

0'00

Hello everyone it's Hannah here from Virtually Fluent and today we're going to talk all about life at boarding school. So in secondary school I, myself, was at a boarding school - which is when you stay, you sleep over at school. I want to talk a little bit about what life is really like whether it's the same as all those films or not. So let's get started with talking a little bit about boarding school

0'34

So, according to Google there are actually only around 500 boarding schools in the UK which is not that much, not many people go to boarding school in the UK. Having said that, it is shown in so many films as the typical education that British students go to. Think of *Harry Potter*, *Wild Child*, *Saint Trinian's*. There are so many films and books that talk about British boarding school. In fact post-*Harry Potter*, after that first film of *Harry Potter*, the number of admissions, the number of students that actually started attending British boarding schools went up, often called the *Harry Potter* phenomena.

1'14

So I want to talk a little bit about what boarding school is like and whether it's really what they say in the films. Now I really enjoyed school, I was quite an academic student so I really enjoyed all of my classes and got relatively OK grades. Here's a picture of me in my school uniform at my boarding school up in Yorkshire. Now, uniforms are not just specific to boarding school, almost all schools (state schools, independent schools) will all wear a uniform here in the UK but they are a lot stricter at boarding school. I mean the uniform list was like two A4 pages long, really specific - the length of the socks and the colour of the socks and the pattern of the socks and even your shoes. They were so detailed about the uniform that you had to wear and I think they really were quite strict at boarding school.

2'10

I think this is something that's probably accurate in films. They have these really strict headmistresses. But I always find it funny that they have these students, they're all supposed to be really bad. They threaten, the parents threaten their children like "*if you're naughty I'll send you off to a boarding school*". You kind of have this idea that boarding school is full of loads of really naughty kids. Not true. And I don't think boarding school is really a punishment for some students just because or for some kids just because you've been bad. But they are really strict and there is a lot of there are a lot of rules and regulations that you do have to follow at school.

2'49

I think back about our phones, for example, we were only allowed to use our mobiles for, I think it was like one hour or one and a half hours every evening, certainly when you're in the first years of school and we had to put them away in a little locker and that only the teacher would have the key. That was quite strict, obviously the more you advanced through the school, when you got to sixth form you had a lot more freedom but still you had to hand in your phones to the teachers. I mean it's true a lot of us did have a second phone hidden somewhere in the wardrobes. I actually remember there was a big big scandal in our first year. I think it was at school and the teachers had found out that pretty much everyone in the class had a second phone and they made everybody stand up and hand the phones back into the teachers. My goodness, so much drama for a mobile phone!

3'42

Other things that are really strict are the bedtimes. So we had lights out, lights on at really specific times. So in the morning they really did just come in and open the curtains wide, turn all the lights on "*morning girls, time to get up*" and at night time it was exactly the same, you had to be in bed at a specific time and we used to try and dorm hop, which is where you wanted to see your friends who were in different rooms called dorms. And the teachers would be standing in the corridors and sent you back to your rooms if you were, if you were caught in the corridors.

4'17

Everything is really scheduled at school, I mean you started assembly at a very specific time in the morning, you had to be bang on time to all of your classes, which is quite difficult when you live in a massive school, I mean you have to run from one side of the campus to the other just to be there on time but everything was really accurate, even like the laundry schedules.

4'38

We had a list of what laundry we were allowed to put in on what days, you know, socks on this day and then you had to organise all of the colours and everything, I mean everything was so scheduled and so organised, which I suppose is a good skill to learn for later in life being on time and punctual but this is definitely shown correctly in films.

4'57

And, of course, you had all the classic rules that you had to be quiet in assembly and in class and no running in the corridors but I think those are quite general rules across most schools.

5'09

One thing that boarding school really does contribute to is living a lot more independently. I mean, certainly by the time we got to sixth form at school we were living in our own little cottages, so you're there with your group of friends and everything's kind of up to you. If you want, you can go to the school cafeteria but you could also prepare your own meals using the kitchen and the school supplies, you could do your own laundry and you know you could even go into town - how exciting!

5'36

And you could catch the local bus into the town. Our local city was York, which is a beautiful place to have as a local city, to go shopping, buy what you needed. So certainly as you go through the years you become a lot more independent and they do give you a little bit more freedom but even then you have to sign out and sign back in again so the teachers know where you are, everything is so regulated.

5'56

One thing which is really accurately shown in boarding school films and TV series is this kind of hierarchy in the school, this level of respect. I mean, when we were first years we used to be petrified of even the year above or the people later, the sixth form, the prefects and the leaders of the school and you used to show that respect. You used to hold the doors open for them, I mean there was so much respect for people that were older than you. Again, which is a good school, a good skill that can be transferable into the real world.

6'32

Sometimes I think it went a little too far, I mean, I remember when we were in sixth form there was this patch of grass near the languages department and only the sixth formers were allowed to walk on the grass. And when you're in first year, you used to think "*should we go and walk on the grass*" I mean the most ridiculous thing, it's walking across a piece of grass but the when you get to sixth form you you really think "*oh yeah it's my privilege that I can walk across this piece of grass*", the most ridiculous thing. But it really comes that that nature of respect is really built into you even with the teachers in the classrooms.

7'09

As soon as a teacher walked into the classroom or a visitor, if parents were walking around looking at schools, you would stand up in your seats, it doesn't matter if you're in the middle of an exam or the middle of a class, watching a film or whatever you must stand up to show your respect and say hello to the visitors.

7'28

But, overall, I did enjoy it and I think there's a lot of advantages to going to a boarding school as I said this level of respect that you learn, this independence and we had the most amazing teachers who really helped in any situation, not just academic but also personal situations, social situations. They were always there to support you and there were so many activities that you could do as well.

7'50

I was a bit of a boffin when it came to the music and dance and drama and doing all these extracurricular activities. I loved doing them and we had so many opportunities to do those. And, of course, the school services as well. We had stables for people who wanted to go riding, you had the chapel for more religious people who wanted to regularly visit, the music school to practice, all of the sports facilities - the swimming pool, the tennis courts. I mean, it really was an amazing place to be and to grow up. So many opportunities so I'm eternally thankful for that and all those extra things which just top it off really- a sweet shop, a

stationary shop, I mean all these things that other schools simply do not have. It's a really lucky place to be.

8'39

But it's not all amazing of course. I mean, it's hard living away from your family. It's so easy to get homesick, especially in those first few weeks where, at the age of 11, which is when I started boarding, you'd never really spent a long period of time away from your family. It's quite young to sort of go off and live by yourself. I mean, the teachers are always there to support you and it's kind of this family feeling but it's hard you don't get to see your family. In my case it was every three weeks, I was a full border, that you would go home.

9'08

I mean the actual environment was great, the academics were great but that homesick feeling is just, it really makes you not enjoy your time there. But other than that I actually think I enjoyed almost everything at school.

9'22

Oh no, the fire alarms. They used to put practice fire alarms at like two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning or it certainly felt like that, just in case there was a fire we'd need to get out and they used to do the roll call for, you know, checking all of the people with - I didn't like that either.

9'38

So, in preparation for the video today, I did a little bit of research online to see what people said about boarding school and I thought we could have a look and see if some of those things are actually true from someone who has been there. So let's take a look.

9'52

All the showers are cold. Not true. I mean, actually, if you think about the films, they do tend to show really old, really dirty showers and the water is always cold in these films. Not true, I mean our showers were relatively modern with the, you know, sliding doors and plenty of hot water, that's not true at all.

10'20

OK, the second thing, the food is always terrible. I actually watched a film recently which is about an English boarding school and they do always make the food look terrible, they sort of slop it onto your plate. I mean, it's not *Michelin star* cuisine that you get but it's not bad. I mean, we had two sections of the cafeteria, we had a hot section and a cold section, there was always fruit and bread and butter available and you had about four or five different options each day. I think maybe at the time when you're a child you think "*oh this isn't what I would get if I were at home*" but actually it's not bad cuisine at all.

11'01

All boarding schools are super religious. Semi-true. Our school was relatively religious, I mean we did have chapel, I think that was like almost every morning, goodness I can't remember,

maybe three or four times a week and I was in the choir so you kind of, you had to be at all of the religious ceremonies. They did have confirmations for people, it was a Church of England school and they did provide the religious tools for someone if you did, for example, if you were Catholic to go to a Catholic church. So they did provide that opportunity for you but I wouldn't say that every single school is super religious, every single boarding school is super religious, I think it depends on the school.

11'45

All the buildings are creepy and old. True. Of course, at our school they had some more modern buildings that they had recently built but the actual main structure of the school, the last standing part of the school, was pretty old and we always used to have stories of ghosts and people walking the corridors at night. It's all maintained pretty well, or in my case it was all maintained well, but yeah it's nice, I mean that kind of typical country English home feeling, it's nice. It can be creepy, for sure.

12'25

There's a really strict matron or housemistress. Kinda true. I suppose they have to be strict really, don't they, to make sure that you're safe. I mean, at the end of the day, your parents aren't there to look after you so they're responsible for you. So I kind of get that. Certainly lots of regulations and rules as I said, the uniform being on point and lights out and schedules, so they do push you a lot for that. But I always laugh when you see the actors and actresses who play the matrons or housemistresses in the films because they're always really, normally really small, really angry people and which is, that's not necessarily true.

13'13

So, hopefully you learned a little bit about what life really is like at a boarding school here in the UK. Of course, this is only in my own personal experience. It might be completely different for any other person who's been to a boarding school and, of course, for someone who is not from the UK, it's probably a pretty big culture shock. I think this is quite a special environment, quite a different environment to grow up in in an educational system, so it can certainly be a shock to a lot of people.

13'41

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