

The Merchiston Journey

If a pupil joins in J4, it is possible for him to be a pupil at the school for up to 10 years. Each pupil is allocated a 'buddy' when he arrives and as he progresses through the school, he will experience a pastoral system which is subtly different each year, but which relies on certain constant elements.

The school is divided into seven Houses, according to the age of the pupils, and each House is run by a Housemaster. The school is also divided into three sections: Junior, Middle and Sixth Form.

The Junior School comprises five age groups (8-12) and all the pupils are looked after by the staff of **Pringle House**. As Merchiston is predominantly a boarding school with a boarding school ethos, each pupil comes under the care of a Housemaster who is usually the first point of contact. All boys in **J4, J5, First Form and Second Form** come under the Housemaster of Pringle First and Second Form. The **Third Form** boys (equivalent to S1) come under their own Housemaster in Pringle as they are in their final year in the Junior School and about to 'graduate' to the Middle School.

In addition to the Housemaster, each of whom has a dedicated team (usually six or seven) of House Tutors, each House also has a team of residential prefects who assist with the running of the House. The prefects, together with the Lower Sixth Form Assistants, are excellent role models for the younger boys and play a vital role in all aspects of House life. Also of great importance are the Housekeepers and House Mothers whose role extends to a wide range of pastoral and domestic issues.

When a boy moves on from Pringle, he enters the **Fourth Form** as a member of **Chalmers West House**, which along with all the other Houses is located in the heart of the school. Historically there have always been more boarding pupils in the Middle School than in the Junior School, but the day pupils remain fully integrated in the residential accommodation, most choosing to stay to complete their prep in House after supper. The Fourth Form is also the year when pupils are able to sample subjects which might be new to them such as Spanish, Design Technology or Electronics. Important decisions are to be taken this year about which subjects are selected to take forward to GCSE.

At the end of Fourth Form, all the boys move to the adjacent **Chalmers East House**. Although they will have a new Housemaster in this '**Shell**' year, the Head of Middle School (who is also a Middle School Housemaster) keeps a close eye on his progress together with his academic tutor who looks after him right up to his entry into the Sixth Form.

Personal space is vital for the boys as they grow up through the school. In Pringle, which is a single-storey building, the boys thrive in their personalised

dormitories of 6-8 together. In Chalmers West the dormitories are now subdivided into semi-private areas for 3-4 beds. After Chalmers East, Rogerson East (Fifth Form) and Rogerson West (Lower Sixth) await.

By Autumn term 2008 each member of the Fifth Form will have his own individual study. This will mean that for the final three years at Merchiston, when public examinations become a major factor in the boys' lives, each boy will live in his own study. As from September 2008 the Sixth Form will be housed in two new boarding houses. Each house will have 63 en suite study bedrooms and a host of contemporary facilities which will be the envy of many universities. Sixth Form boys, however, will still be expected to play a significant role in the other Houses where they will practise their leadership and organisational skills.

The Housemasters, together with their tutor teams, arrange a stunning array of activities and the full 'Merchiston experience' can only be appreciated by entering into the full spirit of this. The weeks are packed with visits from artists and writers, visits to local sites of interest, sports fixtures and fun activities. The weekends offer more of the same but with more emphasis on relaxation. It is not unusual, for instance, for a pupil having completed his Saturday programme of lessons, to jump on a bus to visit another school for a sport fixture, return in time to freshen up for the Reel Club, and finish the evening in the VIA Club for a social with girls from one of our sister schools. Sunday, although not so frenetic, apart from offering a time to rest and contemplate the week gone and the week ahead, is often a time to go on a House outing (karting and paint balling are very popular), for seniors to meet up with friends in Edinburgh or Colinton, or to take part in an event with one of the many weekend clubs. At some point on Sunday there is also a Chapel Service for all the boarders, and sometimes for the day pupils as well.

The final two years at Merchiston are designed to be especially fulfilling as we try to prepare the ground for the inevitable moment when each pupil, no matter how regretfully sometimes, has to move on – either directly to university or on a gap year. Each Sixth Form pupil, apart from his Housemaster, also has a specially designated tutor who helps him through these often challenging years. It is a time too for the Academic Management Team under the leadership of the Director of Studies to help each individual to explore all the alternatives before making important decisions. The Careers Advisor, the Chaplaincy team, the Medical staff, the Deputy Heads as well of course as the Headmaster himself are all ready, able and willing to fulfil the pledge made by the school at the point of registration to help each pupil to maximise his talent and to keep his horizons as clear and broad as possible.

FN Rickard (Deputy Head)