

# Top tips for helping your child to prepare for boarding

Starting boarding school is a big step for children – and for parents! It marks the start on a journey towards independence, and this is a journey that can both challenge and delight. At Lancing we are with our pupils and their parents every step on the way, and the following is offered as a guide to help make this transition as positive as possible.

## 1. Talk about boarding and what to expect with your child

Think about what may be different from home and let your child ask questions and articulate any worries. There will be things that are new and unfamiliar – from shared bedrooms to the structures of a school day to roll calls or set bedtimes to mobile phone policies. If your child comes from another country there may also be the challenge of living and learning in a different language. For all, there is the need to establish trust quickly with their Housemaster/ Housemistress and to negotiate new friendships. Encourage your child to share their feelings. Read through the Parents' Handbook with them so they have a clear idea of structures and expectations.

## 2. Visit (if possible)

Visiting a boarding House, talking with current staff and pupils, starting to feel familiar with the site will all ease anxiety. There is a New Pupils' Afternoon in the final weekend of the Summer Term when families can gather, children can participate in a treasure hunt that takes some around the sweep of the school and where you'll meet with House staff and senior pupils and with the Head Master and other key staff. This is the time where you'll also meet with your child's tutor and they will start to build the friendships with other pupils that will sustain them over the years ahead.

If you can't attend in person, then there is a webinar for overseas families on Saturday 13 June which will cover much of the same ground and which will draw international families together.

## 3. Start building independence and agency at home

In the months before they join Lancing, encourage your child to do their homework independently, to plan their time (e.g. music practice or revision); to get themselves up and ready in the morning; to pack their bag for the school day ahead. This is a good stage to ensure that they get into the routine of making their bed; know how to fold clothes and to strip a bed and even how to prepare some simple snacks or a meal to share with friends. If there are unfamiliar items of clothing (e.g. a school tie for boys) then practising tying this themselves will ease anxiety. Likewise, if they usually use chopsticks, a bit of practice with a knife, fork and spoon will make the opening days feel much more familiar.

Make yourself familiar with the House routine and implement this at home - e.g. mealtimes and bedtimes (particularly at the close of the summer break). This will help your child adapt more quickly to the structure of boarding school life.

#### 4. Discuss worries and concerns

It is absolutely normal that your child will miss you (and that you will miss them) and it is good to talk about homesickness openly. There may well be unexpected 'losses' that are felt – e.g. of a younger sibling or frequent contact with grandparents or of family rituals or a family pet. Think about selecting together some key photos for your child to take. Talk about how and when you'll keep in touch as a family [and from the outset try to strike a good balance between too little communication, which may feel isolating, and too much, which may make it hard for your child to settle].

Daytimes are very busy in boarding schools, but night times are often the time when children miss families most. Help your child think about what helps them to settle into sleep. Work on a good nighttime routine. Acclimatise them to reading (and to come off screens) before bedtimes. Your child's Housemaster/ Housemistress and Matron will be key for them (and for you) in the opening weeks as they settle in. Encourage your child to share any worries with them from the start.

#### 5. Plan together!

Read through the Parent Handbook together and plan what to pack. Write a list together. In addition to practical items, think about what will be comforting and of sentimental value. That might be a soft toy; decorative items; favourite books; a throw for their bed. In that way they will bring 'home' with them into school. Snacks and 'tuck' make excellent treats. Whilst mobile phones make it easy to keep in touch via text as well as calls, a letter to open at the close of week 1 and week 2 can be a wonderfully concrete way of showing they are in your thoughts.

#### 6. Transport considerations

Lancing will organise transport from the airport if required and will arrange transport at the half terms and close of terms. If your child is flying or using public transport on their own; talk them through this; ensure they have a (charged) mobile phone and key contact details at home and at school. Talk them through arrival, passport control, getting bags from a carousel. Even if they are a frequent traveller, flying independently feels different and preparation will make them feel much more secure.



## 7. Emphasize the positive – but don't sugar-coat.

Boarding schools are wonderfully close and supportive communities. There are a plethora of opportunities spanning all areas of the Co-Curricular and the academic; Incredible friendships are made; there is superb pastoral care; pupil individuality is prized and nurtured and your child will never again have so many exciting things to do or so many like-minded people to share this with. However, avoid phrases like 'you'll love it'; 'it will be marvellous' - and talk about new experiences, trying things out, resilience and all the support systems in place. Lancing's dedicated pastoral team; the Health and Wellbeing Hub, the Safeguarding Team, College Counsellors, Peer Support, Chaplaincy, school Prefects and House Captains are all part of the web of care and support that are there for your child at all points of their time with us.

Most importantly – encourage them to get involved, and to say 'yes' to opportunities. Being busy and doing things alongside others are the best possible ways to settle in.

## 8. Managing Energies

It's important to ensure that the summer holiday is a time of refreshment and rest – and of sufficient physical activity. Starting a new school, and particularly as a boarder, is inherently tiring. There are new names to learn; new academic and social challenges, new structures, perhaps a different language to live and work in. It's important that your child arrives at Lancing rested, fit and healthy – and prepared to find the first few weeks tiring (as well as exciting). Talking with your child about managing their energies; getting enough sleep; knowing when their social battery is running low and how to deal with this will help them pre-empt difficulties and plan proactively.

Modern boarding keeps connections between school and home strong and vital. This is an exciting and rewarding time and your calm confidence will reassure your child more than anything else. There will be emotional support in spades extended across your child's time at Lancing and communication between you as parents; the school and your child will be key. Working together, this should be a hugely rewarding and important time for your child and one which will, gently and incrementally, build independence and chart the path towards adulthood.

