

Merchiston Castle School

School Care Accommodation Service

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 November 2025

Service provided by:
Merchiston Castle School Board of
Governors

Service provider number:
SP2006008428

Service no:
CS2005101538

About the service

Merchiston Castle School is a boys school with both day and boarding pupils. It is the only remaining all boys boarding and day school in Scotland. The school roll is 400 boys aged 7 - 18 years. The school is situated in 100 acres of parkland in Edinburgh.

The school is registered to provide a school care accommodation service to a maximum of 323 pupils at any one time.

A maximum of 129 pupils may be accommodated in Laidlaw.

A maximum of 61 pupils may be accommodated in Rogerson.

A maximum of 100 pupils may be accommodated in Chalmers.

A maximum of 9 pupils may be accommodated in Harvey.

A maximum of 24 pupils may be accommodated in Pringle.

To comply with the current staffing schedule dated 17 August 2010 which must be displayed together with the certificate.

The service must comply with all relevant building safety and fire safety legislation.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place onsite on 18 November 2025 between 12:00 and 19:30, 19 November between 08:50 and 19:30, 20 November between 08:50 and 14:00, 24 November between 08:50 and 19:30 and 25 November between 07:50 and 14:00. The inspection was carried out by six inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection, we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service, we:

- spoke with 80 students;
- spoke with 23 staff and managers;
- observed practice, the environment and daily life;
- reviewed returned questionnaires from 14 students;
- reviewed returned questionnaires from 29 parent/s;
- reviewed returned questionnaires from 31 staff members;
- reviewed service documents.

Key messages

- Mutual respect and trust was an established core value across the school
- The community spirit across the school promoted inclusion and strong allegiance
- Boarding staff knew students well and responded consistently and sensitively to their individual needs
- A more consistent approach was needed in relation to support planning
- The strong leadership team had a clear vision for improvement and development across the school

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
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Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

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

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children/people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

The majority of students felt safe and were protected from harm. Those students who had difficult experiences were supported by staff and bullying was challenged. Students were also confident that if they saw any issues, they would challenge this or raise it with the house parent team.

Students had a number of opportunities to express their views or concerns, and they told us they were listened to and taken seriously.

Students were protected because child protection concerns were managed in line with best practice and senior pupils and staff understood what was required from them. We made some suggestions about minor changes to the safeguarding guidance to ensure clarity for all aspects of the policy.

Students experienced compassionate, kind and sensitive care that promoted a therapeutic approach. House parent teams fully supported students moving into boarding for the first time.

Mutual respect and trust came across as strong core values in relationships between house parents and students, with clear communication across the school being a major contributing factor. We found strong evidence of support for different needs in a sensitive and respectful way that considered life experiences, pressures and vulnerabilities. This was also evident in carefully considered support around language needs, religion and culture.

It was a massive achievement for the school to be awarded UNICEF Gold accreditation as a rights respecting school. Considerable work went in to preparing for the award. It is an admirable plan to further this work into the wider community.

We were impressed by the strength of the community spirit within the school and the strong allegiances made. We saw a real sense of inclusion for all the boys, including those who might find social situations more difficult.

Students were involved in the creation and review of personal plans. Their voices were heard, and they understood what was being written and why. This ensured that everyone was working collaboratively towards better outcomes for students.

We were confident that staff understood their students very well and were meeting their needs. However, this could be strengthened by a more consistent approach to support planning. We suggested that where additional support is being offered, this is captured within personal planning. This would promote a more coherent and proportionate approach and provide guidance where needed.

The boarding houses continued to offer a high standard of accommodation and had recently undergone refurbishment. During the inspection there was quick response to issues raised by students, in relation to the environment, which was reinforced through the estates department prompt response to any identified repairs.

We fed back to managers that some of the older students felt that the timing of Wi-Fi should be reviewed, appropriate to age and stage of development.

We also fed back that younger students felt that some play equipment was not replaced quickly if it got broken such as the Xbox and lack of bats and balls for table tennis. In addition, some students found that showers were not as warm as they could be and the bathrooms were also cold, however recognised that this was due to the age of the building. This was also reflected in the temperature of the dorms, but students were clear that they could access extra duvets if required.

Students physical and mental health needs were well understood. The health care professionals such as nurses and psychotherapists made available by the school ensured that students could access services promptly.

Whilst medication within the medical centre was audited well, this was not effectively happening across houses. We discussed this with the medical team who committed to finding ways to help the houses strengthen the process.

Comments about the quality of the food were generally positive and the food was found to be of good quality and well prepared.

A wide range of activities were on offer within the houses. Sometimes these were a difficult balance, however the houseparents' recognised this and endeavoured to meet the recreational needs of all the boys.

The school is ambitious for the students and had high expectations of behaviour and commitment to learning. Students were motivated both in their academic work and in their chosen recreational activities. The enthusiastic commitment to participation was prevalent throughout the school and there was a sense of community and support for the students taking part in all activities, including competitive matches and performances.

The strong leadership team were approachable and well informed. They were clear about their roles and responsibilities, and staff said they felt fully supported by managers.

The head had a vision for the school which identified clear aims and reflected the values of the Health and Social Care Standards. However, the development plans for individual houses vary in quality and quantity and would benefit from some standardisation of format whilst continuing to reflect the needs of specific houses.

The Board of governors played an active role in the school both in support and in governance audit. Systems were in place to ensure robust oversight throughout the operation of the school. Regular meetings between relevant individuals result in effective communication across the board and the school.

All boarding teams operated effectively with good communication and respect for the roles of individual members of the team. Appropriate consideration was given to the deployment of staff and ensuring the correct presence of staff in houses to meet the needs of students. A staffing needs assessment process was in the early stage of development.

Effective systems were in place for identifying, taking action and monitoring risk. House parent teams knew the students very well and could identify where changes in their demeanour might indicate something of

concern. Regular communication between house parent teams and tutors meant that there was good oversight of these concerns.

The senior leadership team and the board of governors mitigated risk with a clear line of sight over key processes including finance, academia, protection and wellbeing, achievements, and complaints.

The recruitment policy reflected good practice guidance. We saw evidence that PVG and professional registration checks had been robustly carried out. However, a better system should be developed to ensure all references are received.

Staff and governors were provided with training appropriate to their role. This was underpinned by annual refresher training.

There are regular forums where students are able to give their feedback about their experiences of boarding. We found that all staff respected young people's voices and placed emphasis on the importance of student voices in evaluating their overall experiences of being at Merchiston. Student voices were present in some development plans, though overall we felt that this could be better evidenced in terms of the work that was being undertaken by the boarding school teams.

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

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).

This area for improvement was made on 1 December 2021.

Action taken since then

The language in care plans was sensitive and trauma informed. Plans in place were meaningful, measurable, and identified desired outcomes

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 rights and wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
7.1 Children and young people are safe, feel loved and get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
7.2 Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people's needs and rights	5 - Very Good

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