

UK EDUCATION GUIDE

How UK Boarding schools have adapted their pastoral care during the pandemic

As the mad dash home at Easter materialised after all, schools were left with the ongoing challenge of not only educating but ensuring continued pastoral care for a majority of students that had returned home, as well as maintaining teaching and pastoral support for pupils who remained in the UK.

We asked some schools about how they have coped with ‘doubling up’ on this pastoral care provision and how they have adapted their pastoral care support during this time, recognising the both sets of students need a different kind of support from the regular provision?

Those students left in the UK have faced additional concerns, many have been worried about family health back home and whilst all schools have encouraged increased online contact with ‘home’, schools have recognised the need to offer additional face to face support and to make sure there is a clear structure to each day, providing security and continuity at a really stressful time.

At [Felsted School](#) 13 international students were unable to get home due to restrictions in their home countries.

Headmaster, Chris Townsend, decided to make Follyfield House, one of Felsted’s senior girls’ boarding houses, home to the 13 boys and girls aged 14 to 18 years of age, this ensured a real sense of community was developed between the pupils from several different nations, early in lockdown.

Over the Easter Holidays, each day was split into three different sections to give valuable structure to each day. Each day incorporated an academic skills session, leisure time and a social period. Rather than conduct regular lessons, recognising it was a school holiday, pupils were encouraged, during the academic skills session, to learn something new; a new language, or catching up on reading, for pleasure!

The leisure times involved creative activities & use of school sports facilities whilst evening social activities ranged from playing board games to directing mini films.

Chris Townsend, comments; “operating as a ‘small household’, the main aim has been to ensure each students’ wellbeing, health and happiness, and to give them some structure to their day. As such a unique group, everyone has got to know and respect each other really well, blending numerous cultures, languages and experiences in the process.”

Meanwhile at [Westbourne School](#), alongside regular structured activities, pupils who have remained in the UK have highlighted the importance of 'Ms Janette', their Boarding 'Parent'.

Ms Janette has been a constant presence in the pupil's lives during this time, providing a really valuable presence.

"Ms Janette is so important to us. She's the one, who takes care of us, we are all so happy she's here, honestly. She helps us with cooking, with sourcing ingredients. If we are ever feeling sad, we just go and talk to her and she makes us feel better. I'm really glad she's here for us... Just knowing you're not alone, I think that's really important," says Dharani an IB student from Malaysia.

Ms Janette has also ensured that the pupils have a clear 'plan of action' for each day, once again providing an invaluable daily structure to young lives that have been turned upside down.

But what about those pupils who have returned home?

Whilst it would appear their pastoral care needs are less, many have missed; their school friends, the structure of Boarding school life and events at school they were looking forward to.

Also, whilst the pupils left in the UK have had fairly easy access to teaching support, for overseas pupils often dealing with synchronous teaching that starts late or early in their day, it has sometimes been hard for them to access the support they might need, immediately they need it and this has been stressful for some.

At [Scarborough College](#) the pastoral care provision for home based pupils was adapted to meet their changed needs to ensure a continued sense of 'community'. As Guy Emmett, Headmaster, explains; "when we set up our 'You Are Connected' distance learning programme, at the heart of the school routine were three tutors meetings that were arranged each week. This enabled pupils to see staff, staff to see pupils and, critically, for the pupils to interact with each other."

Also, reflecting the learning challenges for remote pupils, the College introduced a 'lockdown diary' for pupils to reflect on the impact of the lockdown on their learning. Tutors have monitored diary entries and house points have been awarded for completion of the diary.

Meanwhile, at [Moreton Hall](#), Elyse Conlon, Head of EAL talks about the weekly online meetings she has had with all her international EAL students, just checking in on their welfare. Having a call for no other reason than just to 'check in' has allowed deeper relationships to develop during lockdown. The freedom of the call to be whatever the pupil has wanted to share has meant that Elyse has learnt more about the pupils and their lives at home, which will certainly have increased the bonds between the school and the pupil. "I have been shown around many gardens and homes and seen students growing their own vegetables. Being taught how to make a 'proper' cup of tea by a student in her kitchen was most certainly a highlight," says Elyse.

Overall, helping to maintain structure in young lives and providing a continuing sense of community whether pupils have remained in the UK or returned home has been a defining aspect of quality provision during the pandemic and will mean when all pupils return the bonds between the institution and the pupils will be stronger. As Caroline Nixon, Director [BAISIS](#) and International Director [BSA](#) says; “the wider aspects of school life have not been forgotten during lockdown; schools have still maintained assemblies, clubs, supervised homework times and one to one meetings with houseparents. While everyone hopes for a swift return to normality and ongoing benefit of the pandemic will be the improved communication between school and home.”