

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 five 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 215 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: 17 to 19 June 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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: 5 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students and staff are united in their view that the thing that truly defines the culture of the boarding provision is the quality of relationships that they all share. Staff express pride, affection and deep compassion for the students in their care. Students reciprocate this and speak of the trust and affection that they have for the adults in the boarding provision.

The effective role modelling of positive relationships from staff to students and from older students to younger students nourishes a positive culture and has created a space where students feel cared for and valued. Students say that they feel part of a very special community that promotes deep and lasting friendships.

Students proudly share their achievements. They talk powerfully of the transformative impact life in the boarding provision has had on them and how it has enhanced their prospects as they transition into higher education or work.

Staff support for more vulnerable students is first class. A skilled special educational needs coordinator and pastoral team provide excellent wraparound care and support alongside boarding staff. Staff say that they benefit from the training opportunities available to them, which help them to meet individual students' needs.

Boarding staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. They are all positive about their experiences of working in the boarding houses. Teachers who support the boarding houses say that their duties have resulted in positive changes to their teaching and given them a better understanding of the students that they support.

Students are aware of who they can talk to when they have presenting health needs. The lead nurse's oversight and monitoring of students' health needs are excellent. Staff also benefit from the oversight of the school nurses. This ensures that they have the competencies and skills to administer medication.

Medication administration is well managed. Staff supplement electronic records of administration with handover documents, which minimises the risk of errors. Staff encourage young people to manage their own medication when this is safe and appropriate. This helps them to learn important life skills.

The lead nurse has excellent relationships with external medical professionals. This helps to ensure that students receive prompt and effective support for their health and medical needs. Health professionals develop high-quality, individualised healthcare plans, informed by consultation with other relevant professionals. Health staff support boarding staff to understand students' needs and provide a consistent response.

The support for students with emerging mental health or well-being concerns is strong. Staff provide tiered support to ensure that whatever level of need staff identify, there is an appropriate response. Staff respond to lower-level needs with a mixed range of support, including peer mentoring and drop-ins to the well-being centre. Should students' needs increase, there are more targeted interventions that include individual or group work to help students understand and manage personal challenges. The well-being team is also an integral part of the safeguarding team, resulting in good links with the wider professional network when needed. Students feel supported and value this support.

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

A skilled, multi-disciplinary team of safeguarding practitioners provide high-quality safeguarding support for students. When appropriate, staff make efforts to keep students informed about safeguarding and provide them with clear advice and support about topical issues or concerns.

When students feel vulnerable, staff take action to ensure that students get the help that they need. Lead staff ensure that necessary referrals to specialist services are made, and clear plans are implemented to help keep students safe.

There has been a notable change to how behaviour is both considered and responded to. Following the last inspection, leaders have worked to change the culture around both bullying and behaviour. This has had positive outcomes. Staff feel more confident to challenge negative behaviour between students. Staff's focus on bullying has included work in assemblies, information leaflets, posters around the provision and informal discussion with students. This approach has had a positive impact and has seen a significant reduction in incidents of concern.

Students recognise the key role that they play in promoting a positive safeguarding culture, and the leadership team also values this. Leaders have responded to suggestions to review the use of surveillance, removing one camera, and have plans to further review the positioning of cameras inside boarding houses.

Health and safety processes are very well managed. When maintenance issues arise, a skilled estates team quickly rectifies the situation. Leaders use effective systems to monitor statutory compliance across the boarding houses. House leaders have ensured that boarding staff and students are confident in the actions to take in the event of emergency fire evacuations.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders have achieved remarkable positive changes in a comparatively short space of time. Students, parents and staff all praise the quality of leadership. They identify huge progress in consistency across boarding houses, the professionalisation of the boarding staff and the integration of the boarding and day student communities.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support and guidance that they receive from senior leaders. They receive an annual appraisal of their performance. Staff benefit from ambitious professional development targets, which senior staff link to the school's wider improvement plans and goals.

Leaders provide excellent oversight of boarding practice. They regularly review the effectiveness of the arrangements in place and provide constructive feedback that supports continuous improvement in the experiences of boarding students.

Leaders respond competently to all complaints once they have had suitable time to fully investigate the issues raised. Complaints are few. Staff manage most issues through effective and open communication with students.

Governors demonstrate a good understanding of what is happening in the boarding provision and are clear about the changes that have occurred since the previous inspection. They regularly discuss boarding, and governors have an impressive understanding of the current strengths and areas for improvement. Governors are present and use opportunities to discuss any concerns that boarders may have.

Students have many opportunities to share their views and talk confidently about their trust in these processes. Senior leaders are now part of the student council meetings and are very responsive, giving feedback almost immediately. This comprehensive approach has given students the confidence that they are heard and can effect change should they need to.

There are no breaches of the national minimum standards or points for improvement from this inspection visit.

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

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Inspectors

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

Glen Strowbridge, Social Care Inspector

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