

Preparing to Board at Pringle – a parent's guide

Sending one's child away for the first time is a daunting prospect, even when the school takes its pastoral care as seriously as Merchiston.

There is a wealth of information on the school website (and in the **information pack** that lands with a menacing thud on your doorstep in late May/early June). I have three pieces of advice about the information pack:

- do make yourself a cup of coffee/pour a glass of wine (depending on the time of day) and set aside a couple of hours to go through all the information, arming yourself with a pen and paper to note questions as you go: you will never remember them afterwards.
- do not leave this process until the beginning of July (here, I speak from bitter experience), telling yourself that you will get round to it next weekend. There are forms that need returning to the school by the middle of June.
- do not read it on a busy commuter train into London: the final realisation that you will no longer be responsible for caring for your son, or bathing his grazed knees, may induce tears, and your fellow passengers will sidle away from you in some alarm (again, I speak from experience).

But *do read the information pack*, and be not afraid, for it is quite user friendly; indeed, the school has gone to great lengths to make it as easy to navigate as possible, including with it a separate mini pack containing the forms that need returning.

Supplementary to the information pack, here are some of the points I noted during my first year as a boarding mother:

School uniform

- if you want to try and buy second-hand items from the school uniform exchange shop, try to visit before the end of the Summer Term; although it is open on the Wednesday before the start of the Autumn Term (and by appointment during the holidays – see the information pack for details), it leaves little time to sew on all of those labels.
- If your eyes water at the price of a kilt jacket for a ten-year old, don't forget to explore the many second-hand shops in Edinburgh's Grassmarket, as well as the uniform exchange, before committing to buying a new one.

Packing

With the exception of school coats and blazers, all school uniform is stored in large drawers in the boys' beds: the locker is for their own clothes (called 'casuals' in the school vernacular).

- Don't turn up with eight white shirts on hangers, ready to hang in the locker; you will simply have to remove the hangers and fold them instead. Better to arrive with them already folded.
- I don't think that my son has ever worn all eight shirts, as the laundresses wash every day, so I will only be buying six for my second son this year.
- Remember that the school launders clothes on an industrial scale, so don't send your son with anything that won't stand up to vigorous washing.
- Do make sure that you include a suitable bag/s for leave out and half term, or your son will be coming home for the weekend with a suitcase the size of a small beach hut.
- Read the kit list for the adventure camp at the start of the Autumn Term and make sure that you have included all the items your son will need for it, as well as what is on the uniform list.
- Don't forget writing paper and stamps (although the boys can buy these): I found that some ready stamped and addressed envelopes meant that thank-you letters to various relations stood more chance of being written.

Tuck boxes

If you opt for the traditional style, it is a good idea to put a plastic container inside it, to avoid cakes/muffins oozing and staining the lining.

- If you choose to give your son anything perishable, make sure that he is aware of the principle of eating it ASAP: I opened Jamie's tuck box at Christmas and found an alien life form inside.

Telephoning

- It is a good idea to order a phone card for your son, but make sure that you do it in good time for the start of term, as it can take a couple of weeks to arrive.
- Try to arrange for times when your son will phone you, using the phone card: it can be a frustrating experience waiting for the boys' phone to be free in the evenings.

And remember:

Mr Hall and Mrs Wearmouth are always willing to answer **every** query you have, no matter how trivial you think it may appear, so do ask.