



BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL RIYADH

Boarding Life in UK Schools

Information for Parents

There has never been a better time to become a boarder at a British boarding school. Standards in education and in pastoral care have probably never been higher, and today's discriminating and demanding parents will find that schools match their expectations, aiming to provide the very best environment in which a child can grow and learn.

Children, too, are aware that a boarding education can offer them the best of both worlds – home and away – and are almost always prime movers in the decisions that families make about the most appropriate school for them. For international students, immersion in an English-speaking environment from an early age can make the difference between technically accurate command of the language and confident, natural fluency. In today's global market, this can be a huge advantage.

A home away from home

Schools work hard to make the transition from home to school as smooth as possible, especially if a child is coming from overseas. A seven-year-old is likely to find him or herself sharing a large bedroom with about half a dozen other youngsters, but having his or her own private space, with a wardrobe and locker and sometimes a built-in desk. The combination of private space and company is important for helping children build friendships which may last a lifetime. This companionship, coupled with a busy life outside the classroom as well as within it, and easy contact with parents, helps a child to weather the early days of missing home and begin to enjoy all that school life has to offer.

Children learn to understand different peoples and different cultures by making friends and living in a thriving community based on mutual respect, an excellent preparation for the adult world. International students will make progress in English by leaps and bounds, not just because of the expert tuition, but also because of the close daily contact and shared activities with English-speaking students.

Older children are likely to find the numbers in their bedrooms diminish, with perhaps two or three sharing up to the age of 16, and single study-bedrooms – often with en-suite facilities – rapidly becoming the norm for sixth-form students preparing for university. The older the students, the more likely they are to have established their friendships and the more likely it is that they will wish to spend more time studying: there may be fewer people in the room, but the desks will be larger, the shelves more laden.

At all ages of boarding, schools offer comfortable, pleasant accommodation, with single study-bedrooms frequently larger than those at university. Communal areas, such as common rooms and, for older students, kitchens, are well equipped and have the advantage of staff supervision, ensuring that students learn to respect other users and the facilities at their disposal.

All of this will be overseen by friendly, professional, committed and dedicated houseparents, for whom the happiness of the boarding house depends upon the happiness of individual boarders and the strength of the relationships they build with each other. Often, they become the most significant people in a child's boarding life and they take that privilege very seriously indeed.

A busy life

Access to school staff and facilities after the teaching day is a major benefit for boarding students. Homework for younger students will be supervised and therefore orderly, but with help available if needed. School libraries are valuable resources in the evenings or at weekends, reminding students of the wisdom on their shelves as well as on the internet.

Clubs and activities offer opportunities beyond the academic day to discover and nurture talents, to explore occupations that may be life-changing. One young woman who went on to represent England as a rower recalls of her early days at boarding school: *'I'll never forget the day someone said "Does anyone fancy rowing?"', and I'd never thought of it before, but I said yes – and it changed my life.'*

The extended day gives children the time and the chance to try something different, or pursue an established interest. School plays and musicals need directors, stage managers and lighting technicians as well as actors. Many a serious musician, with hours in the music practice rooms to hone their skills, has found time at boarding school to get together with like-minded students and start a rock band.

Sport plays a major part in the lives of many boarding schools, with whole afternoons given to its practice, and matches frequently played by players at all levels of enthusiasm and skill, both after school and on Saturdays. Many of the UK's Olympians were able to find the time for excellence because they were boarders. Not having to run for the bus in their teens may have given them the time to be good enough eventually to run – or row, or swim – for their country.

Superb facilities

Over and above the classrooms and laboratories, the dormitories and common rooms, boarding schools are able to offer superb facilities such as theatres, swimming pools, courts, pitches and tracks, the essentials for both serious application and participation for fun. A boarding life is likely to be the very opposite of the limited life sometimes led by children who live a distance from school and are caught by the logistics of transport or parental availability. Prep (the term commonly used for homework), a choir practice, a game of football and a swim before cocoa with friends and bed with a good book is a better framework for an evening than hours spent at a computer or watching television.

But what about the parents?

Parents who live overseas can rest assured that their child is benefiting from all that the school has to offer, both in and out of the classroom. The full boarding life fills the child's week with opportunity, fun and companionship, and if a child's first language is not English, their learning will be more or less constant. To become completely at home in a second language is a wonderful gift, and may be the greatest of the many benefits a UK boarding education can bestow. For parents, knowing their child is well looked after by professional, qualified and caring staff, and that they are set on the road to future success, goes a long way to alleviating the natural concerns about missing them.

Even for parents based in the UK, the biggest worry about children going to boarding school is how much they will miss them. Happily, contact with parents has never been easier. Parents of boarders and the houseparents in charge of boarding houses are in constant reassuring contact by phone, email and, where possible, regular meetings. Boarding houses will have private telephone kiosks and booths for student use, and few children go to boarding school without a mobile phone. No, they won't be able to use them in lessons or during school hours, but everyone acknowledges the importance of keeping in touch with home, parents and siblings, by phone, Skype, email or MSN Messenger. Often there will be some tolerance of the problem of time zones getting in the way of communication – if the middle of the night is the only time possible to talk to far away parents, most houseparents will understand. Modern boarding really is a partnership between school and parents, with both parties seeking the best for the child.

A place to learn

Boarding schools are likely to spot the potential in any child, nurture it and expect that success will follow. Some of the schools are amongst the best in the world academically; others provide the environment in which less high-flying talents can develop and flourish. You can be certain that all UK boarding schools seek to help all students achieve their full potential. Their academic record is second to none, a consequence of small classes taught by highly professional teachers, in settings with excellent facilities and an overall ethos of achievement being the norm.

Perhaps more important, in all of them, academic success is something of which to be proud. As one boarder recently remarked, *'It's definitely cool to do well – people expect you to do your best in everything, and there's loads of help available if you're finding it tough.'* For international students, this help is likely to include specialist teaching of English as an additional language. With this support in addition to the usual curriculum lessons, students from overseas have an outstanding record in UK schools, going on to universities either here or in their own countries.

Most boarding schools are independent, and all schools featured in this Guide belong to one of the constituent associations which make up the [Independent Schools Council](#). These associations make sure that all aspects of the education offered are of the highest standard. Education in these schools is subject to inspection every six years by the [Independent Schools Inspectorate](#)

Safety first

In April 2007, responsibility for inspecting the boarding element in schools passed from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). So important is the welfare of children that boarding inspections take place every three years, with reports published on the [Ofsted website](#). CSCI inspections had been organised according to the National Minimum Standards, against which boarding schools were judged. These Standards, covering the range of welfare, health and policy issues appropriate for boarding schools, will be used by Ofsted as they continue what will be called welfare inspections in boarding schools.

Inspectors will talk to children and, increasingly, seek their views as primary consumers of the service offered by schools. Any concern raised by a child will be rigorously pursued, as will any suspicion of child abuse. Race and gender equality policies are carefully inspected and there is a clear expectation that schools educating students from overseas pay due regard to all the needs of those students, just as parents would wish.

All schools will have firm policies to deal effectively with bullying. Staff are scrupulous about taking action to deal with situations as they arise and before they become serious. Schools are accountable to students themselves, to parents who have entrusted them with their most precious child, and to the inspectors who watch over their proceedings. With boarding staff increasingly availing themselves of the university-accredited training offered by the [Boarding Schools' Association](#), schools are safer, more secure and more aware of students' needs than ever before.

Moving on

Many parents see boarding in the sixth form as the perfect preparation for university life. The student feels more independent, taking more responsibility for his or her daily life and for the discipline of study, while parents have the reassurance that someone is keeping a discreetly watchful eye on their child's welfare – making sure that they eat properly and are not burning too much midnight oil.

Many boarding schools have strong links with UK universities, and their careers departments and tutors are well practiced in overseeing the application itself. Ninety per cent of boarding students proceed to the university of their choice. Helping students get to the right course at the right university, whether in this country or back in the student's home country, is part of the boarding school package.

Whether or not a student decides to go on to further study, a boarding education is one of the best possible starts in life a young person could wish for. Boarding students develop independence and confidence, a capacity to get on with others and relate to people from all over the world and from cultures very different from their own. Living in England, absorbing language and culture almost incidentally to their whole experience of education, equips students whose first language is not English to take their place in the global economy.

Developing skills for the 21st century

In developing lives of their own from a young age, by learning to live with others and understand and respect them, as well as resolving conflict when it occurs, these young people will develop all the skills they will need to go out and meet the challenges of this 21st-century world. And they will take with them achievements, friendships and interests that may last them a lifetime.

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The UK boarding experience

International students may be accepted at UK boarding schools for short periods such as a term or a year, as well as for two-year A-level, Higher or International Baccalaureate courses, two-year GCSE courses, or for the whole of their school education. Boarding schools are able to offer the following benefits:

High academic standards: Many of the UK boarding schools are top of the league tables for public examinations, expecting the best standards from their students and staff. Highly qualified and experienced staff teaching small classes enable considerable achievements on the part of their students, who then access the best universities.

A safe environment: High standards of professional pastoral care are the norm, and are assured by regular inspections by Ofsted, producing published reports. Students will be well cared for in a happy community in comfortable surroundings. Healthy eating is encouraged and schools maintain high standards of medical care of students. Many schools are also fortunate in having superb buildings and grounds in which to grow and learn.

Support for international students: Schools are alert to the particular needs of international students, and value the huge contribution they have to make to the academic and social life of the schools. Respect for different cultures is fostered in the mixed communities which prepare students for the modern world. Most schools ensure that individual or group lessons in English as an additional language are available, and broad programmes of activities are available.

An extra-curricular life: The activities a student enjoys after school and at the weekend will be wide-ranging, challenging and fun. With excellent facilities for sport, music, art and drama at their disposal, and tutors and coaches on call, schools make a different world of opportunities available to students outside the teaching day.

A – Z Glossary

Boarding house: A building or floor where students live and sometimes eat. In large houses, boarders may be divided by age on different floors. In other schools, students live in separate houses, often of mixed age groups. There is often competition between houses in sport or music for instance. Many schools will have a separate house for sixth-formers, with more independence and privacy.

Dormitory: A large bedroom shared by boarders (often called a 'dorm' or a bedroom). Younger students may share with up to six friends; older boarders are more likely to be in smaller rooms.

Exeat: A weekend when boarders are usually not in school, but will go to guardians in the UK. In some schools, international boarders may stay at school for exeat.

Extra-curricular activities: Activities taking place outside the formal curriculum, which are designed to encourage non-academic skills and experiences.

Headmaster/mistress: The person in charge of the school, often called the 'Head'.

Houseparent (also known as housemaster/mistress): The person responsible for the care and supervision of boarders in a boarding house. They are usually assisted by other members of staff such as matrons or tutors. Many houseparents also teach during the day.

Independent Schools Council (ISC): The unified organisation promoting the common interests of member schools in the political arena.

Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI): ISI is responsible for inspecting the standards of education in independent schools. Inspections are held every six years.

Matron: Often a member of staff with pastoral or domestic responsibilities for boarders, not necessarily medically qualified. Anyone known as a school nurse must be qualified.

National Minimum Standards: The 52 standards of care for boarders against which schools are judged for their performance in boarding. Gradings will, in future, go from 1 for Outstanding to 4 for Inadequate (a change from the previous gradings, in which 4 was the highest score, and 1 meant the particular standard had not been met). Inspections are held every three years.

Ofsted: The body that regulates and inspects schools' boarding provision. Inspectors consider the welfare, health and safety of boarders, and talking to boarders themselves is an important part of the inspection process.

Prep: The term commonly used to mean homework. (Also used as an abbreviation of 'preparatory'.)

Sixth form: The final two years at school, in which students aged 16–18 study for AS- and A-levels or equivalent qualifications.