INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

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Sevenoaks School

Full Name of School	**Sevenoaks School**			
DCSF Number	**886/6014**			
Registered Charity Number	**1101358**			
Address	**Sevenoaks School** **High Street** **Sevenoaks** **Kent** **TN13 1HU**			
Telephone Number	**01732 455133**			
Fax Number	**01732 456143**			
Email Address	**admin@sevenoaksschool.org**			
Head	**Mrs Katy Ricks**			
Chair of Governors	**Mr Anthony Evans**			
Age Range	**11 to 18**			
Total Number of Pupils	**995**			
Gender of Pupils	**Mixed (491 boys; 504 girls)**			
Number of Day Pupils	**656**		Capacity for flexi-boarding:	**N/A**
Number of Boarders	Total:	**343**		
	Full:	**343**	Weekly:	**N/A**
Inspection Dates	**1st to 2nd December 2009**			

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PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule* for INTERIM inspections. The inspection is a two day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in March 2006.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

(a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
(b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
(c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
(d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
(e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
(f) The premises and accommodation
(g) The provision of information
(h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

(i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
(ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
(iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

A specific inspection of boarding was not carried out and the report does not contain judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Any comments on boarding arising from this inspection are in the context of the school as a whole. The existing report on boarding was produced by the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

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.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

1.1 Sevenoaks School aims to provide academic excellence with a strong pastoral and co-curricular emphasis and a global dimension inspired by the International Baccalaureate (IB). The school has a long history of leading innovation in education. It is a registered charity governed by the trustees.

1.2 The school is one of the oldest lay foundations in the United Kingdom, dating back to 1432. It is now an inter-denominational, co-educational, day and boarding school. Situated on the outskirts of Sevenoaks, some 25 miles south east of London, the school occupies a 100-acre site containing a mix of buildings of different ages and styles, some of them listed. Two international boarding houses cater particularly for sixth-form boys and girls from overseas.

1.3 The present head took up her post in 2002. Since 2006, sixth-form pupils have been prepared exclusively for the IB. The Centre for Excellence and Innovation has been established since the last inspection to promote the quality of teaching and learning.

1.4 At the time of the inspection, 995 pupils aged between 11 and 18 years were attending the school, 491 boys and 504 girls. Of these, 166 boys and 177 girls were boarders, and 426 were members of the sixth form, 211 boys and 215 girls.

1.5 Scores in standardised tests indicate that the average ability of pupils in the school is far above the national average. Where pupils are performing in line with their abilities their examination results are expected to be above the average achieved nationally in maintained selective schools.

1.6 Entry to the school at age 11, 13 or into the sixth form is selective following tests, an interview and a report from the applicant's previous school. Day pupils come from a variety of independent and maintained primary schools, mostly within a 25 mile radius of the school; boarders are regional, national and international, including pupils from over 30 different countries.

1.7 One pupil has a statement of special educational need. Just over 100 pupils do not have English as their principal language, 21 of whom receive additional language support. The school has identified 88 pupils as having a recognised learning difficulty or disability. Of these 68 receive specialist additional tuition.

1.8 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

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2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

2.1 Pupils at Sevenoaks achieve considerable success in their work and activities. Results at GCSE in the last three years for which comparative data are available have been high compared with maintained selective schools. The pupils' performance in the IB over the same period has been high compared with UK schools taking the IB, which is at least as challenging a benchmark as maintained selective schools. A large number of pupils gain very high scores in the IB. Pupils make good progress over time relative to their ability profile, which is far above the national average. Pupils are highly-motivated independent learners. Most are enthusiastically involved in the co-curricular life of the school, many achieving high standards in their chosen activities, particularly in music and sport, and in the large number of pupils engaged in service activities.

2.2 Strong teaching contributes significantly to the progress and standards achieved. Lessons are challenging, well paced and varied. Teachers are self-critical, reflective professionals. They know the pupils' aptitudes and needs well. The curriculum is exceptionally well planned to provide a broad and balanced programme, augmented by a well constructed and relevant personal and social development programme extending to every year group, and by religious studies until the end of Year 11, after which pupils study the theory of knowledge. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 take international studies in line with the school's aim to promote global awareness. All pupils experience the creative and theatre arts programme in Years 7 to 9. The wide-ranging co-curricular programme enables those who chose to do so to extend their experience in these subjects, to develop a wide range of other interests and skills and to grow in self-confidence and independence. Parents and pupils are highly satisfied with both the curriculum and co-curriculum programmes.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

2.3 Excellent personal development leads to young people with a clear sense of their own identity and self worth, a well developed awareness of, and respect for, the beliefs of others, and a strong sense of morality. The pupils are keenly aware of the needs of others, raising substantial sums of money for charity and participating willingly in a variety of service activities, both locally and overseas. Pupils' cultural awareness is strong, supported by the international nature of the school and the wide range of trips to theatres, concerts and around the world. Although they develop a broad general knowledge of the public institutions and services of England, the provision for acquiring this is limited. Pupils readily take responsibility both for themselves and for others; for example, as prefects, school council members or peer mentors.

2.4 Strongly effective pastoral care is underpinned by a well thought through pastoral structure which ensures that pupils are well known and that their needs are understood and met. Pupils report that bullying is uncommon and that methods for dealing with it are effective. Procedures for securing the welfare, health and safety of pupils both at school and on trips and expeditions are thorough. A comprehensive fire risk assessment has been conducted by external consultants and arrangements to minimise risk are good. Regular evacuation practices are conducted in all parts of the school and these are properly recorded in the boarding

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houses. Boarding pupils and their parents are highly satisfied with the boarding provision. Boarders and day pupils are well integrated, and the pastoral system, based on form tutors and divisional heads, treats them equally.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

2.5 The governors are experienced and committed and have a shrewd understanding of the work of the school and its strengths and needs, shared by the senior management and demonstrated in the detailed development plan. They are conscientious in fulfilling their responsibilities with respect to the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils. The leadership and management of the head and her senior team are highly effective and contribute significantly to the success of the school. Delegation within the team is excellent, with clearly defined roles and a genuine readiness to share responsibility. Robust systems have been established for the annual review of departments and for the effective coordination of the work of teachers and tutors. Rigorous checks are conducted on all those appointed to work in the school but at the time of the inspection the centralised register was incomplete in that not all staff or volunteers had been included, although they had been checked. The school benefits from some outstanding buildings, including a splendid modern sports centre. Disability access is good. Virtually all pupils responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire like being at the school.

2.6 The school has excellent links with its parents. The Head's Forums for parents attract large audiences who may raise any topic with the head. Information available to parents is wide ranging and clear, and a new website has significantly enhanced access to this information. The school responds quickly and diligently to parental concerns and has a comprehensive complaints procedure, to which it has adhered closely on the rare occasions when it has been invoked. Parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed particular satisfaction with the curriculum, teaching, information available about the school, the activities programme, boarding, ease of communication with the school, the prompt response to concerns, behaviour and the attitudes and values promoted. No aspect attracted significant criticism but the least positive response was about encouragement for parental involvement in school life. A small number of parents wanted reports to be more informative. Inspection evidence supported the view that reports have focused more strongly on providing encouragement than information, which the school has already acted to redress. Inspectors judged that parents have sufficient encouragement to be involved.

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3. ACTION POINTS

(a) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended, with the exception of those indicated below.

Under Standard 4 (The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors) it must:

- keep a full record of the recruitment checks made on all staff, including supply staff and volunteers, in the centralised register of appointments [Regulation 4C].

(b) Recommended action

3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. strengthen pupils' awareness of the public institutions and services of England;
2. continue action already being taken to increase the information provided in written reports to parents about their child's recent progress and steps needed to improve.

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INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school, including a detailed self-evaluation.

Inspectors

Mr Rodney Fox	Reporting inspector
Mrs Jean Marsland	Senior team inspector (former head, GSA)

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