

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

By the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

On

March 6th – 9th, 2006

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Sevenoaks School

Full Name of the School	Sevenoaks School
DfES Number	886/6014
Registered Charity Number	1101358
Address	Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 1HU
Telephone Number	01732 455133
Fax Number	01732 456143
Email Address	admin@sevenoaksschool.org
Head	Mrs C L Ricks
Chairman of Governors	Mr R B Sackville-West
Age Range	11-18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	6th-9th March 2006

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003.

The inspection was carried out in conjunction with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The CSCI report is available separately (www.csci.org.uk).

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

CONTENTS

	Page
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION	3
The Educational Experience Provided	3
Pupils' Learning and Achievements	4
Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	6
The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)	7
3 THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS	10
The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils	10
The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community	11
The Quality of Boarding Education	12
4 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	14
The Quality of Governance	14
The Quality of Leadership and Management	14
5 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS	16
Overall Conclusions	16
Next Steps	17
6 INSPECTION EVIDENCE	18

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Sevenoaks is one of the oldest schools in England, established in 1432 as a lay foundation by William Sevenoke. It has changed significantly over the last forty years and has earned a justifiable reputation for being innovative and forward thinking. An international boarding house for boys was built in 1961 and the school remained all boys until 1976 when girls were accepted into the sixth form, and the Girls International House was opened. It went fully co-educational from Year 7 in 1983. The present head took up her post in 2002.
- 1.2 The school aims to discover and exploit potential, to cultivate an ethos of very high expectations, and to provide real curricular breadth and balance; in the sixth form, these aims are embodied in the International Baccalaureate (IB). It also seeks to promote an internationalist perspective, and to provide a very extensive co-curriculum within a supportive and friendly atmosphere in which every individual counts.
- 1.3 The school is situated in a very pleasant campus environment on the southern outskirts of Sevenoaks. It has a most attractive mix of buildings of different ages and styles, a number of which are listed. Its excellent facilities are set in attractive grounds adjacent to the distinguished medieval palace, Knole House, and its beautiful park.
- 1.4 Since the last inspection in March 2000, a new dining hall and languages suite have been built, The Sennocke Centre, a very well equipped sports complex, has been completed, and there has been much refurbishment of classroom and boarding facilities, including major provision for disabled access.
- 1.5 The day pupils are not only local, but also come from a wide geographical area; the boarders are regional, national and international. There are pupils from over 30 different countries in the school. Most of the parents are engaged in professional and business occupations. Slightly fewer than 20 per cent of pupils receive scholarships or bursaries. At the time of the inspection, there were 987 pupils on roll, with 276 boys and 290 girls in Years 7-11, and 205 boys and 216 girls in the sixth form. There were 168 boy and 172 girl boarders.
- 1.6 Standardised tests indicate that the average ability of the pupils is significantly above the national average, at least a third are in the top three per cent, and almost all are in the top quarter of the ability range. Thus, where pupils are performing in line with their abilities, results in public examinations are expected to be above those achieved in maintained selective schools.
- 1.7 No pupil has a statement of special educational need but there are over 100 pupils for whom English is not their principal language, and 16 receive language support. In addition, the school has identified 59 pupils as requiring particular educational help, and the majority are given specialist assistance. The most usual needs are mild dyslexia and dyspraxia.
- 1.8 Entry to the school at 11+, 13+, and in the sixth form, is based on selective examination, interview, and a report from the previous school. Sevenoaks is very popular and is oversubscribed. In recent years, up to 16 per cent of pupils entering at 11+, and about 10 per cent of those joining the sixth form, come from maintained schools in the UK. Other entrants are from the independent sector or from maintained or private schools overseas. Virtually all pupils stay on in the sixth form; in recent years fewer than five per cent have left from Year 11. Almost all sixth form pupils go on to top universities either in this country or abroad.

- 1.9 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence is shown in the following tables.

School	NC name
Year 7	Year 7
Year 8	Year 8
Year 9	Year 9
Year 10	Year 10
Year 11	Year 11
Lower sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 Sevenoaks School provides a high quality all-round educational experience that is fully consistent with its stated aims and philosophy. The school strongly promotes academic achievement and the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are thoroughly appropriate to the needs and abilities of its pupils, and the expectations of their parents. Day and boarding pupils benefit from a friendly and supportive atmosphere that complements and enhances the full range of educational provision. Pupils in all year groups have an internationalist outlook, are happy, polite, very helpful and purposefully busy. In the pupils' questionnaire, and during the inspection, many pupils expressed their appreciation of the curriculum, the many exciting opportunities provided for them, and their real enjoyment of, and pride in, the school.
- 2.2 The school is very effective in promoting linguistic, mathematical, scientific, human and social, and physical, aesthetic and creative development. The curriculum in the lower and middle schools is broad and balanced, and is open to all. Pupils are able to choose from a wide range of GCSEs, including four modern and two classical languages, and some pupils can take mathematics and French examinations in Year 10. Three sciences are available to GCSE as well as at double-award Science. Sport, drama, art, music, design and technology, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and voluntary service offer strong co-curricular support to the academic programme. Throughout the school, provision is strong for the acquisition of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills.
- 2.3 The last, small, cohort of A-level students leaves this summer, and so, from September 2006, the whole sixth form will be taking the International Baccalaureate, where the required integration of academic study with the creativity, action and service programme (CAS) will continue the practice of curricular and co-curricular integration that is a strong feature of the middle school. Pupils and parents are strongly supportive of the imaginative and coherent vision for the school that draws all the features of its provision together, and are pleased that additions to the Standard and Higher level IB options courses have been made available by the school.
- 2.4 Between seventy and eighty students join the school in Year 12, of whom up to sixty are from abroad. This intake adds new vigour and enthusiasm to an already exciting school environment, and the quality of the work they produce is often of a particularly high standard. The ease with which they integrate, and the obvious happiness they radiate and express are particular features of, and testament to, the effectiveness of the school's curricular philosophy, and pastoral support systems.
- 2.5 The number of curricular and co-curricular opportunities the school offers its pupils, and the intensity with which so much activity is undertaken, provides a challenge for all pupils, but they cope very well with all the demands placed on them.
- 2.6 Pupils' experiences are enriched and enhanced through a co-curricular programme that is thoroughly integrated into the school's overall ethos. Sport plays a central part in the lives of most pupils, and the new Sennocke Centre greatly enhances sporting opportunities. Pupils enjoy and benefit from a huge range of physical activities. The school has a long and distinguished tradition of musical excellence, exhibited in a chamber music concert of exceptional quality during the inspection. Remarkably, three-quarters of all pupils are currently learning at least one instrument.

- 2.7 Emphasis on the importance of work-experience in Year 11 serves to familiarise pupils with some of the realities of life beyond formal education. Membership of the CCF from Year 10, voluntary service, CAS, and a large number of one-off projects that involve voluntary service activity, often in far-flung parts of the world, afford all pupils the chance to set their academic study within a healthy, caring and community-conscious environment. These opportunities are particular strengths of the school.
- 2.8 The tutorial system is the vehicle for providing advice about academic and co-curricular choices throughout a pupil's time at school. Preparation for the next stage of education is particularly thorough. The well-resourced careers department introduces pupils to higher education matters from Year 10, increases the quantity of input through the Cambridge Profile with personal, professional feedback, and runs the Year 11 work experience programme. In Year 12 pupils think about UCAS application more specifically. The school provides excellent guidance on course choices at home universities, and is developing increasing expertise on overseas higher education, particularly for US universities, for which there is an experienced specialist adviser.
- 2.9 Parents express particular satisfaction with the curriculum at all levels. Planning and supervision of the multiplicity of complex paths through the school's broad range of choices is of very high quality, and both senior management and heads of department and tutors ably assist in its overall implementation.
- 2.10 Although the pupils are of high ability, as indicated in standardised national test scores at entry, and excellent external examination results are achieved, the provision for the gifted and talented does not always reach beyond the requirements of examinations at all ages and in all subjects. Pupils have the academic capability and potential to benefit from challenges beyond those offered by GCSE and IB courses alone and, although the very high level of Oxbridge success suggests the challenging of many talented sixth form pupils, even more could be done to develop pupils of such high calibre in each age group. The school is aware of this need.
- 2.11 The school screens pupils for dyslexia and other learning difficulties at Years 7 and 9, and teachers can ask for further help if they feel that a pupil needs it at any time. Those who seek special help, including overseas pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) requirements, are given effective tuition at the very busy learning centre, which is only just able to meet demand. The parental questionnaire revealed much satisfaction with special educational needs provision and there have also been significant improvements to disability access since the last inspection.
- 2.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.13 The quality of pupils' learning and achievement is very good. The school is highly successful in meeting its aims of developing the pupils' academic potential. The school's provision enables scholastic standards to be very high and the quality, range and depth of the co-curricular opportunities available to pupils inculcate a wide range of skills, personal self-confidence, and awareness of the needs and features of the wider world. Pupils show determination and intellectual curiosity. They are academic in approach and well rounded in skills and understanding. In many lessons, pupils are genuinely enthusiastic and pupils throughout the school enjoy their work. They possess the skills required for extended writing and these capacities develop particularly rapidly in the sixth form. Pupils are independent, confident thinkers and they deploy technical vocabulary with skill and accuracy.

- 2.14 Examination results are extremely good at both GCSE and IB, and are on a rising trend. At GCSE, the number of A*/A grades is over ninety per-cent, well above the average for selective maintained schools, across the subject range. Measured against both national and international standards, results at IB are outstanding and the pupils are justifiably proud of these achievements. Overall, pupils' learning and achievement have improved since the last inspection.
- 2.15 Pupils are highly articulate and argue with conviction and coherence. They are independent, logical thinkers who are prepared to articulate their views and share insights. In a sixth form assembly a small group of pupils gave an excellent and thoughtful presentation on their house-building project work in Tanzania. Their use of technical vocabulary in a wide range of subjects is confident and precise. They write fluently for a wide range of purposes, and extended writing skills are well developed, notably in English, classics, and history. Note taking is good in many subjects and there is much useful annotating of worksheets and texts, but few notes or files are checked or marked systematically.
- 2.16 The pupils work effectively in class; they also have good research skills. They reason and argue cogently and think for themselves. The extended essay in the IB diploma requires much independent study and individual research, as does the presentation and written assignment in the Theory of Knowledge. The pupils value the opportunities to practise the thinking skills that these programmes, which are a compulsory part of the IB diploma, require. They find these parts of the course demanding but, ultimately, very worthwhile.
- 2.17 Mathematical and numeracy skills are well developed and the pupils have the understanding and confidence to apply them, where needed, in other subjects, for example in economics, business and management, geography and the sciences. ICT is well represented as a curriculum subject and good ICT skills were evident in, for example, word processing, art and design work and the sciences. However, the use of ICT is not widely exploited in the curriculum, nor systematically built into the work of most departments.
- 2.18 Individual pupils, groups and teams achieve notable successes in a range of co-curricular endeavours, including Mathematics and Physics Olympiads, the Arkwright Scholarship, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and the Model United Nations. There is also great commitment to, and involvement in, a variety of overseas exchanges and trips. In sport, the school has an enviable national reputation in sailing, shooting, tennis and athletics. The school has a regional reputation in basketball and swimming. Rugby has always been the major boys' game and there have been recent successes in cricket, cross-country and hockey. Girls' sport has been making good strides in recent years, and the under 14 team reached the national hockey competition final this year. Improvements have been made in school sport since the last inspection.
- 2.19 Music is outstanding, with pupils regularly chosen for the National Youth Orchestra. Drama is also very strong, having four pupils chosen for the National Youth Theatre this year. Significant numbers of pupils participate in a rich variety of musical and dramatic output throughout the year. Pupils are also involved in a range of charitable pursuits, including the long term Romania-Moldova project.
- 2.20 Pupils apply themselves well in lessons and preparation, and show great interest in their studies. They read with understanding and they speak with confidence. They listen particularly well in the many modern foreign language courses that are available, and their accents are authentic. The best pupils in Year 11 French are regularly successful in Institute of Linguists examinations. However, the spread out nature of the school site makes it difficult to ensure that lessons begin on time; lack of punctuality is a problem, pupils can be slow to settle and some curriculum time is inevitably lost.

- 2.21 Pupils express themselves with confidence and assurance. They show evidence of high levels of literacy, with very good examples of extended writing being observed in Years 12 and 13. Reading is undertaken conscientiously, although constraints upon sixth formers' time inevitably limits the extent to which they are able to engage with additional literature.
- 2.22 Pupils work well together in groups and some very good examples of co-operative and collaborative learning were seen. As they progress through the school, pupils acquire high levels of skill in all the key areas required for success in their future academic careers. By the time they reach the sixth form they have the ability to listen attentively, read critically and write with fluency, accuracy and style. They take their work seriously and a sense of pride permeates their academic and co-curricular endeavours.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.23 Pupils demonstrate particularly well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, contributing very well to a major aim of the school. There are pupils from over 30 different countries at Sevenoaks, and all happily display a genuine tolerance and understanding, and an appreciation of the diverse cultural community in which they live and are educated together. The strong internationalist ethos, which influences all that the school does, together with the quality of relationships in this closely integrated community, makes a real contribution to pupils' personal development. It is fostered in both the curriculum and co-curriculum so that the school fully achieves its aims of developing personal, spiritual and moral qualities, with mutual tolerance and respect, concern for others, and a genuine interest in the wider world.
- 2.24 The ethos of the school helps pupils to develop a strong sense of spirituality: in their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence and in relation to their respective faiths, personal beliefs or observance. Self-esteem and self-knowledge are addressed as part of a structured lesson programme in personal and social development (PSD) - initially in Year 7 and then in Years 8 and 9 - with further more challenging topics included in Years 11 to 13.
- 2.25 Regular assemblies led by the chaplain challenge pupils to think deeply about the meaning of life, as occurred in the assembly about inspirational religious figures. Within the curriculum pupils have opportunities in a range of subjects to discuss personal beliefs and the influence of different religious ideas, as illustrated in a Year 9 Mediterranean World lesson about the background to the Arab/Israeli conflict. Creative subjects such as art, drama and music foster an individual appreciation of awe and wonder. Genuine care and concern for others were very evident in the whole school.
- 2.26 Pupils have a real awareness of their social responsibilities and have many opportunities to develop moral and ethical understanding. They also have many opportunities to distinguish right from wrong. Pupils accept that school rules are fair and necessary to maintain an orderly and harmonious community. Opportunities for pupils to explore fully the moral and ethical implications of certain situations occur in a wide range of subjects. In history a lesson on the brutality of war provided good examples from the recent Iraq conflict and the First World War. Similarly a middle school assembly addressed the dangers of teenage alcohol abuse, and was followed up as a result of a special tutors meeting in the next form tutor period.
- 2.27 Pupils have many opportunities to develop socially, accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and contribute to community life, including a developing knowledge of public institutions. They learn about democracy and elections, they know much about international politics and organisations, and the PSD programme promotes an understanding of wider issues beyond the school community. The school provides extensive opportunities for

teamwork and for pupils to show initiative and leadership within the overall curriculum in the school as a whole and in the boarding houses. Consideration for and opportunities to empathise with others both in and outside the school community are key features of school life. Pupils are encouraged regularly to raise money for local, national and international charities. £20,000 was raised through a charity walk to help rebuild a school in Sri Lanka after the Tsunami. From Year 10, all pupils are expected to develop a strong service ethic through commitment to the Voluntary Service Unit or the Combined Cadet Force, as well as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Sixth formers are equally encouraged to be socially responsible, and actively to help others. They are involved in running a crèche, in teaching science or a number of sports to local primary pupils, in entertaining old people, and in helping in a local nursing home - all as part of the CAS component of the IB. Trips to support charity work in the developing world are also organised.

- 2.28 Pupils' cultural awareness is also outstanding. The school teaches many modern languages and pupils also become familiar with a variety of cultural traditions in such subjects as religious studies, the humanities, music and art. Regular theatre trips, drama performances for all ages, and participation in a wealth of musical concerts all enrich pupils' experiences. The school's aim of fostering an internationalist approach permeates all aspects of community life. Starting in Year 8 with the French exchange or a study trip, pupils have opportunities to visit many foreign countries throughout their school careers. Some cultural visits and field trips are, as in the case of the now annual geography field trip to Morocco, sometimes deliberately organised to countries with very different cultures. The array of national flags in the dining hall is a colourful reminder of all the different nationalities represented on the school campus. The two sixth form international boarding houses are a dynamic influence on the academic and social life of the school.
- 2.29 All pupils learn much about internationalist perspectives - whether it is in assemblies about other countries, in meeting of the Cultural Awareness Society or merely by sampling international culinary delights in the dining room or the boarding house. The new International Studies Course in Year 10 is partly designed to prepare pupils for participating in the Model United Nations, which teaches the pupils so much about world issues and institutions, and requires them to understand and empathise with many of the economic, social and political problems faced by countries throughout the world.
- 2.30 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.31 Overall, the quality of teaching is good and, together with the excellent relationships between pupils and staff, it is an important factor in fulfilling the aim of fully exploiting academic potential. Teaching promotes high levels of achievement by pupils of all abilities; effective learning is fostered, as are high standards. The great majority of teaching seen in the inspection was good, and a proportion of it was outstanding. However, some was only satisfactory and a few lessons were poor. Teachers are adept in increasing pupils' understanding and developing their skills. The teaching strongly motivates the pupils who work diligently and enjoy school. Since the last inspection, approaches to teaching have become more varied although, in some instances, expectations are not high enough.
- 2.32 Teaching fosters in pupils the application of intellectual, physical or creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves. A great deal of the best teaching witnessed was centred on student learning and initiative. Examination results are, of course, regarded as decisively important, but a significant number of teachers are just as determined to imbue a love of their subjects, and to promote independent thinking.

- 2.33 Most lessons are well planned. The unusual length of the school's standard lessons, fifty-five minutes, facilitates variety and productive use of different teaching rhythms, although single lessons in practical subjects can be a little rushed, especially if pupils arrive late from other areas of the campus. Pupils co-operate well together in class, and also work very effectively on their own. Although many lessons are vigorous and energizing; a few are too slow, given the pupils' proven calibre; and some lessons had a degree of over-narrow examination-oriented instruction. The school is aware of this problem. The best teaching hinged on the desire to see pupils discover things for themselves, and propel their enquiries rapidly forward as a result. In the pupil questionnaire almost all the pupils stated that they found the work interesting, that they were set the right amount of work, and that the teachers gave them appropriate help if problems arose.
- 2.34 Relationships between staff and pupils are very relaxed and friendly, and are based on affectionate mutual regard. Teaching shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils. It instils confidence, mutual respect and valuable flexibility. However, expectations are in some cases a little low, mainly below the sixth form.
- 2.35 The teachers are highly qualified, and with considerable international experience which is particularly beneficial to IB work. Their subject knowledge and expertise are appropriately high, and they encompass a wide and effective variety of style and approach. Practically-based learning was both highly effective and enjoyable in a Year 8 information and communications technology (ICT) lesson in which pupils designed a video documentary, having the opportunity to edit together scenes and soundtrack. Year 12 pupils, working in small groups, were made to show very good critical thinking skills in a highly demanding Theory of Knowledge lesson on the logical sequencing of an argument in a scientific essay.
- 2.36 The quality and quantity of the wide range of resources are very good, and are used effectively to support the teaching. The well-stocked library, with an extensive periodicals section and attractive displays, is a valuable resource for the school, and increasing co-operation between the librarian and some departments is enhancing its effectiveness. However, the use of available ICT resources is uneven, although some teachers deploy computer and electronic technology well in their teaching programmes. The school is aware of this issue.
- 2.37 While teaching includes regular and thorough assessment of pupils' work, it is inconsistently effective both in method and timing. The school's grading system is detailed and clear, and all pupils are comfortable with it. However, marking practice varies a little in quality. Some work is annotated with admirable devotion and forward-carrying momentum; but occasionally it is less assiduous. While it is recognized that some work is self-marked or evaluated well orally in class, it is not entirely clear to what extent pupils absorb such debriefing. Turnover of work can also be variable; most of it is returned within a few days at most, but it can take somewhat longer, and therefore be unhelpful to pupil progress.
- 2.38 Professional expectations are high and the majority of departmental handbooks and schemes of work are of good quality. Considerable departmental freedom is available to manage teaching and learning, but departmental strategies are not always fully aligned with expressed school policy. The school recognises that its tradition of individual and departmental autonomy leads to some unevenness in the monitoring of both teaching and assessment.
- 2.39 Teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly and to have concern for each other's needs and individuality. Frequent use of group and pair work aids both their proper conduct and the pupils' approach to independent learning.

-
- 2.40 The school has devised comprehensive arrangements for pupils' performance to be evaluated. These reflect both the school's aims as provided to parents and national norms. A no less detailed system of monitoring, recording and reporting is also in place. The procedures and methods by which staff write reports are under review.
- 2.41 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- 3.1 Staff provide excellent care for all pupils, and the school gives particularly close attention to their welfare, health and safety. Effective enhancement to day pupil pastoral care arrangements, particularly in the middle school, has taken place since the last inspection.
- 3.2 Support and guidance at the school are extremely effective. Sound formal arrangements are in place, with tutors being clear about their responsibilities in relation to individuals and groups, and there are clear channels of support for pupils to deal with problems, should they arise. Very positive responses from the parental questionnaire indicate support for the quality of pastoral provision, as did the observation of the tutorial system in action during the inspection.
- 3.3 The key pastoral figures are form tutors or boarding housemasters or housemistresses, and divisional heads. They, together with the pastoral deputy, are able easily to share information and act to resolve pupil problems. Tutorial staff are very conscientious and have received training both in school and through external agencies.
- 3.4 A tradition of mutual support exists in the school between staff and pupils, and among pupils themselves. The special atmosphere in assemblies reflects this, particularly where pupils participate and where individual and group achievements are celebrated. Caring attitudes are fostered within and across peer groups. Pupils are relaxed and happy, and are also very well disciplined and well behaved – although some wear their uniform a little untidily.
- 3.5 Policies to guard against bullying and harassment are effective, and are supported by a comprehensive personal, social and development programme. The disciplinary focus emphasises positive behaviour, self-discipline, and responsibility. The pupil questionnaires revealed a genuine appreciation of pastoral arrangements, and a widespread feeling that bullying problems are rare, and are always dealt with quickly and effectively.
- 3.6 Very effective structures exist to enable parents to discuss academic or social issues in the school, relating to their children. Many such consultations are about minor problems and are relatively informal, but where there are concerns of a more serious nature parents feel that these are listened to seriously and that appropriate action is taken.
- 3.7 Child Protection policies are also effective. The pastoral deputy head is the designated child protection officer and all staff are aware of the relevant procedures. The documentation is detailed and comprehensive as are the strategies through which the various policies are effected. Pupils have access to a confidential counselling service, and a sixth-form “listening” service is being established. Pastoral arrangements in the sixth form are to be enhanced by the creation of an additional divisional head in the next academic year, and this is indicative of the extra emphasis that has been placed on pastoral care since the last inspection.
- 3.8 Comprehensive systems of risk management and assessment demonstrate the desire to ensure the safety of all those using the school site and going away on trips. Obligations regarding fire prevention are fulfilled and there is an active first-aid policy, well supported by the staff, most of whom have had training. Each boarding house has a matron and there is a well-equipped medical centre staffed by qualified medical practitioners and support staff.

- 3.9 Health and hygiene regulations are conscientiously applied in the kitchens. Meals are provided in spacious new dining facilities, and the food is of extremely high quality. It is nutritious and varied, and menus take into account the international aspects of the school. The catering arrangements make a major contribution to the health and well-being of the pupils and have improved since the last inspection. It is, at times, detrimental to good behaviour that pupils have to queue outside for lengthy periods at lunchtime, in all weathers, before gaining access to the dining hall.
- 3.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.11 Links with parents and the community are excellent and, in replying to the questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of parents, from a particularly large set of replies, expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the education and support provided for their children. They are very pleased with the curriculum that is offered, and particularly value the IB Diploma as a first rate programme, and an excellent preparation for university entry. They feel that there is sufficient opportunity to be involved in the school's activities and that they are kept very well informed.
- 3.12 Parents are very positive about the quality of the pastoral care and support provided for their children, with the standards of behaviour demanded, the way worthwhile attitudes are promoted, and the assistance given to pupils with learning difficulties. Parents are also very happy with the quality and range of co-curricular activities, although there is a little concern that the standard of some school sports does not quite match the very highest standards achieved in so many other areas of school life.
- 3.13 Parents feel that they are very welcome to support their children in a variety of ways. Sports matches, plays, concerts and other events are well publicised, and parents receive appropriate details in advance. Arrangements for parent/teacher meetings for all year groups are good and useful additional meetings have been introduced since the last inspection at certain key academic stages. In addition, information sessions about a variety of issues relevant to today's teenagers are appreciated.
- 3.14 The school has a very active and supportive parents' association, which facilitates communication between the school and parents, and runs fund-raising social events. Last year they contributed towards the cost of a floor covering for The Sennocke Centre, to provide a space where the whole school community can meet. Liaison with the school is very efficiently organised. Area representatives feed back concerns at termly meetings, and the system works very well.
- 3.15 Regular newsletters tell parents about individual and collective achievements in the school and about forthcoming events. Parents in particular year groups receive special information about subject option choices, careers guidance and work experience. Informative full school reports are written twice a year. In addition, parents receive termly grade sheets and are also sent useful information about the academic work, examination performance and progress of their children. The problem of maintaining communication with overseas parents is being addressed by regular e-mail contact.
- 3.16 Written replies to parental concerns indicate that the school handles these with care and sensitivity. The school has a clearly defined complaints procedure. It is set out in the excellent staff handbook and in a document available to all parents.

- 3.17 The school works very hard to maintain and develop a strong network of community links. Much of this is based on the high quality work of the Voluntary Service Unit (VSU) and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Very large numbers of pupils from Year10 upwards are involved in programmes, which, in the sixth form, contribute towards the service element of the CAS programme of the IB.
- 3.18 Locally, pupils work as general classroom assistants in fifteen primary schools, and visit old people's homes. They also run science clubs for local children, a computer group for Special Needs adults, a crèche for staff infants, and an after school club. In addition, there are good academic, sporting and musical links with the wider community, regular contacts with university departments and opportunities for work experience placements at the end of Year 11, some of which are arranged by members of the parents association. A special international service link involves fund raising and support for Care and Comfort Romania and a children's hospital in Moldova.
- 3.19 Changes since the last ISI inspection have served to improve the quantity and quality of communication with parents. The general organisation of the CAS component of the IB has been improved, and its service element continues to make a very significant contribution to the local and wider community.
- 3.20 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

The Quality of Boarding Education

- 3.21 Relationships within the boarding community, the range of activities provided for boarders, and the quality of boarding accommodation and resources are all excellent. Good practice is shared between houses, boarding staff are well trained and appropriate investment in boarding accommodation, staffing and facilities has occurred since the last inspection. Parent and pupil questionnaires revealed a very high level of satisfaction with all aspects of boarding.
- 3.22 The boarding houses, whose pupils comprise a third of the pupils at Sevenoaks, make a very significant contribution to the life of the school. Pupils identify themselves very strongly with their houses and look to them as a major source of social and welfare support. Housemasters and housemistresses lead their houses very well and are very committed to them. There are inevitable differences in the ways the mixed junior house, the single sex 13-18 age group houses and the international sixth-form houses are run but this is an indication of an appropriately flexible approach to the different requirements of individual houses.
- 3.23 Relationships among boarders, and between staff and boarders, are particularly good. New pupils, both from within the UK and from overseas, are quickly integrated into all the houses. Standards of behaviour are very high and there is a clear expectation that pupils treat each other with kindness and respect. Instances of bullying are very rare, and are dealt with sensitively and entirely appropriately. House staff are very knowledgeable about child protection issues. The efficient running of the 13-18 age group houses, in particular, relies on the senior boys and girls taking responsibility for supervising younger ones at various times of the day, and they are supported in this by the house staff.
- 3.24 An extensive and well-balanced programme of activities, some of which have an international dimension, is provided after school and at weekends. Boarders also have adequate free time. The collective views of the whole pupil boarding community are taken into account, as are those of pupils in individual house contexts, and this democratic approach is an impressive feature of the boarding provision. Particularly good levels of

staffing and general support are available in all the houses. Since the last inspection staffing has been increased, Internet access has become available to all houses, and boarders can increasingly easily maintain private contact with their parents and families.

- 3.25 Systems and resources for caring for boarders when they are ill are good. Boarders take all their meals centrally and much effort is made to provide a balanced, healthy and varied diet, which also helps to celebrate the school's cultural diversity. The quality of meals shared during the inspection was of a high standard.
- 3.26 The overall standard of the accommodation is very good, despite the buildings being of different ages and styles. In the junior house and in the 13-18 houses the junior pupils share dormitories and this is generally popular. Pupils continued to share dormitories until their senior years in the school in some houses, while in others they progressed to shared or individual rooms much earlier. The furnishings and decoration are very bright and comfortable and the heating systems are effective. The houses are particularly well served by their matrons, and their house, maintenance and cleaning staff.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governance is excellent, fully contributing to the school's aims, and strongly supporting the school's value system. It ensures that pupils benefit from a very good quality of educational provision and it provides excellent oversight and guidance. There have been important overall improvements to the constitution, structure and operation of the governing body since the last inspection, and it has developed greater professionalism.
- 4.2 The 2003 charitable deed clearly defines the structure and management arrangements of the governing body. The governors' strategic role, and its relationship to the chief executive responsibilities of the head, is well established, and the current strategic plan indicates the governors' objectives for the school in the next five years. The governors are kept fully informed about, and are much involved in, all-important aspects of financial management and administration, and exercise appropriate financial control. They are ably supported in these areas by the dedicated efforts of the bursar. They take their roles of maintaining the ethos, quality and development of the school very seriously, and are totally committed to ensuring compliance with regulatory and legal requirements.
- 4.3 A recently enhanced, and very well organised, committee structure ensures that governors contribute appropriately to financial planning, academic matters and investment in resources. They also support the school in matters such as the development of accommodation and questions of staffing.
- 4.4 The chairman is in regular and close touch with the head, and he has a thorough knowledge of the school. Governors are routinely provided with very good quality information by the head. There is a high attendance record at various governors' meetings, and several governors regularly attend school events such as concerts, plays and sporting events. Some also visit lessons. Good relationships between the governors and staff of the school are carefully fostered. The governors entertain new members of staff to dinner, and social events are held to which governors and staff are invited. Governors have a very good knowledge of what is going on, and provide encouraging but searching support for the school.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The quality of leadership and management, overall, is good. Very clear educational direction and leadership are provided by those with senior management responsibilities, as reflected in the all-round quality of education, the care of pupils, and the successful achievement of the school's ethos, aims and objectives. The management of the school has been modified sensitively and effectively since the last inspection.
- 4.6 The governors show very good commitment, allied to clear aims, and their efforts are strongly supported by the effective leadership, and sound management of the head and her senior management team. This sense of direction within the school enables a very supportive, loyal and hard-working team to make significant advances both in the current fulfilment of objectives and in future planning. They possess complementary skills, and they have benefited from some restructuring of roles and responsibilities, and better-defined job descriptions.
- 4.7 Leadership is strong, visionary and consultative in style. It is accessible to all members of the school, and sets a tone that greatly benefits the whole school community. The head's

- practice of meeting with groups of parents regularly is very effective, and assists in informing the school's plans.
- 4.8 Senior management decision-making is collegiate, consultative and firm; and actions are followed through appropriately. A rather complex but effective committee and faculty structure allows for full communication, consultation and efficiency of management.
- 4.9 A well defined range of procedures and policies is in place. The whole-school development plan has well chosen areas for educational improvement within the school. It is kept under review and is supported by departmental planning, which, although generally good, is variable in quality. A new masterplan maps out an exciting future building strategy, linked to educational needs.
- 4.10 Management and leadership at departmental level are, with a few exceptions, effective. Monitoring and review take place, but the achievement of rigour, consistency of procedural application, and standardisation of practice is not always met. Some variability in the quality of assessment procedures occurs and a lack of monitoring of teaching lessens the effectiveness of teaching in some areas.
- 4.11 An excellent and wholly supportive working environment helps the school to attract and retain high quality staff. Teaching staff appraisal is very good, supporting individual professional development and performance, as well as the achievement of whole school aims. A similar programme for support staff is being introduced. A very good induction programme operates for new members of staff, and necessary support is being provided for newly qualified teachers who are undertaking the programme through the Independent Schools' Council Teacher Induction Panel. We regularly have new staff undertaking this. Since the last inspection greater care has been taken to monitor individual subject teaching and co-curricular workloads.
- 4.12 The school's very good resources are well managed, enabling them to support both the school's broad aims and its pupils' needs. Recent capital projects such as the dining hall/modern languages suite and the Sennocke Centre significantly enhance the life of the school. Financial management is very good. The budgeting process and resource management are fair and transparent, with needs carefully analysed and spending prudently controlled.
- 4.13 The school is administered very efficiently through highly appropriate structures. Complex areas such as parental communication, marketing, health and safety and the CAS programme, benefit from the input of dedicated teaching support, grounds, maintenance, and catering and office staff.
- 4.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.15 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 The school very successfully fulfils its aims and aspirations by seeking out and exploiting potential, setting generally very high expectations, and providing a broad and balanced all-round educational experience for both day and boarding pupils. All this is done within an internationalist context, which promotes openness, tolerance and the celebration of difference. In addition to the very good academic and co-curricular opportunities afforded by the well-designed lower and middle school curriculum, the senior school IB programme provides pupils with genuine educational enrichment both for academic study and co-curricular development. Extra modern language opportunities, an intellectually challenging Theory of Knowledge course, an extended essay, and a well organised Creativity, Action and Service programme make the sixth form Diploma programme both demanding and exciting.
- 5.2 Leadership is purposeful and is well supported by the senior management team. The school has dedicated, talented and highly committed teaching and support staff, and it delivers excellent pastoral care for all. The school's all-round provision for boarders is outstanding. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is clearly evident, and they show real understanding and respect for others. So much of what the school provides, both inside and outside the classroom, enables pupils to develop extensive interests and an active involvement in the wider world. Their skills for learning are strongly developed; they show intellectual curiosity and seek out knowledge independently. Academic achievements are, in consequence, very high. Parents are highly satisfied with the education provided, and pupils are appreciative of all the opportunities available.
- 5.3 Since the last inspection, the school has made many improvements. It has enhanced its very high academic and co-curricular standards and has improved its pastoral care programme. Its governing body has been restructured, and it has developed greater expertise and professionalism. A new dining hall and modern languages building have been completed, a state-of-the-art sports centre has been built, some boarding accommodation has been upgraded, and several classrooms have been refurbished. The curriculum has been improved by the introduction of a two-week timetable, a decision to offer only the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form has been implemented, and greater flexibility is being introduced in the lower school modern languages timetable. The provision for learning support has been strengthened, staff appraisal and professional development have been enhanced, and the senior management structure has been modified, giving it more direction and focus.
- 5.4 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.5 The school provides an outstanding all-round education for pupils of high ability and has no major weaknesses. To improve its provision still further, it should carry out the following developments:
1. Provide greater standardisation and consistency in assessment procedures and practice.
 2. Provide closer linkage between departmental and whole school development planning.
 3. Enable learning support provision to be expanded in order fully to address special needs' requirements.
 4. Review provision for gifted and talented pupils in each year group.
 5. Increase the use of information and communication technology (ICT) within the curriculum.
 6. Promote greater time awareness and punctuality on the part of teachers and pupils.
- 5.6 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 6 March to 9 March 2006. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 National Minimum Boarding Standards were inspected by a team of five Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspectors over two days.

List of Inspectors

Neil Gamble	Reporting Inspector, Former Headmaster, HMC school
Christopher Hall	Head of Department HMC school
Anne Howarth	Former Senior Teacher, GSA school
Peter Hamilton	Headmaster, HMC school
Sue Lewis-Blake	Head of Department, GSA school
Dominic Lockett	Deputy Headmaster, HMC school
John Puddefoot	Deputy Headmaster, HMC school
Richard Palmer	Head of Department, HMC school