

Merchiston Castle School School Care Accommodation Service

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Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

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Service provided by:
Merchiston Castle School Board of
Governors

Service provider number:
SP2006008428

Service no:
CS2005101538

About the service

Merchiston Castle school is an independent school for boys which provides boarding facilities for many of its pupils. The school is situated in extensive grounds in the Colinton district of Edinburgh.

The school's conditions of registration are:

1. To provide a School Care Accommodation service to a maximum of 358 young people at any one time:
 - A maximum of 58 young people may be accommodated in Pringle,
 - A maximum of 126 young people may be accommodated in Laidlaw,
 - A maximum of 61 young people may be accommodated in Rogerson,
 - A maximum of 104 young people may be accommodated in Chalmers,
 - A maximum of nine young people may be accommodated in Harvey,
2. The School care accommodation service will be provided during the School terms.
3. To comply with the current staffing schedule dated 17 August 2010 which must be displayed together with the certificate.
4. The service must comply with all relevant building and fire safety legislation.

We note the inspection took place during covid restrictions and at a time when many had been in place for a considerable period. This was taken into account when considering all aspects of this report.

What people told us

Overall, the feedback was positive and indicated that concerns raised were listened to. Some care staff did however feel they had not been made fully aware regarding future plans for the school and some of the developments taking place in the various boarding houses.

We obtained evidence from a variety of sources after directly interviewing care service staff, young people and other professionals involved in providing the care and support within the school. We also carried out an online survey with the young people and requested feedback from parents/carers of those that boarded at the school via email. Examples of the responses we received included:

parents/carers:

- The quality of care, support and supervision is excellent.
- We have always found Merchiston to place a very high emphasis on care/support and supervision.
- We are always able to quickly communicate any concerns we have and get answers/updates straight away.
- The biggest compliment I can give is just how happy our child is when we talk to them whilst at school and away from home.
- The school provides a nurturing environment and has a no tolerance stance to bullying, racism, hazing etc.
- The quality of care, supervision and support is excellent.
- The staff are so friendly and supportive.
- Since our child's arrival at Merchiston they have been very happy and the feedback from them was they had lots of support from housemasters, tutors, and house mothers.
- They have learned from Merchiston the joy of strong friendships and the importance of respect of their fellowman out with the school.

From the young people:

- It feels like a second home with a strong community.
- Rules are fair.
- Really like having the prefects around.
- Food is really good and love the toasties in the house.

- House parents really homely.
- Wi-Fi has been struggling but new system works much better.
- Good opportunities for activities.
- We are forced to go to chapel. The teachers say it is not solely for Christianity and any religion is welcome, but they sing Christian hymns and pray to the Christian god. I'd rather not go to chapel.
- Great aspirations.
- Get on well with house parents.
- Weekends go into Edinburgh or go home, stock up on snacks.
- Sanctions fair.
- COVID impact on going, confident school kept them safe.
- Tutor helps explore future opportunities and house mother runs careers cafes.
- Could be more food available. Food forum to discuss what could be better. Few choices sometimes.
- Able to put views across and taken into consideration. Realistic suggestions considered.
- COVID procedures good, and safe, bubble system.
- Struggling with COVID and the staff really helped me.
- Get on well with house parents, supportive, helpful.
- Can't compete with home food.
- Enjoy time here, opportunities to do so many things and improve.
- Many supports and everyone wants the best for you. No bullying fights.
- Heating has been an issue.

Care staff and other professionals involved with the care of the young people:

- Feel it is fantastic here.
- Feel very well supported.
- Great team in house, changes over time, positive engaged team here for the right reason.
- Work together as a team.
- Work with each other and support.
- Leadership willing to listen to views of the house.
- Atmosphere created positive.
- Developed together and views listened to and taken on board.
- Great support from leadership team. Available for support. Can phone or email.
- What is offered to the young people is really good.
- Haven't seen the plans. Have asked to see them but have not seen.
- Kitchens in portacabins very old and past the best.
- Don't have time to have office days.
- Caring school, dedicated.
- Students very well cared for.
- Feel that the Governors should be more visible.

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

Overall, we found this to be positive and there was a very clear commitment and emphasis to ensure young people were at the centre in the provision of their support and wellbeing. We graded this aspect of the care service as very good.

During the inspection visit which was carried out over a three-day period and involved four inspectors we saw many examples of the kind, friendly and respectful way young people were treated by all of those involved within the school.

Young people generally responded positively and relationships between care staff and young people were observed to be respectful and positive.

We saw the medical staff worked closely with the care staff and also provided valuable support over the weekends when various sporting events took place.

We also saw that medical staff were attending regular house meetings thus ensuring a flow of communication was maintained.

We found a large number of activities were arranged by the school which had the capacity to consider almost anything if requested. There was a genuine commitment undertaken by the care staff team to try and facilitate /undertake any activity /sport that the young people showed an interest in.

We also found the care service had a big emphasises on treating everyone with respect and being very much part of the local community. Involvement had naturally been curtailed somewhat over the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We found there was an enthusiasm very much present with everyone however to re-establish this aspect and experience of attending Merchiston.

The leadership team were seen to place an importance in direct involvement with the young people and again after taking the past years difficulties into account were keen to take part with the daily events and social activities around the school.

These included sitting with pupils/staff during mealtimes, undertaking social evenings with the young people, refereeing team matches, being involved in the cadets and taking part in a variety of sponsored events.

We saw that regular parent's meetings took place and alongside surveys with the young people and the care staff this had led to several changes /developments being implemented to improve the young people's experience at the school.

A number of issues around the provision and delivery of food provided a good example of how practice had changed to the benefit of the young people.

Along with changing the lunch times to avoid young people having to rush off to activities there was a recognition that the right quantity of food was made available to ensure seconds for all year groups could be facilitated.

We saw and read the school had worked really hard to respond to comments made about the food which is such an important element of any residential facility.

After attending mealtimes ourselves we observed no one having to rush and plates being full of food on offer.

We also found the care service was becoming more able and responsive to providing diets from other countries and had a commitment to ensuring everyone was well catered for.

The school had a diverse catering team and were able to converse in different languages with pupils, some of whom, were findings it difficult to adjust to the timing of meals as well as the cultural differences.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

Overall, we found the leadership team to be committed, positive and having the capacity to continue with the goals identified within their continuous improvement programme.

They presented as very open to feedback on how different aspects of the service were being delivered and could be improved upon.

We acknowledged they were still a relatively new team after a staffing restructure and they had to ensure future plans and objectives were being shared and understood by everyone within the school environment. We graded this aspect of the care service as very good.

We saw evidence that reviews/self-evaluations and improvement planning had been driving the change and improvement and feedback we received from a variety of sources suggested leaders were responsive and used this learning to improve. See comments made above in what people told us.

We considered the leaders had the skills and capacity to oversee improvement after undertaking a robust evaluation of the care service and understood views of the care staff were central to this and played a meaningful role within the quality assurance process.

We found improvements undertaken were, continuously evaluated, well managed using research and best practice guidance.

There was effective monitoring and young people knew what to expect as a result of being empowered to raise concerns. See comments made above in what people told us.

The leadership team showed an ability to reflect when things did not always go to plan .

The admissions process allowed for information to be shared with feedback from housemaster, tutors and teachers being an ongoing process.

Team around the child meetings had been started and computer processes had been introduced to allow all staff to share comments.

Sectional meetings took place to gather any information of concern from each house and a chronology of individuals welfare needs thus ensuring improved outcomes for young people was maintained.

A wellbeing committee of staff and pupils had been formed and this provided an opportunity to share and address concerns.

For the first time joint meetings of housemaster/year group heads were taking place to ensure information was passed on timeously in respect of young people's welfare.

We saw that child protection procedures were understood, and concerns along with other possible related matters were dealt with in an appropriate way.

Notifications and involvement of other professions both internal and external were seen as being important and of benefit. The success of these processes was built on the positive working relationships which they had formed with external agencies.

We saw examples of this taking place during the inspection visit when a number of concerns had to be addressed involving these procedures by the leadership team.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

Overall, we found this to be positive with a staff group that were clearly committed and understood the aims and objectives of the school. There was a feeling however amongst some that issues around deployment and long-term plans could have a negative impact if not addressed. We graded this aspect of the care service as very good.

We observed a genuine kindness of approach being undertaken by the care staff who had a commitment to treating the young people with compassion and respect. Examples of this were observed in how young people were addressed by the care staff using their first names and the knowledge members of staff had about everyone's needs and welfare.

We found care staff knew the young people in their care well and they gave many examples when being interviewed as to how they were responding appropriately to their individual needs.

We considered there was a very real commitment and understanding to be a part of providing and facilitating a safe and welcoming environment which was displayed and undertaken by all of those we saw and interviewed.

We observed care staff to be very attentive of young people's needs and the diversity of skills and expertise within the teams produced a sense of belonging and homely atmosphere within the boarding houses visited. We did however find the current structure of how care staff were presently deployed might require some clarification with the staff involved.

We were made aware the care service were currently reviewing the role and tasks of housemaster/mistress particularly in consideration of applicants having a pastoral past experience rather than specifically teaching.

We recognised that one of the key outcomes in the improvement plan related to mental health and

wellbeing of pupils and staff particularly, following COVID-19. Whilst acknowledging only limited progress had been made we agreed this was a vital aspect for the care service to take forward in the coming months.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

Overall, this was seen as positive, and we gained the impression the young people were very much encouraged to become part of the local community. We graded this aspect of the care service as very good. We found and heard about several activities that the young people undertook which involved them locally. The sixth form pupils normally mentored primary school pupils at local schools as part of the Koinonia (community service) programme.

The primary schools were delivering food parcels during the pandemic and due to their contact Merchiston pupils decided to help. Deliveries were made across the city.

This included delivering meals for Cyrenians, described as an inspirational charity who produce food for people experiencing homelessness and social exclusion.

We saw that young people were actively promoting the work of the Cyrenian project.

Pupils also delivered activity packs to younger children.

Other pupils completed charity events to raise money for charities such as for cancer research for a fitness challenge.

A cycle/run to raise money for British Heart Foundation had taken place and pupils also wrote letters to older adults in care homes and other young people abroad who might be experiencing loneliness.

Some became involved in walking people's dogs and volunteering in community centres.

In total there was a high number of volunteering hours.

We saw the standard of accommodation was variable with one of the kitchens being quite poor in terms of décor in one of the houses. All areas seen appeared welcoming and apart from some minor Wi-Fi problems and a recent issue with heating all of which had been addressed young people presented as very relaxed and comfortable in their surroundings.

How well is our care and support planned?

4 - Good

We focused in this part of the inspection on care plans for young people who were boarders and how the care service were building on the progress made since the last inspection.

Overall this was positive with the school being proactive in gathering a significant amount of information for care plans and ensuring they were implemented.

It was acknowledged by the care service this was still a work in progress and although the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection had been successfully implemented further work was still required. We graded this part of the care service as good.

We heard of an assessment process which was conducted prior to pupils attending the school which involved information sharing with previous schools, family and any other professionals who were relevant. This information was then collated on an online system with regular reviews, which involved in depth feedback from house parents, tutors, family and the young person.

A chronology was developed from this information which was positive in identifying strategies which were working and monitoring improvements.

We saw amongst the strengths young people's views were captured and positive goals were set.

We found however further work should be carried out in developing how the plans were written, and consideration should be given to some of the language within them.

Statements such as saying medication would not be appropriate for addressing a concern without that concern being clear in the plan provided a good example.

Other plans in relation to behavioural or mental health needs of the pupils could have been more specific, as it was difficult in some cases to determine what the plan was in response to.

We considered goals identified in the plans needed to be more SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound).

Often the goals identified had little context stating for example the young person should "have more fun in school" which was a broad statement, with little clarification of what was trying to be achieved.

If plans are developed in this way the young person and the team around the child should be able to recognise the achievements and make progression towards the desired outcomes.

We acknowledged the care service had made developments to these plans over the last year, and it was positive to see involvement of family and pupils when devising them.

This ensured all those involved agreed with the plan, and were able to suggest interventions that had been successful in the past.

We have made one area for improvement.

Areas for improvement

1. The service provider in continuing the progress made within the area of care plans for young people should ensure they are, written in a child friendly way, are meaningful and have specific measurable times scales incorporated to achieve desired outcomes. This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards. My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices. (H&SCS1.15).

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

The service provider should develop its system to gather, store and share information to support the ways in which care is provided and ensure specific concerns and events are properly recorded. The system should be accessible for all relevant staff and be routinely used to describe ways of helping individual pupils to feel safe, comfortable and happy.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that 'If I am supported and cared for by a team or more than one organisation, this is well-coordinated so that I experience consistency and continuity' (HSCS 4.17).

This area for improvement was made on 19 September 2019.

Action taken since then

Action plan submitted. with a completion date of February 2020

1. To amend the recording options on the School's MIS (3Sys)
2. To train all staff in the recording of concerns with the improved headings

3. To ensure that all documents relevant to any bullying incident are stored within the system and are visible to staff
4. To put in a place a protocol that requires a Bullying Support Plan in response to any incident - this will include review dates, outcome and action points for staff, agreed with the pupil.
5. To review these improvements with the Child Protection governors in advance of the Committee meeting in February 2020.

We saw area for improvement had been completed during this inspection.

Previous area for improvement 2

The purpose and content of support plans should be clear. They should consistently be put in place when needed and identify intended outcomes for the pupil being supported. Identified needs including child protection concerns and subsequent outcomes should be agreed and shared with pupils, parents and relevant staff.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me'. (HSCS 1.19) and 'My care and support is consistent and stable because people work together well.' (HSCS 3.19)

This area for improvement was made on 19 September 2019.

Action taken since then

Action plan submitted. with a completion date of February 2020

1. A new Bullying Support Plan protocol will be established and this, alongside existing Support and Child's/ Young Person's Plans, is shared with all staff to allow care for the individual concerned to begin quickly and in a coordinated way with review points and outcomes recorded.
2. All relevant documents in support of any Wellbeing or Child Protection concern recorded will be added to the relevant section of the pupil record
3. The recording options for concerns have been limited to 3; 1. Child Protection Concern - Bullying, 2. Child Protection Concern - other, 3. Wellbeing Concern.
4. Staff training on updated protocols.
5. Review changes with Child Protection governors in January 2020.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

1.1 Children and young people experience compassion, dignity and respect	5 - Very Good
1.2 Children and young people get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children and young people's health benefits from their care and support they experience	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
3.2 Staff have the right values, skills and knowledge to care for children and young people	5 - Very Good
3.3 Staffing levels are right and meet children and young people's needs, with staff working well together	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Children and young people can be connected with and involved in the wider community	5 - Very Good
How well is our care planned?	4 - Good
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects children and young people's needs and wishes	4 - Good

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