



BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL RIYADH

Boarding Schools in the UK

For over 100 years, students have been going to the UK to enjoy the benefits of a world-class boarding education. There are outstanding schools in the UK including state boarding schools. However, there are also mediocre ones and it is important to research schools thoroughly.

Results

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) reported in 2002 that British independent schools achieved the best results of any type of school in the world. What's more, in tests set by OECD for 250,000 15-year-olds in 32 countries, those in UK independent schools outstripped similar groups in all other countries. Nearly 40% of the UK students who get three 'A' grades or better at A-level went to independent schools, even though only 7% of students attend these schools. And 92% of independent school-leavers go on to university. The reason UK boarding schools do so well comes down to a combination of three factors: firstly, they have very good student-to-staff ratios; secondly, they invest in facilities; and thirdly, they have the traditions and ethos to address the needs of students as individuals. T

Student-to-staff ratios

A good student-to-staff ratio can make a significant difference. It means that every student can be looked after, both academically and pastorally. It means that students who are doing well in a subject should never find themselves bored, while those who are finding a subject challenging will never find themselves being left behind. A good student-to-staff ratio means that the learning environment is always geared to the needs of individual students rather than to the needs of the institution.

Another area in which a good ratio makes a difference is the amount of pastoral care devoted to a student when classes are over for the day. The emphasis that is now placed on pastoral care and personal mentoring is perhaps the biggest difference between the boarding schools of today and those of 20 or 30 years ago. UK independent schools were always academically successful, but today they pride themselves on being just as successful at helping students with the social and emotional challenges that growing up can bring.

Facilities

UK independent schools are in constant competition with the well-regarded state education system, and this means that headmasters and headmistresses are well aware that parents who are paying for their own children's education expect to see high-quality facilities and modern teaching methods. The facilities in Science, Art, Music, Information and Communications Technology, and Sports are therefore often state of the art.

As well as offering the most up-to-date facilities, UK boarding schools are often located in some of the country's most attractive and traditional buildings. This in itself creates a sense of pride and expectation, as the buildings themselves embody the values and traditions of the institution, which can often date back hundreds of years.

Tradition and ethos

Schooling of course is about more than just preparing students to be successful in examinations or preparing them for a particular range of career paths. Perhaps more than anything else, UK boarding schools are characterised by the traditions and ethos that they seek to instil in their students. The specifics of these traditions will vary amongst schools, but there are a number of common themes at their heart.

First, UK boarding schools always look to develop the whole person and not just a single aspect of them. However good a boarding school's academic results are, it will also be striving to create a rounded learning experience by encouraging self-expressions, creativity, and individuality in its students. Success in Sport, the arts, and in other areas, such as debate, may be less tangible than examination results, but it is one of the ways in which a student's independence, confidence and faith in himself or herself is built up.

Another key to instilling self-belief and self-confidence is an emphasis on allowing students to form their judgement. UK students are encouraged to think about issues on their own and to read widely and then to discuss and defend their point of view.

This concentration on developing the whole person is part of the reason why students who have been to a UK boarding school are so prized by employers. By instilling self-confidence in their students, UK boarding schools teach them to be adaptable, to show leadership and to trust their instincts. In a globalised world in which to succeed is significantly dependent on dealing with large amounts of information and multiple points of view, the ability to trust one's own instinct and to be confident in decision-making is a very valuable skill.

Finally, at UK boarding schools there is always an emphasis placed on developing social skills. Living together in a multi-age, multicultural community requires that students be helped to develop qualities like kindness, tolerance, and responsibility. It is no wonder that the students of UK boarding schools are so recognisable in the outside world.

Excellent choice

UK boarding schools offer a wide variety of choice, with every school creating its own unique atmosphere from the combination of academic approaches, facilities on offer and the traditions that each maintains. To name just a few of the choices, parents and students can select from co-education or single-sex schools, from those with many boarders or those with few, or from those that place an emphasis on, for example, by their family name, while others emphasise self-expression. The range varies enormously, but one thing that is certain is that a very good match can always be found to the needs of an individual student.

Value for money

All of these qualities contribute to the exceptional value of a UK education. In fact, UK courses represent an excellent investment. Courses here tend to be shorter and more intensive than those in other countries, so they need to be efficient. In addition, international students who are enrolled on any full-time course in Scotland or any full-time course lasting for six months or longer in the rest of the country are often eligible for free healthcare through the UK's National Health Service (NHS), and can also apply for some of the scholarships and bursaries offered by schools and colleges.

World-famous qualification

Although some UK boarding schools will offer non-UK qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate, to students who want or need to follow a particular qualification pathway, the general benefit of having UK qualifications is well known internationally. Qualifications like A-levels are not only recognised throughout the world, but, as a result of the stringent quality assurance systems of UK education, they are also respected.

Multiculturalism and the international language

Another advantage is that students can experience a genuine multiculturalism within boarding schools as well as more broadly in UK society. UK boarding schools are used to welcoming people from all over the world, and the experience of sharing life and study with both British and international students creates a lived multiculturalism that is still quite rare in today's globalised world.

Then, of course, there is the English language. English is the international language of business, of Science and of the internet, and there is better way to learn a language over the long term than to immerse oneself. Boarding schools are also well aware that international students might need short-term help, and they will provide specific tuition courses for new students and support for students experiencing communication difficulties.

Youth culture

Finally, there is the excitement of growing up as part of the UK's dynamic youth culture, a culture which is famous for its creativity in whichever sphere of life a student may be interested in, with world-famous music, media and sports events to attend and participate in. It is no wonder then that students who have boarded here are so recognisable.

Glossary

Independent boarding schools: Institutions that are run independently rather than by the state (the UK Government) to provide a general education and accommodation for young people between the ages of 7 and 18. Some schools have pre-preparatory departments, which take non-boarding students from the age of five or even younger in some cases. The majority of boarding schools in the UK are non-profit making institutions.

Independent colleges (tutorial and sixth-form colleges): Independently run institutions that provide educational opportunities and, in some cases, accommodation, mainly (though not exclusively) for students aged between 16 and 18.

National Health Service (NHS): Provide free and subsidised medical treatment for people who live in the UK.

Boarding in the UK

In this section, Hilary Moriarty, National Director of the UK's Boarding Schools' Association, explains why the country's boarding schools are safe happy places for maximum achievement and personal development.

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 and 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 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.

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 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 extracurricular 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 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 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 classroom 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 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, e-mail and, where possible, regular meetings. Boarding houses will have private telephone kiosks and booths for student use, and a 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, e-mail 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 among 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 that 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 Inspectorate.

Safety first

In April 2007, responsibility for inspecting the boarding element in schools passed from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSI) 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 (www.ofsted.gov.uk). CSCI inspections had been organized 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 School's Association, schools are safer, more secured 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 career departments and tutors are well practised 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 young 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.

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 exeats.

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

Headmaster/Headmistress: 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 School 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 the 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.