

“ The number one thing we look for is general cognitive ability, and it’s not IQ. It’s learning ability and the ability to process on the fly! ”

Laszlo Bock,  
Senior Vice President,  
Google

### Looking forward

These are exciting times for Teaching and Learning at Sevenoaks. Each of our strands is dedicated to the development of the best possible educational experience within the school, as well as looking outwards to collaborate with like-minded institutions in a variety of different countries.

Underpinning the work of our Institute of Teaching and Learning is the desire to provide our students with a programme of learning that is stimulating, enriching, fulfilling and fun. So many descriptions of educational principles can easily sound like clichés, but we are committed to making sure our practices at all levels make our aims and objectives real and concrete. We have high expectations, but we do everything possible to reach them.

In the end, we want our students to be successful, but we also want them to be happy.

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SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

## Institute of Teaching and Learning

“ Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family. ”

Kofi Annan



“ It has been documented by Koessler, Johnson, Boden and many others that the most exciting intellectual advances are interdisciplinary or non-disciplinary in nature. ”

Over the last few years, Sevenoaks has been developing an approach to the curriculum that takes greater account of the variety of ways in which students learn. Our aim is to better prepare them for university and employment, but also to encourage awareness of themselves as learners, and of their place in an increasingly global world, which cares as much or more about the skills they display than about the knowledge they've accrued.

A traditional educational model typically divides the process of acquiring knowledge into particular categories. There is a clear distinction drawn, for instance, between what is 'academic' and what is not, between things that happen in the classroom – the 'curricular' – and the clubs and activities that take place outside – the 'co-curricular', – and between cognitive or intellectual qualities and personal, emotional or 'affective' ones.

A more holistic model is one that encourages thinking about the way these different categories relate to each other. A student who possesses strong interpersonal skills, who is mindful of others and can work collaboratively, is more likely to succeed in the world of work. A student who can apply knowledge and skills acquired in one particular field across to another is more likely to think critically and to be creative. And the student who is able to think inwardly, to reflect on the way in which they learn and to understand how best to develop, is most likely to achieve their true potential.



In other words, in a progressive curriculum model, the academic and the experiential, the emotional and the cognitive, the personal and the interpersonal, far from being isolated and discrete, are seen as present and complementary at all times.

This is the spirit that informs our seven Core Learning Values, around which all elements of the school curriculum are defined, and through which we are effecting meaningful change:

#### **Creativity**

Students are encouraged to think imaginatively and to be adaptable. They try out different solutions and evaluate their strengths. They are encouraged to see existing situations in new and different ways.

#### **Independent Learning**

Students learn to think for themselves. They develop a natural sense of curiosity and ask thoughtful questions. They acquire skills in research and enquiry. They learn how to manage their time and take responsibility for their own progress.

#### **Critical Thinking**

Students acquire the ability to comprehend, analyse and synthesise information. They explore strengths and weaknesses of multiple answers and question assumptions. They argue points of information persuasively and learn to solve problems in different ways.

#### **International Understanding**

Students develop knowledge of ideas, issues and themes in a 'real world' global context. They explore ethical, social and political contexts and the relationships between them. They identify ways in which notions of justice, tolerance and peace can be realised.

#### **Collaboration**

Students learn in collaborative, co-operative ways, both as leaders and as members of a team. They acquire effective communication skills and understand the importance of active listening. They learn to negotiate, compromise and show consideration for alternative points of view.

#### **Self-awareness**

Students develop understanding of themselves and the way they learn. They learn to prioritise and to be resilient in the face of challenge. They aspire towards intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being.

#### **Social Responsibility**

Students explore the implications of moral and ethical decisions. They acquire a principled, compassionate world view and are sensitive to the needs of others. They exhibit honesty, personal responsibility and a sense of commitment in all areas of school life.

Our Institute of Teaching and Learning is designed to foster this ideology.

We look internally at our own practices and are equally outwardly facing in order to broaden students' horizons, as well as position the school as a centre of educational research and development in an international context.

We take into consideration three main areas of focus:

### 1. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT:

This relates to the architecture of our curriculum design; skills that relate to lifelong learning are given equal status to success in public examinations. It also embraces changes going on within our various curriculum areas – whether in a particular subject, out on the sports field or in an art studio. One particular feature of this relates to our suite of core Critical Thinking courses: Systems of Belief, Critical Perspectives, Ten Ideas that Changed the World, and Theory of Knowledge. Throughout the school, all students take these courses, which are designed to teach them about a range of real world philosophical, cultural, religious and political issues and problems, and to enable them to acquire skills in critical interrogation of such issues.

### 2. SEVENOAKS ONLINE:

Our Global Classroom initiative will invite students and teachers from all over the world to interact, teach, share and learn. An individual or a whole class learning about the politics of the Middle East will be able to exchange points of view with students in Hong Kong or Seattle. Teachers will discuss approaches to teaching and learning, and swap resources. Collaboration in aspects of research in international mindedness or intercultural understanding will be shared and online webinars hosted.

### 3. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT:

Sevenoaks School has a long-standing reputation for excellence and innovation in very many educational fields. We want the school to share more of that experience, and learn from others. Our aim is to conduct research and host a range of different kinds of meetings. Seminars, conferences and lectures will invite teachers, employers and university professors, both local and international, to present on many different matters that relate to the practices associated with education in an international context.

This year alone, we have supported a network of 30 local primary schools a stone's throw from the school gates, and have also run a conference on IB education in Shanghai. Our expertise and experience of the IB has also supported the rollout of the IB Careers Programme across Kent schools.



In more practical terms, the focus of our Institute is:

### 1. CURRICULUM CONTINUUM

The school structure spans seven years and there are administrative divisions between Lower, Middle and Upper schools; however, as far as the academic programme goes, learning should be fluid and continuous. Curriculum Continuum is all about an integrated approach to the curriculum which gets away from differences between year groups by focussing instead on shared aims, skills and objectives; ideally there should be shared DNA between the first lesson you have as a pupil at Sevenoaks and the last.

Bridging the gap between entry and the IB with consistency was one of the main drivers behind the development of our new Middle School curriculum and Diploma – to keep students academically curious, intellectually questioning and well prepared for the next step, whether the Middle School, the IB or university. The core programme of courses – Systems of Belief, Critical Perspectives and Ten Ideas that Changed the World, represent one particular strand of this initiative.

Working with UCAS, parents and universities to have the Sevenoaks School Certificates appropriately recognised is key, though in conception they are more than GCSE substitutes, and are perhaps better understood as part of a broad diploma. We want diplomas for the Middle School and, perhaps, the Lower School to reflect the full breadth of a Sevenoaks student's experience.

Beyond exams and diplomas, but including both, is the curriculum, which should be fully integrated. This includes content and skills specific to each subject or faculty, but also elements that are more generic. We are currently mapping the curriculum across the school, looking at ways in which content, skills development and knowledge can be represented centrally, ideally through a shared nomenclature, which embraces our seven core learning strands and the IB Learner Profile.

### 2. INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Just as Curriculum Continuum is concerned with the vertical articulation of the curriculum, so Interdisciplinarity looks at its horizontal articulation. Ideas introduced in one area should be picked up in another without fuss and time, and resources optimised to make learning and progression through the school consistently inspiring. In Science especially, the most exciting work happens when disciplines meet and every major product is worked on by a team with diverse backgrounds, so differences between subjects cease to matter. Our Year 10 students recently undertook a project taking plant elements in Biology, turning them into jewellery in Tech workshops and then glazing them with materials made in Chemistry.

The IB promotes the notion of a learning community and the exchange of ideas between traditional disciplines. Sharing ideas, teaching methods and good practice across departments can be hard to achieve. We are helped in having Theory of Knowledge and the other Critical Thinking courses, which consider ideas and material spanning several

“ The more interdependent the world becomes, the more we rely on collaborators and orchestrators who are able to join others in work and life.”

Andreas Schleicher,  
Director, OECD

disciplines, and we have several teachers comfortable in different subject areas too.

Our aim is to further develop interdisciplinary elements into the curriculum, through interdepartmental projects, collaboration of subjects over events and content (for example History and English working together to study the First World War). More recently, one of our Enrichment Week activities included a project for the local community that brought together geography, film-making, biology, grassroots activism, history, art and a significant level of independent work.

Enrichment Week also saw the commencement of an interdisciplinary approach to the Creative Arts, with students working across year groups, and across departments to portray the epic poem Beowulf. Drama, Art, English, Film Making, Puppetry and Tech all came together to create an exhibition, depicting all the elements of the poem.

This interdisciplinary approach sits well with modern university expectations; we notice the rise in popularity of very IB-friendly Combined Honours and interdisciplinary courses, as well as Liberal Arts, which our students are increasingly attracted to for their Higher Education choices.

### 3. DIGITAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Because of our status as a leading IB World School and our international character generally, schools with a similar ethos to ours are spread out across the world. We are more likely to have constructive conversations and productive projects with



IB schools in another country than with an A-Level school five miles away.

We look forward to seeing this strand develop in scope and status. Our aim is to develop effective exchange between members of staff on things such as best teaching practice, whilst also allowing a way for students to interact with, and develop links with, students from global schools. We also see opportunity for us to collaborate on learning projects with international schools, and foster notions of intercultural understanding and interest in matters of local, national and international concern. The work currently being done to look at Sevenoaks Online will support and underpin this, and our ongoing IT project with Labster will further support our digital approach to learning.

### 4. CURRICULUM OUTREACH

Curriculum Continuum within the school can go further. We can work with our partner primary and prep schools and other IBSCA schools to improve quality of provision and pace of innovation.

This will include the continued development of working links with local and international schools, the development of more theme-based events (eg Science Week), workshops for teachers and student-led meetings and conferences with other schools. This year, we have hosted or facilitated over 90 events for local schools, with over 50 of them being aimed at teacher development and training.

The development of Sevenoaks Online, which will be an interactive digital way of sharing and promoting our curriculum to other schools, will potentially give us franchise or white label options and maximise our outreach activity.

### 5. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Institutional change can be hard to achieve. The school has a dedicated team looking at future classroom ideas, and innovative teaching, learning and social spaces.

Partnerships will be established with leading UK and international universities, and with other educational research establishments, including advisory boards such as the Institute of Education.

Currently we are exploring new ways of assessment and reporting for student progress, and the team are debating issues such as ‘What’s the point of school exams?’, ‘What constitutes meaningful homework?’, ‘Should we change our reporting and assessment methods to align them more closely with our modern curriculum?’ and so on.

We are also keen to make the most of our exploit and innovation with IB knowledge and curriculum design, and hope to host bi-annual teaching and learning type conferences here and abroad. The ongoing forging of relationships with like-minded schools will facilitate this.