Keswick School

Keswick School Multi Academy Trust

Vicarage Hill, Keswick, Cumbria CA12 5QB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

This is a mixed day and boarding school situated in a rural location on the edge of a small town. The Lairthwaite boarding house is situated on the school site and accommodates pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years. Many boarders are from overseas.

The school has academy status and has space for 50 boarders.

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

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 October 2026

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.

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Date of last inspection: 22 January 2024

Summary of findings

Children speak very positively about their experiences of boarding. They report feeling safe, valued and well cared for. Strong relationships with staff and peers,

together with a welcoming environment and opportunities to contribute to decisions, help children develop a strong sense of belonging.

Boarding supports children's academic, social and emotional development, with excellent wellbeing support, including a valued therapy dog. Staff promote independence, community involvement and positive behaviour, while maintaining effective safeguarding practices.

Leaders, governors and staff work collaboratively to provide high-quality care and ambitious support for children.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children enjoy boarding and speak positively about their experiences. They feel well cared for, develop strong relationships with boarding staff and build meaningful friendships with their peers. Children have a strong sense of belonging in the boarding provision. Staff support children to explore their individual identities, cultures and beliefs. Parents also speak positively about boarding. One parent said, 'Hand on heart, a five star service from start to finish; couldn't wish for anyone better to look after my child'.

Children thrive academically and socially while boarding. They enjoy school and engage well in their education. Boarding makes a positive contribution to children's educational attainment and progress from their starting points. Boarding and school staff work closely together, sharing information effectively and maintaining strong partnership working.

Staff implement a robust and well-planned admissions process for new boarders. They take the time to understand each child's individual needs, carefully assess their suitability for boarding and ensure that introductions are tailored to support a positive experience. This thoughtful approach helps children to settle in smoothly and develop confidence in their new environment. Staff also follow comprehensive procedures for overseas students, ensuring that suitable arrangements are in place to promote their safety, welfare and successful integration into the boarding provision.

Children actively contribute to decisions about their day-to-day care. Prefect meetings, suggestion boxes and house meetings provide opportunities for children to share their views. Staff listen to children's opinions and use their feedback to make meaningful changes.

Staff recognise and celebrate children's positive behaviour and achievements. This encourages children to develop good character and understand the benefits of making positive choices.

Children speak overwhelmingly positively about their boarding experiences. Older children described the positive developments that have taken place over time, including improvements to the environment such as the addition of a new kitchen. Children say that staff listen to their views and act on their feedback, particularly the head of house. All children report that they feel safe and enjoy boarding. Children describe staff as consistent, and they value knowing which staff will be on duty, helping them to feel secure and well supported.

Children highly value the boarding house therapy dog and regard her as an integral part of the boarding community. They described the positive impact she has on their emotional wellbeing, particularly in helping them manage feelings of homesickness and providing comfort and emotional support. The strength of this provision is reflected in external recognition of the boarding house's practice. The head of house was invited to deliver a webinar for the Boarding Schools' Association, sharing the approach to creating a homely boarding environment and successfully integrating a therapy dog into boarding provision. This demonstrates the commitment to promoting children's welfare and sharing effective practice across the sector.

Children participate in a wide range of activities in the boarding provision and across the school site, including rugby, basketball, board games, baking and movie nights. Staff place a strong emphasis on community engagement and encourage children to attend Scouts, use the local gym and access community facilities, such as the sailing club, rugby club and cinema. Staff actively encourage friendships and social opportunities, including inviting non-boarders to Friday evening meals. One child said, 'Sometimes I stay here at the weekends if there's something fun planned. I love being here.'

Children also contribute positively to their local community. They volunteer at events and projects, including the local film festival, the Wildlife Trust and local rewilding initiatives. These experiences help children develop confidence, empathy, social responsibility and valuable life skills while strengthening their community connections.

Staff encourage children to develop independence in line with their age and abilities. Children learn practical life skills such as cleaning, doing laundry and helping others. Some older students also hold part-time jobs and undertake voluntary work.

The accommodation meets the needs of children. Leaders maintain a safe and secure environment that protects children from harm. The boarding facilities feel warm, welcoming and homely. Photographs celebrating children's achievements are displayed throughout the boarding house. Children enjoy caring for animals on site, including the chickens, which helps them develop responsibility. Staff and children take pride in the boarding house, and all areas are exceptionally clean and tidy.

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

Staff have not been the subject of any allegations or complaints. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate safeguarding and allegation management training. When children make disclosures, staff respond appropriately, make referrals to external professionals when necessary and provide ongoing support to children throughout the process.

The safeguarding governor maintains a clear understanding of the boarding provision's strengths and areas for development. She works closely with the designated safeguarding lead to share information and hold relevant individuals to account.

Staff provide excellent support for children's welfare. They identify emerging concerns quickly and take prompt action to prevent issues from escalating. Staff work closely with external wellbeing and health professionals to support children who have specific emotional wellbeing or mental health needs. The head of house has introduced a weekly wellbeing survey, enabling staff to identify concerns early and provide timely support to promote children's mental health and wellbeing. One child said, 'Boarding keeps my mind organised, and I love sharing with friends.'

Staff manage incidents proactively and maintain clear, detailed records of the actions they take. Records demonstrate effective information-sharing with parents and internal and external professionals. Staff have a strong understanding of children's individual needs and respond appropriately when concerns arise. They also provide children with opportunities to reflect on incidents and explore associated risks, helping them to develop their understanding, make safer choices and strengthen their ability to keep themselves safe.

When staff impose consequences, they do so fairly, proportionately and in accordance with policy. They involve children in identifying appropriate consequences and, wherever possible, use restorative approaches. For example, children may research risks or consider how their behaviour has affected others. This approach helps children to learn from incidents, develop greater self-awareness and make more positive choices in the future.

Staff maintain suitable arrangements for storing and administering medication safely. Where children have specific health needs, staff implement detailed healthcare plans and receive appropriate training to meet those needs effectively. Staff record and respond appropriately to accidents, injuries and illnesses. They support children to access medical services, including accident and emergency departments, doctors and opticians when required. Leaders maintain clear expectations for parents whose children bring medication prescribed overseas, ensuring that all medication can be prescribed lawfully in the UK. Staff also support children who are competent to self-administer medication, helping them develop important life skills.

When concerns arise about children harming themselves, boarding and school staff work together effectively. They share information, take appropriate action, work alongside parents and professionals, implement safety plans and increase supervision when needed. Staff also offer practical solutions, such as room changes, to help children feel safe and comfortable.

Staff follow clear processes to identify and address bullying. They intervene early to resolve conflict and prevent situations from escalating. When incidents of conflict occur between children, staff respond appropriately and complete restorative work with them that is proportionate and meaningful. They support children to reflect on their actions and learn from their experiences.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders maintain a stable and consistent staff team, enabling children to build positive relationships with familiar adults. Children report that staff listen to them, take their concerns seriously and act when needed. Through effective professional practice, staff support children to make progress and enhance their experiences and outcomes through boarding.

Leaders and managers understand the needs and behaviours of children who access boarding. They monitor children's progress and identify when additional support is required. Boarding staff, parents and school staff work collaboratively to provide consistent care. These strong relationships ensure that children receive coordinated support that helps them achieve their individual targets and goals.

Senior leaders demonstrate exceptional commitment to children who experience significant changes in their family circumstances. They take decisive action to secure children's continued access to education and boarding. Through effective multi-agency working and persistent advocacy, leaders ensure that children's best interests remain central to decision-making. The headteacher also engages with the local community sensitively and compassionately to successfully secure additional support that improves stability and outcomes for children.

Leaders promote an open and transparent culture in which diverse views are listened to, valued and considered. This culture creates a positive environment for both children and staff and supports continuous improvement. Leaders and staff share high aspirations for children and maintain ambitious expectations about what they can achieve. They provide high-quality care that helps children build stronger futures.

Leaders use a detailed and evaluative development plan to assess the boarding provision. The plan sets realistic yet ambitious objectives and drives improvement in the quality of care and children's experiences. Governors understand the priorities in the development plan and monitor progress through regular committee meetings.

Leaders, managers and governors work collaboratively and share an ambitious vision for the boarding provision. Together, they bring the skills, experience and commitment necessary to ensure that the boarding provision operates effectively.

Members of the pastoral and boarding committee demonstrate a strong understanding of the boarding provision's strengths and challenges. They work closely with boarding and school staff and regularly visit the boarding house. Governors understand their safeguarding responsibilities and actively oversee children's safety and wellbeing. The committee receives regular reports, provides effective challenge and offers valuable support.

Boarding staff hold weekly team meetings that focus on children's needs. Staff share information about children who may require additional support or safeguarding, celebrate achievements, discuss children's feedback and identify training needs.

Managers provide informal supervision opportunities that help staff reflect on and develop their practice. However, they do not always record these discussions. In addition, annual appraisals have fallen behind schedule and require attention to ensure that they align with performance management expectations.

Leaders ensure that staff complete comprehensive mandatory training. They also arrange specialist training to help staff meet children's individual needs effectively. In addition, prefects receive safeguarding training, giving them the skills, knowledge and confidence to support their peers.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendation

- School leaders should ensure that staff receive regular reviews of their boarding practice through supervision sessions and appraisals, and these should be clearly documented. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 20.1)

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: SC034907

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Simon Jackson

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