

15 November 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Merchiston Castle School
Edinburgh**

In January 2015, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Board of Governors. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published further letters in June 2015 and in February 2016. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and young people and worked closely with the Headmaster and staff. We heard from the Headmaster and other staff about the steps the school has taken to continue to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified at the last inspection. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting children and young people. This letter sets out what we found. The Care Inspectorate inspected the school's residential accommodation at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Building on existing good practice, continue to develop a nurturing ethos and culture of openness across the school and boarding houses, where all children and young people feel safe to report concerns to staff.

Staff have taken very effective steps to further embed a nurturing ethos and culture of openness across the school. In our pre-inspection survey, all boys stated that they feel safe and that they are well cared for, both in school and in the boarding houses. Staff are successfully embedding positive approaches to dealing with discipline. A culture of restorative practice in the day-to-day life of the school and boarding houses is developing very well. Staff, boys and parents speak positively about the impact of this approach. Prefects have received comprehensive training in how to best support and mentor younger boys. Younger boys talk very positively about prefects as good role models whom they trust and respect. Across the school, boys of all ages are confident that they have adults and prefects they can talk to if they have a concern or worry. This year the school has made important changes to tutoring arrangements. As a result, there is improved continuity in the school's approaches for supporting boys both pastorally and academically as they move through their school years.

The school is taking action to refresh and update the curricular programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE). Senior pupils have been consulted about the topics that they would like included in their 'life skills' programme.

As a result, a range of speakers and experts in areas such as mental health and financial planning are adding value to the school's work. There are helpful plans in place to now ensure that the whole-school programme for PSHE builds on boys' prior experiences and knowledge as they progress through the school.

The school has taken very successful steps to improve pupil voice. Through a range of pupil-led councils, committees and forums in school and in boarding houses, boys are consulted meaningfully about many aspects of their experiences. As a result, boys talk very positively about recent changes that improve their day-to-day school life. For example, younger boys really value having more free time to relax and follow their own pursuits. They are enjoying the new 'chill out' areas within their dormitories and are involved in choosing the colour scheme for their rooms. Following the opening of the new all-weather games area, older boys appreciate the opportunities to participate in a wider range of sports. The pupil-led learning council continues to play a strong role in identifying areas of strength within the school, as well as aspects that boys feel could be improved further. Pupil voice is now a strong feature of the school.

Improve approaches to individualised planning for learners who require additional support.

Staff have made very good progress in improving their approaches to planning to meet the needs of individual boys. Systems for record-keeping have been streamlined. There are clear procedures for key staff in the school and boarding houses to share important information about individual boys. Staff are very positive about the value and impact of these changes. The school is investing in a new electronic management information system which will allow them to further develop their processes for effective planning to support pupils. Regular opportunities for all boys to talk about their own wellbeing with staff that know them well are now clearly built in to school life. Commendably, boys across the school can articulate confidently their own wellbeing strengths and needs.

Further strengthen the leadership capacity within the school in order to continue to drive forward improvements in child protection, safeguarding and wellbeing.

The Board of Governors has provided astute and forward-thinking strategic direction in helping the school to continue to improve. A well-qualified and experienced external committee has been established to provide independent scrutiny and challenge to the Board and school leaders on their approaches to child protection and compliance. This innovative development demonstrates the school's commitment to continuous improvement in this important area of their work. In addition, a number of new leadership posts have been created in order to establish a strong, Pupil Support Leadership Team, with responsibility for the wellbeing and support of boys. As a result, the school is very well placed to continue to embed approaches to child protection, safeguarding and wellbeing.

The strong leadership provided by the Headmaster and senior staff has led to more robust and rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of the day-to-day running of the boarding houses. These procedures now match the existing highly-effective

approaches to monitoring the academic life of the school. Sound policies and procedures for child protection, safeguarding and wellbeing are in place and are clearly understood by all staff and pupils. Led very effectively by the Pupil Support Leadership Team, on-going and high-quality training is helping staff across the school and boarding houses to have a shared understanding of best practice to ensure the wellbeing of all boys at Merchiston Castle School.

What happens next?

The school has made very good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The Board of Governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of the school.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/MerchistonCastleSchoolEdinburghCity.asp>

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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