

Frewen College Boarding Team interview with the Wealden Times Magazine



What does a houseparent do?

It's about being 'Mum away from Mum'.

Being a houseparent is a way of life rather than 'just a job'. It's about creating a caring community which nurtures, encourages and provides boundaries for students of different ages, from different cultures and with different needs and expectations.

What is a typical day?

There is a basic routine which involves making sure that boarders get to school on time prepared for the day ahead. Later we have an evening meal followed by homework club and then we run a choice of activities such as cricket, baking, rounders, crafts, volleyball, music and gym. Outside of that, anything can happen! You may have the best-laid plans which get overtaken by the unexpected.

How did you come to be doing the job?

Boarding is second-nature to me having been a boarder myself, parent to a flexi boarder and housemistress for several years. I love what I do and hearing from students years later who remember things you did to support them makes even the most challenging days worth while.

What qualities does a houseparent need to have?

LOTS of patience! Sense of humour, warmth and kindness. It's important to be a good role model and to encourage our children find the best in themselves.

What is the best way for a parent to get their child ready for boarding?

Boarding is a big change for young people, helping your child to develop some independent life skills such as being able to change their sheets and load a dishwasher can help prepare them for boarding. If they have never slept away from home before you could consider arranging sleep-overs with friends/family. Talk about any worries and reassure them of their support. If possible, meet with boarding staff so a child gains a sense of collaboration around their well-being.

What are the typical problems at first – and how do houseparents help them through it?

First time boarding can be quite daunting, and homesickness is probably the biggest challenge. Feeling lost and unsure what to do can also add to being unsettled. Allocating a buddy in the house is helpful as they've almost certainly experienced the same feelings and can help show the ropes and make friends. Keeping them busy and having fun helps as well as clear routines. Our Boarding team will talk with the student and their family to enquire how things are going. Dependant on how a student is settling in, they may observe quietly or be hands-on.

Can all children take to it, or do some never settle in?

Most students settle in, although some take longer than others. It's important to give it a fair go and avoid rushing into hasty decisions.

What do kids get from the boarding experience?

Boarders generally develop a real sense of independence and team spirit. They get a well-rounded holistic education and experience personal growth. They make friends for life and great memories.