

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

Keswick School is a co-educational 11–18 comprehensive with 1,290 pupils on roll. There are 53 boarding places available. The school is set in a stunning location on the edge of the attractive market town of Keswick at the heart of the Lake District National Park.

Inspection dates: 9 to 10 October 2018

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 **good**

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: good

Date of last inspection: 27 June 2016

Key findings from this inspection

This boarding school is outstanding because:

- Staff support remarkable experiences and opportunities for boarders. Boarders make excellent social and academic progress to provide here a strong foundation for future success.

- Boarders demonstrate a strong sense of community. They care for each other and staff value each child's unique contribution to boarding life.
- Staff help children to develop a strong self-belief that helps them to overcome any barriers to their individual progress.
- The school and boarding provision have an in-depth understanding of each child's needs. They set realistic yet ambitious individual targets to help each child to realise and stretch their full potential.
- Staff welcome children's views and value their unique personalities and experiences. There are many opportunities for children to influence their boarding experience.
- Staff are careful about how transitions are managed because they understand that children react differently to change. Exemplary arrangements are in place for those who start to board, to ensure that all their individual needs are addressed well.
- Boarders are safe. Enthusiastic and caring staff encourage them to take part in a range of activities to develop their self-esteem, social skills and manage risk effectively.
- Children told inspectors that the boarding house is like a big family and there is always someone who can help.
- The leadership team knows and understands the pressures, development needs and limitations of their boarding offer, and how this sits within the whole school community.

The boarding school's areas for development:

- Inconsistent recording of monitoring of the boarding self-evaluation action plan may lead to uneven progress being made in the identified improvements required to secure ongoing development.
- Policies regarding compulsory attendance at church, and sanctions for managing children who disrupt children's bedtimes, will benefit from being reviewed considering children's views and choices.
- Precautions in place to address children's online safety needs do not recognise that older children who board may need greater flexibility in access to the internet to practise safe use of electronic communications.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that all monitoring activities are effective and that the self-evaluation for boarding includes any impact on the quality of care being provided. This is especially in regard to sanctions and compulsory attendance at a Christian church.
- Review the overall policy and practice for e-safety in boarding to ensure that children are given opportunities to manage risks and to learn from their mistakes.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

All boarders make excellent progress in education and enjoy their experiences. They arrive from a range of backgrounds and cultures. They make outstanding progress in learning social and functional independence skills. Those who wish to are given opportunities to excel in their fields of interest such as sport or literature. This often has a lasting and profound impact on their quality of life and future life chances. For many, boarding acts as a springboard to their chosen future academic, work or sporting life. For others, their boarding experience has helped them to learn about, and understand, the core British values that are part of their heritage.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about their child's experiences and the support provided by staff. Parents said that when they raise concerns, the school addresses them well. One parent said, '[My child] is given the appropriate and increasing amount of freedom over the years and has grown in her confidence accordingly. We are delighted with her care and the individual approach taken to support her. A clear framework is in place but is adjusted to the individual needs of each child.' Another parent said, 'My son loves the boarding experience. It has made him very independent. He has friends from all over the world and we believe the whole package, academic and pastoral, will help to make him a well-rounded young person.'

Children told inspectors that the things that are best about being boarders are the friendships they enjoy, the activities, and the feeling of being a family. Their friends are welcome to visit the boarding house, and at weekends they can go for sleepovers at the homes of their day-pupil friends. Those who have used the pastoral support service often volunteer as peer mentors once they have benefited from the help provided. This reflects the strong sense of community and resilience typically demonstrated by boarders.

Staff welcome children's views, and value their unique personalities and experiences. There are many opportunities for children to influence their boarding experience. For

example, children voted to use tuck shop profits to buy a dishwasher for the boarding kitchen; a point reward scheme means children can earn 'take-away' suppers from local shops; others join community groups to pursue outside interests and friendships. The comfortable shared lounges, computer suite, music room and the shared bedrooms all reflect the personalities and interests of those who use them. Inspectors were impressed by children's self-awareness, and their ability to express themselves and listen to others. These skills will help to underpin positive relationships and achievements now and in their adult lives.

Boarders value the welfare and education support systems available to them. They engage with staff, seeking reassurance from them late at night if they feel homesick. They work with the pastoral team, to identify and use strategies to improve their resilience and management of difficulties. In termly one-to-one meetings with boarding staff, they identify and plan to work on personal targets. Some have benefited from a diagnosis of additional learning needs. One child said, 'Now I know I have autism, I understand why I couldn't make friends. I'm learning how to get on better with people.' Another said, 'I didn't want to be a prefect, I have enough trouble being responsible for me!' Instead, he uses his interest and skills in bicycle maintenance to offer younger children care and support. Boarding enriches and maximises the progress children make in developing as well-rounded individuals.

Staff are careful about how transitions are managed because they understand that children react differently to change. Exemplary arrangements are in place for those who start to board, whatever their age. Parents and children work with the school nurse and with admissions staff to ensure that children's unique needs are recognised and addressed. Staff 'keep an eye' on those who appear to be more unsettled than others and make effective plans to support them. One 11-year-old boarder bravely told inspectors, 'I struggled at first; I had to call staff most nights. They were kind. They helped me to make friends. I talked to my family, who were also a bit sad, but it's OK now.' Endings are also managed well. Past boarders return to visit and express their thanks for the help staff gave them. When children leave sooner than expected, the school ensures that there is good information provided to their new school. Where possible, the school supports them to attend and sit any national exams they have been entered for. Staff ensure that there is a strong focus on good outcomes and emotional well-being when children are affected by change. This demonstrates a whole-school commitment to creating an environment where children can thrive.

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

Boarders are safe. Enthusiastic and caring staff encourage them to take part in a range of activities to develop their self-esteem, social skills and manage risk effectively. From admission until they leave, staff identify children's strengths and vulnerabilities. They nurture careful development that helps children to experience growing independence and learn to problem-solve any difficulties that arise. Staff work hard to build warm, trusting and respectful relationships. Children flourish in

the positive and safe environment of the boarding house.

Staff are not risk-averse. As children move through the school, the opportunities for independent activity increase, including walking into the local town on their own, taking more responsibility for independent learning, volunteering in the community and taking on part-time paid work. Boarders use an electronic system to sign in and out, and staff oversee permission for younger children. It flags up those boarders who do not sign back in at the expected time. Staff always follow this up so that they are reassured that children are safe. Older boarders told inspectors that they value the responsibility they are given, because it helps them to prepare for life after school.

Male and female independent visitors support boarders, so that every child can feel comfortable to approach them. A new boarding governor has identified that she will visit the boarding house, to increase her opportunities to hear children's views. Children reported that they can rely on a huge amount of support and can talk to a range of people if they have concerns, including older pupils, teachers, parents and friends. Some children have positive experiences of the special educational needs co-ordinator, and specialist teacher support from within the local authority and the school. Children told inspectors that the boarding house is like a big family and that there is always someone who can help them, from help with physics homework to homesickness.

The school pastoral support team offers children a high-quality, bespoke service that focuses on helping them to overcome barriers to emotional well-being and good mental health. Highly effective communication between all school departments and innovative use of trained and well-supported peer mentors gives children a range of ways to get the support they need. Carefully planned, time-limited and reviewed interventions ensure that parents and external professionals are involved when necessary. Due to difficulties in accessing local mental health provision, the school employs a trained counsellor to meet with children who have more complex needs. This provides essential support to oversee children's welfare and safety while local area services are engaged and ensures that matters are escalated swiftly.

Online safety is given high priority within the school. Staff, governors, parents and children have opportunity to undertake training, some delivered by the police and Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP). Boarders understand the risks of using the internet, online gaming and excessive 'screen time'. Further training is planned for boarding staff and boarders. The current policy, while keeping children safe online, does not consider the challenges unique to boarding time because it can limit some children's accessibility to friends and family due to restrictions in the availability of internet connection.

Children's behaviour is exemplary. They understand and confidently challenge the rules and boundaries set out in a whole-school policy. Staff are patient in helping them to understand the consequences of breaking rules. One sanction, not listed in

the policy, was proving controversial at the time of the inspection and is worthy of review to ensure that it remains effective.

Arrangements to safeguard children, including recruitment practices, are effective. Recent incidents have been dealt with well, offering child-focused resolutions. The school has good links with the local protection agencies and will use these to explore additional support for boarders and take advice. Safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory and government requirements. The school has updated its safeguarding policy and practice in line with new guidance.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers show exceptional levels of competency. They model commitment, collaboration and dedication to the core values of the school and continually seek to refine and improve the service they offer. This provides the very best experience for children that improves their progress, achievement and attainment across a range of skills and attributes.

Leaders and managers demonstrate commitment to the whole child. They aim to help children to excel and stretch their potential. They do this by offering very high levels of holistic support and encouragement. Academic progress is important, but this is fully integrated into expectations about supporting children to 'grow tall' through secure attachments and growing confidence with a toolbox of skills that will help them in their future lives.

Children's individual needs are prioritised but are realistically addressed with the emphasis on children becoming self-sufficient in emotional regulation and decision making. There are many and varied systems and processes that offer support across the whole site. Professional collaboration and communication are demonstrated in well-coordinated approaches to give children just the right amount of support to help them to thrive.

Leaders have a clear understanding of children's progress throughout, from how well 'newbies' are settling, to how much improvement and progress they are making academically. It is worthy of note that boarders make comparatively better educational progress than day pupils. This is due to a careful balance of self-directed leisure time, well-managed daily prep, and the support systems that surround individual children. Prefect and peer mentoring involve young people in empathic support and enable children to accept guidance and support in a more relaxed way. The system for holistic pastoral care is of enormous value to children and is a practice worthy of wider dissemination.

There has been significant improvement in the quality of recording of supervision and appraisal for staff. The head of house has begun to use reflective practice sessions to support staff to explore the impact of the work, and how they can improve the quality of care provided. Staff meetings also support reflective practice and demonstrate a clear focus on children. Additional support needs, such as allergy

training, have been provided by the school nurse to ensure that children are appropriately cared for. The impact of this is seen in the high-quality and trusting professional and inter-personal relationships throughout the school.

Leaders and managers promote and model a culture of tolerance, inclusiveness and understanding across the school and boarding provision. Children said that their ethnicity is respected, and rare incidences of bullying or racism are swiftly and effectively dealt with. A strength of the school and boarding is the way they support children who have special needs to accept help without fear of being stigmatised.

There has been improvement within the reporting and oversight of how leaders and governors understand the shortfalls and strengths of boarding. All recommendations from the last inspection have been addressed. A new boarding governor, boarding committee reports and discussions, and a boarding self-evaluation plan have all highlighted development needs and set out expectations for progress. Due to changing and increasing responsibility areas for school leaders, the monitoring and review of these plans is not consistently recorded, and this means that progress is not maximised or captured in a succinct way, although the boarding house is achieving its child-centred aims and objectives.

When children's needs are not being met by external agencies, the school prompts and chases, but also puts in place its own helping strategies to ensure that children are supported. There are good relationships with the local community and lots of opportunities for children to gain additional experiences in sports, theatre, music chess and other interest groups. An impressive range of activities have emerged through fostering links with other boarding schools. Sterling work has been achieved through the library group that helps children to develop a love of poetry, literature and reading. A book of children's writing has been published, and there are plans to use this in local primary schools. An exciting new project is to write and publish a book related to agricultural work, as this reflects the interests of the rural children who attend the school. These initiatives demonstrate the outwards-facing approach children have because school and boarding emphasise their place in the world.

In general, the school has an excellent multi-layered community where children from overseas blend in extraordinarily well with more local children. In many cases, they are re-finding their British heritage and culture and are thoroughly enjoying it! However, the outdated and unpopular practice of compulsory attendance at a Christian church for all does not reflect the school's general ethos about listening and responding to children's views, and the leadership team has undertaken to review this policy.

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: SC034907

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Simon Jackson

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspector(s)

Denise Jolly: social care inspector

Helen Humphreys: HMI



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