

# An Induction to Boarding for International Schools

## Module Two – Working Safety

In this module we will consider what is needed to create a safe, effective and successful boarding framework. We will also consider how to work safely and the key elements that will support you in doing so.

### Key features – safe and effective boarding care

The BSA promotes the following principles as essential components of safe and effective boarding provision:

- competent and caring staff
- supportive relationships
- a reliable environment
- consistency in all respects
- awareness/observation
- good communication and teamwork
- accurate information sharing and record-keeping.

The standard of care given to boarding pupils is increasingly being scrutinised and so it is important that you are aware of the needs of young people as they grow and develop throughout their time in the school. In doing so, you can have a clear framework and sense of purpose for meeting these needs, and providing levels of pastoral care and welfare that meet today's high standards and levels of accountability.

*“The organisation of the boarding house, the deployment of staff, the development of the physical environment of the house, together with the systems, structures and procedures (both school-wide and house-based) all need to be implemented with clear objectives and outcomes in mind.”*

[Holgate T & FitzGerald, B in Good Practice in Boarding Schools, Holgate, T, 2001, BSA]

Best practice suggests that schools should ensure that:

- Any person employed or volunteering in a position working with boarders has a job description reflecting their duties, receives induction training in boarding when newly appointed, and receives regular reviews of their boarding practice. They should also have opportunities for training and continual professional development in boarding.
- Any role of spouses, partners and/or other adult members of staff households within boarding houses is made clear.
- The staff supervising boarders outside teaching time are sufficient in number, training and experience for the age, number and needs of boarders, and the locations and activities involved.
- Boarders are at all times under the responsibility of an identified member of staff who is suitably qualified and experienced.

Source: DfE, (April 2015) NMS for Boarding Schools.

## Working safely

To provide high quality pastoral care and support to boarders, you need to focus on what makes such provision safe. There are two aspects to be considered; safeguarding children and working safely. We have already covered the safeguarding aspect. Working safely requires you to be aware and alert to risk and to always act in a proactive manner.

The key elements that support you in working safely are:

- your role and responsibilities in respect of all contact with children and other staff
- school policies, procedures and protocols
- communicating (information sharing) in an effective and timely manner to help ensure consistent and fair support for all children
- maintaining appropriate relationships/boundaries with pupils, parents and staff.

## Roles and responsibilities

It is common for schools to provide a detailed job description for their boarding staff. Key elements for the housemaster or housemistress/senior house parents might include responsibility for:

- the efficient running of the Boarding House
- safeguarding and promotion of the safety of all boarders
- the maintenance of good discipline
- the academic, social, emotional and physical wellbeing and development of the boarders
- the management of the staff, organisation and resources of the House.

Assistant boarding staff will have a job description appropriate to their role, which might require them to:

- act “in loco parentis” for the boarders
- provide all boarders with the best possible experience of a boarding education by ensuring a challenging and supportive environment
- assist in ensuring the safety, good discipline and pastoral well-being of all boarders
- assist in providing a positive and fulfilling residential experience for all boarders.

The key will be how the various staff within the boarding house work together to provide the best possible care for the boarders. A team approach is essential to ensure that boarders are kept safe and, at the same time, are able to grow and develop in line with the school/college's aims and objectives (the Boarding Principles). Some aspects of the boarding role are common including the safeguarding duty and the responsibility to help with any emergency or crisis.

**Reflection:** if you are new to your role, reflect on your job description after you have had time to understand what is expected of you on a day-to-day basis. Also, identify the main areas within your role which relate to keeping boarders safe and ensure that you fully understand what the school expects from you when you are on duty.

## How do you see your role?

How do you see your role – as a teacher, carer, parent, role model, advocate or supervisor? Perhaps it's a little of all of these things. Whatever role you have in boarding, it is essential that you work in a safe, effective way.

You need to:

- be even-handed in relationships with pupils
- be unambiguous in your behaviour towards pupils
- avoid secrecy and understand confidentiality
- respect pupils' rights and privacy
- share concerns and worries with colleagues
- avoid being misinterpreted
- understand issues concerning physical contact with pupils.

## Key aspects

- Staff know the whereabouts of boarders (or know how to find their whereabouts) in their charge at all times.
- Staff working know and implement the school's policy in relation to children going missing and their role in implementing that policy.
- Staff actively search for children who are missing, including working with police where appropriate.
- There is at least one adult member of staff sleeping in each boarding house at night, responsible for the boarders in the house.
- Boarders have a satisfactory means of contacting a member of staff in each house at night.
- Boarders' access to staff accommodation is properly supervised and does not involve inappropriate favouritism or inappropriate one-to-one contacts between staff and boarders.

**Reflection:** Do you fully understand what is expected of you in your boarding role? Always seek to establish the expectations of the school and parents as well as setting out your own expectations for your role.

## Maintaining appropriate boundaries

It is essential that all adults operate in a professional and caring manner with children without compromising their own safety. Maintaining appropriate boundaries is a key aspect of this.

Consider

- Walking past an empty room, you notice a member of staff giving a pupil a very close hug.
- A teacher insists on giving Sophie (age 13) extra tuition on her own after school.
- Alex (a junior boarding assistant) frequently sits on pupils' beds and chats to them when he assists with evening duties.

Whilst these might not be cases of staff failing to maintain an appropriate boundary with children, you must remain aware, even vigilant, for any colleague who may be putting themselves and the children they look after, at risk.

## Avoid 'helicopter parenting'

*"Staff involved in residential care have an obligation, both legal and moral, to ensure that the students in their care are properly supervised. Supervision involves the monitoring and directing of students in order to protect their wellbeing."*

Duty of Care, 2004, BSA.

Staff need to be able to judge the extent and manner in which they carry out this duty. Some children, by reason of their age, experience and vulnerability, may require particular care and close supervision. Often children will not want to be supervised, but this should not deter you from exercising appropriate supervision. The skill is in being able to monitor behaviour, development and growth without imposing too restrictive a set of boundaries or appearing to be 'on their backs'. Children need to be able to learn from their mistakes and should not grow up in a community where adults parachute in and solve every problem or issue for them.

**Reflection:** Next time you are on duty, consider the way in which you supervise the boarders. Are you allowing them time and space to 'grow and develop' and to learn from their mistakes and each other or are you stepping in too soon to resolve minor disagreements or disputes?

## In summary

This module has covered how to work safely, including the key elements of safe and effective care. We also looked at the varied roles and responsibilities of boarding staff, the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries and helicopter parenting and how to avoid it.

You are now ready to complete the corresponding questionnaire. Click '**Questionnaire 2**' to begin the questions.