offer treatment or advice on any issues. A particular strength of the provision is the ability to ensure that boarders receive emotional and psychological assistance where that is needed. The medical team works closely with

the school and boarding staff to ensure that everyone is aware of each boarder's situation and needs. The multidisciplinary approach to promoting boarders' well-being, safety and progress is cohesive, well organised and very effective. Boarders who have needed extra help and nurturing have made excellent progress as a result of the well-planned and sensitive interventions.

The quality of food is unanimously praised by boarders. They reported that there is ample food with an excellent choice. Catering staff are aware of any specific needs, whether these are cultural or medical. Additionally, catering staff show an awareness and sensitivity to identifying boarders who may be suffering from eating disorders or skipping meals. Catering staff are aware of whom they should share this information so that support can be put in place swiftly. This demonstrates the ethos in which all adults, no matter what their role, share a responsibility in ensuring that all students are looked after, protected and supported.

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

Boarders unanimously speak of feeling safe in their school community. They report that there are numerous adults with whom they can share any concerns and worries. They also have the option to speak to 'Student Listeners', who are senior students who have been trained to provide support and advice. Consequently, boarders are confident that their concerns are heard and dealt with.

A diligent and conscientious safeguarding team ensures that all students in the school have the support that they need in order to feel safe. Very good communication with partner agencies ensures that plans are made and implemented to protect the students both at home and in the school. Members of staff in the safeguarding team actively advocate on behalf of students to ensure that families receive the help and support that they need. This approach ensures that the safeguarding team is aware of its wider duties that extend beyond the school community. On one occasion, the safeguarding team did not pursue a historical allegation as it thought it had been addressed by a previous school. This was a missed opportunity to explore the issue further and ensure that appropriate action could be taken to protect others in the wider community. However, this shortfall had no impact on the boarder concerned, who has received pastoral support of a high standard.

Boarders have a good understanding of the risks in the cyber world and display a mature attitude to the use of personal electronic devices. This is underpinned by comprehensive personal, social, health and economic programmes which ensure that boarders are aware of safe internet usage.

Boarders act as excellent ambassadors for their school. Behaviour is of an exemplary standard and all students, whether day or boarding, are clearly aware of the rules, routines and high expectations. Sanctions, where used, are appropriate and proportionate. Boarders were unanimous in their feedback that they are treated fairly. Additionally, senior members of the boarding staff examine any disciplinary records in order to see if there are any themes developing and to ensure that they

are fair.

Serious sanctions, such as fixed or permanent exclusions, are carefully considered and scrutinised by both the headteacher and governors. This ensures that due process is followed and that the decision made is justified and proportionate.

The safety of students is given a high priority. All boarders know what to do in the event of a fire and take part in fire drills at various times of the day and night. Efforts are made by members of staff to ensure that boarders have all their electrical equipment checked to ensure that it is safe before using it in their boarding areas. This expectation has not been consistently understood by all boarders and could lead to some items being used before they have been checked. A very clear policy and procedure was updated during the inspection process; however, the effectiveness of this process has not had time to be consistently implemented.

Risk assessments are of a high standard and clearly outline what measures need to be taken to ensure all students' safety. This means that students have an opportunity to take part in enriching, exciting activities and outings, both in their local community and the wider world. For example, a number of students are taking part in an expedition to Nepal and numerous students have successfully completed 'The Duke of Edinburgh's Award'. Managed risk and developing maturity and responsibility encourages all students to take advantage of some excellent opportunities and to develop their skills, resilience and confidence.

A comprehensive recruitment process ensures that all necessary background checks are carried out on all prospective employees, no matter what their role. This ensures that only adults with appropriate employment histories work at the school.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: Outstanding

High standards are expected and achieved by all members of the leadership and boarding teams. Boarders are seen as central to any plans and their successes and happiness are celebrated with pride by all members of staff.

The Head, the Governors and the Director of Boarding have a clear vision and plan of how to develop and maintain the high standards achieved. This well-constructed plan identifies areas of strength and areas which are to be improved, and how and when these are to be achieved. For example, a reorganisation of the boarding leadership has enabled easier communication between the heads of houses and an ability to swiftly reflect on any incidents or issues. In turn, this enables the leadership team to put into place plans to ensure that all members of the boarding community receive high-quality support.

All members of staff receive the training that they need to provide support to those in their care. They are aware of the challenges that boarders may experience, be this academic or pastoral. While members of staff, who are also teachers, have their performance and continual professional development assessed on an annual basis, the boarding element of their task is not explored in great depth. Additionally, the matrons who play a vital part in the day-to-day running of the houses, and whose roles are highly valued by the boarders, could benefit from more personalised

reviews. These could take into consideration their safeguarding roles and the pastoral support that they offer to the boarders as well as their other tasks. This shortfall does not undermine the effective support provided by the boarding staff.

All boarding staff receive regular training in areas such as safeguarding, fire awareness and awareness of mental health issues. All attend regular meetings with the staff in their houses so that everyone is up to date with specific issues and alert to which boarders may need extra support. New boarding staff also receive mentoring and guidance from established staff and this ensures consistency and stability across the houses. All members of staff appreciate that working in boarding is 'more than just a job' and all appreciate the key roles that they have in helping the boarders develop and grow. This all equates to a vastly experienced staff team that is committed and dedicated to providing excellent guidance to the boarders.

Due to staff often having shared roles across the school, there are multiple opportunities to swiftly communicate concerns and issues across all departments and disciplines. Where needed, a 'Team Around The Child' is put into place; this model ensures that any student in need of additional support has a number of individuals and professionals working together to meet their specific needs and who understand their vulnerabilities. Consequently, this team can provide excellent support swiftly and effectively in a manner preferred by the student concerned.

There have been no formal complaints received regarding boarding since the last inspection. This reflects the level of ongoing communication between members of staff and the boarders, and ensures that issues can be discussed and resolved at a low level without the need for recourse to formal systems.

There is an active board of governors and trustees who visit the school and boarding areas regularly. They provide support and guidance to members of staff and endorse the high standards achieved. Clear planning for the future of the school is in place and the governors drive and guide the high aspirations of the senior leadership team. The Head of Boarding is encouraging governors to develop their roles further with a view to providing critical and more in-depth analysis of the service. This recommendation has been accepted and welcomed by the governors, but the practice has not yet had time to be embedded in their visits and reports on the boarding provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: Dr John Weeds

Type of school: Boarding School

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Inspectors

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