ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

25 to 27 March 2025

Sevenoaks Preparatory School

Fawke Cottage

Godden Green

Sevenoaks

Kent

TN15 0JU

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors maintain effective oversight of school leaders' work. They offer an appropriate balance of challenge and support to leaders and so ensure that the Standards are met consistently. Leaders have suitable knowledge and skills to carry out their roles as required. School policies and procedures are followed systematically. The strong focus on pupils' wellbeing reflects the school's ethos. Pupils are well prepared for the next stages in their education and future lives.

2. Regular reviews secure continuous improvements in the school's academic and pastoral provision. Consequently, the broad and varied curriculum is responsive to pupils' needs and their learning is relevant to life in modern British society.

3. Pupils' needs and abilities are typically well understood. Staff use assessment information to plan learning appropriately overall. As a result, pupils achieve well over their time in the school.

4. Teachers are knowledgeable in their subjects. Overall, they use this knowledge effectively, including, for example, to pose challenging questions in discussions with pupils, in workbooks and in guiding pupils to extend their learning. As a result, most pupils think deeply as they build creative responses to tasks. Typically, teachers support pupils well to apply their understanding to new ideas, to become curious learners and to reflect critically. Overall, pupils enjoy their learning. However, occasionally, activities are not matched as closely as they could be to the things that pupils know and can do. At times, a few pupils who could achieve more are set work that is too easy. When this happens, these pupils do not make as much progress as they could.

5. The early years curriculum is consistently well delivered. Books and stories are at the heart of children's learning. Teachers model reading, discuss the word choices of authors appropriately and encourage children to use increasingly ambitious vocabulary. As a result, children develop effective literacy and communication skills.

6. The school's revised behaviour policy is still embedding. Regular monitoring aims to ensure that staff apply the policy expectations consistently. The school's values, as expressed in its 'Way of Life' vision, are woven through the curriculum. These values guide pupils to think of others and to respect different views. As a result, most pupils behave well, showing and appreciating kindness.

7. The school's premises are well maintained. Health and safety procedures, including fire safety, are well managed. Pupils are supervised effectively. Risk assessments and thorough reviews of any incidents arising lead to improved practice. Staff are appropriately trained for their roles, including in first aid.

8. Leaders ensure a positive safeguarding culture in the school. They provide relevant information to parents in line with the school's aims. This includes signposting potential risks to pupils and highlighting where available support and guidance can be obtained. Staff respond rapidly to concerns. This means that pupils get the support and help they need if they are worried.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that teachers deliver learning that is consistently well matched to pupil's needs and abilities so that pupils are supported to achieve their full potential routinely across subjects.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders at all levels work effectively together to maintain standards. They act responsively to continue to improve the quality of the school's offer. Their knowledge and skills support well-informed decisions when changes are needed. Regular monitoring underpins successful improvement actions. These include, for example, thorough audits that result in pupils' enhanced learning on diversity and inclusion. Further actions focus on developments in how spelling is taught across the curriculum and the implementation of the revised behaviour policy. These ongoing improvements ensure that, overall, leaders' high ambition for pupils' achievement is realised.

10. The curriculum is appropriately matched to pupils' diverse interests. Effective support is in place when required. Pupils' wellbeing is a priority in any actions taken. They thrive because of well-designed and effectively implemented programmes. Consequently, the school's vision to 'challenge all, embrace opportunity and fulfil potential' is typically achieved.

11. Any potential risks to pupils, staff and visitors are managed effectively. The associated policy is followed. The effectiveness of risk management actions is reviewed systematically. Leaders look for any trends and patterns that may need further intervention. Suitable risk assessments are in place for all aspects of the school's offer, including trips and activities. Staff are appropriately trained to manage risk in line with their roles and responsibilities. Risk monitoring is embedded effectively in the school's development planning process.

12. Leaders' strategic vision is well communicated and aligned closely with the school's ethos, known as its 'Way of Life'. This ethos underpins school policies. It is embedded in the curriculum and all aspects of the school's work. As a result, pupils build positive interpersonal and personal behaviours, including respect for and kindness towards others. They understand the importance of developing self-knowledge and self-esteem for their own physical health and mental wellbeing.

13. The school's website provides the required information, including school policies and procedures. A wealth of additional information for parents promotes a positive approach to keeping pupils safe. Parents receive regular reports about their children's progress. The school keeps suitable records of any complaints if they arise. These are managed appropriately in line with the policy.

14. The school has a detailed accessibility policy in place. Comprehensive guidance ensures that staff are equipped to provide effective support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

15. The school's early years offer is well led and managed. Leaders give clear guidance to staff through effective supervision and planning. Well-considered approaches create a stimulating teaching and learning environment focused on children's needs and interests. Most children achieve well. They enjoy their learning and are ready for future challenges as they progress further up the pre-prep school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The school's broad and diverse curriculum includes outdoor learning, critical thinking and, from Year 3, French and Spanish. It is well supported by the planned programme of trips and visits, as well as through the range of sporting, creative and academic clubs and activities. These activities include fencing, judo, street dance, engineering, robotics and orchestra. Pupils build their knowledge and skills while exploring their chosen interests. The curriculum ensures that they are well prepared for their next steps in education.

18. Pupils' learning is mostly effectively planned and delivered, including through teachers' use of information from the school's regular programme of assessment. Well-considered resources include, for example, individually designed workbooks in some subjects. Activities allow pupils to build their knowledge effectively on the foundations of previous learning. Most pupils are confident to apply what they know to new learning. Consequently, they make good progress, enjoy their learning and respond creatively to the challenges set.

19. Most teachers give pupils clear instructions and helpful guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils are encouraged to think deeply about their learning, so they achieve well. Occasionally, teachers do not use their prior knowledge of what pupils can do to plan learning precisely, so some pupils' progress slows. Where learning and activities are well matched to pupils' needs and interests, pupils respond well. When occasionally tasks are set that are too easy for some pupils, low-level distracting actions by a few pupils can affect their peers' learning.

20. Positive relationships encourage pupils to engage appropriately in debate and discussion. As a result, they are confident to share their views and ideas with others. Pupils enjoy reading in lessons and for pleasure. In the early years, children learn their letters and sounds enthusiastically. They build the knowledge and skills to decode complex words quickly. The early years curriculum includes many opportunities to incorporate stories into play and into planned activities. Early years staff know their children well. They share information about children's learning. Staff use this effectively to identify individual needs and to adapt plans accordingly. As a result, children make good progress. Effective role-play activities encourage children to engage and talk to one another in imaginary scenarios, such as visiting the doctor. Staff model the use of language appropriately, so children extend and develop their vocabulary. Children are guided skilfully to participate in activities to continue to build on their prior learning. This means that they progress quickly, including from mark-making to early letter formation.

21. In the pre-prep school, teachers have high expectations for pupils' reading and writing. Teachers' knowledge of different writing styles ensures that pupils in Year 1, for example, understand the features associated with news stories. Across the school, these high expectations are typically reflected in most pupils' articulate responses to questions, as well as in their effectively structured and well-argued points in essays. For example, older pupils use sophisticated subject-specific vocabulary in science and humanities discussions. Ambitious tasks encourage pupils to be inquisitive and questioning.

22. Teachers have access to appropriately disseminated information from staff with oversight of provision for pupils who have SEND. This information underpins the planning of suitable interventions to support these pupils, in class or through group and one-to-one sessions. Close

monitoring ensures that interventions are effective. These strategies, implemented by well-trained staff, ensure that overall pupils achieve well.

23. Staff use relevant information about pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) effectively. This includes helpful guidance on appropriate support to give in class. Most pupils who speak EAL have functional spoken and written English language skills. However, where necessary, some pupils have additional resources which support them to learn successfully. These include, for example, word banks and picture clues. In the early years, children who speak EAL are supported through a tailored home/school programme. Consequently, they progress well in developing their language skills and access the early years curriculum effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

25. Personal social, health and economic (PSHE) education, including relationships and sex education (RSE), is taught effectively through wellbeing lessons. The programme is adapted to address pupils' needs as they change over time.

26. Pupils have opportunities to revisit important wellbeing and RSE themes, so they can apply their knowledge to a variety of contexts, including through different subjects. In humanities, for example, pupils are encouraged to make comparisons with the values of today's society and those of different time periods. In doing so, pupils challenge historic aspects of thinking about diversity and inclusion, further developing their understanding about how and where stereotypes can be formed. The curriculum ensures that pupils are prepared effectively for their lives in British culture.

27. Positive behaviours are well promoted. Wellbeing topics include opportunities for pupils to reflect on the impact of discriminatory language and actions. They learn how to manage their behaviour appropriately, while developing a good understanding of how to build effective relationships. Relevant use of specialist staff, such as the school nurse, enhances RSE teaching and learning. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of how their bodies change over time and the emotional impact these changes can have.

28. The extensive sporting opportunities in the curriculum and co-curricular programme ensure that pupils develop a range of physical skills. Positive attitudes to physical health are promoted, for example, through outdoor learning. Pupils are physically active as a result. They understand the importance of physical activity in supporting emotional wellbeing. Pupils build an age-appropriate understanding of the factors that may have an adverse effect on health through their learning in science and in wellbeing sessions.

29. In the early years, well-considered resources and play equipment underpin activities that are planned with children's interests in mind. Children have space and time to move and as a result they develop core strength and balance appropriately. Specialist staff teach specific sports skills effectively. Their strong subject knowledge secures children's good progress as they develop, for example, co-ordination and ball-handling skills.

30. Early years staff are attentive to children's emotional needs. Consistent routines and positive nurturing relationships support children's wellbeing. In turn, this helps them to learn how to regulate their emotions.

31. The school's programme of trips and visits enriches the curriculum alongside a wide range of clubs and activities. As a result, pupils explore and expand their wider interests. Clubs include, for example, opportunities for some pupils to make mini-television shows or podcasts for the rest of the school community. Consequently, they broaden their taught subject skills and knowledge further. In the 'Junior Duke' programme, younger pupils apply their skills independently as they develop their self-esteem and confidence.

32. Pupils learn about different world faiths and share their own faiths with others. They understand how faith guides decision-making, underpins rules and influences attitudes to concepts such as

forgiveness. Pupils develop respect for individual differences, including different value systems and the people who believe in them.

33. The school's 'Way of Life' ethos enables pupils to develop a positive understanding of their own attributes. Affirming relationships with staff further build self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils understand that kindness to one another should be at the heart of relationships. They reflect on any minor behaviour issues in this context.

34. Staff are alert to any serious behaviour traits and concerns, including bullying. Substantiated bullying concerns are rare. When necessary, they are recorded and dealt with appropriately and swiftly by staff. The school adapts its behaviour policy to consider the needs of all pupils, including those pupils who have SEND.

35. The school premises provide the required facilities and accommodation, including when pupils are unwell or require first aid. Procedures to ensure health and safety follow school policy. Staff are appropriately trained and qualified in line with their roles. This includes suitable numbers of staff trained in paediatric first aid. Accidents are recorded and the associated logs are reviewed. Effective changes are implemented where needed in response to any patterns noted. Maintenance is planned systematically and enacted in an efficient and timely manner. Staff ensure that a regular fire risk assessment is undertaken. Any resulting recommendations are acted on efficiently and appropriately. Fire prevention equipment and systems are suitably maintained. Evacuations are practised regularly, evaluated and recorded. Leaders ensure that sufficient staff are deployed so that pupils are supervised safely, including in the early years.

36. Staff complete and maintain the attendance and admission registers in line with statutory guidance. The required information is reported to the local authority about pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard times.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

38. The school's ethos and 'Way of Life' sets a standard for helping others. Pupils give their time, interests and talents as part of the school's Oak Award. They support local initiatives, for example, in raising awareness of and mitigating against the environmental challenges for the local toad population. Leaders place great value on the ideas and opinions expressed by pupils. From Year 2, for example, pupils participate in the school council. This leads to positive changes, such as installing new goalposts and redesigning the playground. Year 7 pupils are trained to be 'buddies' for Year 2 pupils. All Year 8 pupils are prefects. The school council makes decisions that inform the selection of charities. They organise relevant fund-raising activities. Pupils influence changes in school processes. They know that their opinions are valued as they learn to be actively responsible citizens.

39. In the early years, children celebrate festivals such as Diwali. They begin to understand the diverse cultures of British society through imaginary play, including with dolls from different backgrounds, and through well-chosen story books.

40. Pupils experience careers education through the 'world of work' topic and the wellbeing curriculum from Year 3. This is supplemented in humanities and science through the careers highlighted at the end of each unit. A range of wider career options are promoted in displays around the school. Wellbeing topics from Year 6 include a more formalised programme, with regular monthly visits from motivational speakers and a spring term careers fair. Year 8 prefects each have staff mentors who encourage regular reflection on personal and leadership skills. This integrated approach ensures that pupils are prepared well to make informed choices about the next stages of their education.

41. Economic awareness is taught effectively, for example, through calculations involving money in mathematics. The wellbeing curriculum includes a well-planned series of topics on money management and the world of finance. Economic education is also integrated into subject teaching, such as in geography when Year 6 pupils apply their economic knowledge to discuss the benefits and pitfalls of living near a volcano. From Year 3, pupils start wellbeing topics with a review of what they know and what they would like to learn. Staff adapt learning effectively to follow pupils' interests. They ensure that any gaps in knowledge are appropriately filled. Consequently, pupils achieve well.

42. Pupils apply their learning on rights and responsibilities to reflect on the ways in which different people are treated in society. Year 6 pupils, for example, reflect on the impact of slavery through a study of Josiah Wedgwood, as well as The Factory Act, work on the development of the British Empire and colonialism. They apply their understanding of the rule of law and the impact of decisions in Parliament. In Year 8, pupils reflect on the role of the monarchy in law-making, for example, in essays such as those considering the rule of King John. Appropriately chosen class reading books support pupils to understand the plight of refugees. Pupils develop positive attitudes to a diverse society. They understand the importance of respectful relationships, the impact of racism and the importance of appreciating different views and experiences.

43. Well-planned learning includes opportunities for collaboration where appropriate. Pupils also have many opportunities to co-operate outside lessons. In year group plays, for example, they develop positive social skills and learn how to work effectively with and for others.

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The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Statutory requirements are met. Governors are trained appropriately in safeguarding matters. They are suitably aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, including to ensure that internet filtering and monitoring systems are effective. The school's safeguarding practice is checked systematically. Pupils' attendance is monitored closely. Governors complete formal reviews of safeguarding policy and associated practice at various points throughout the year.

46. The oversight of safeguarding by governors includes a review of recruitment procedures, the accuracy of the pre-employment checks noted on the single central record of appointments (SCR) and the impact of staff training. Review findings are reported back to the full board and the safeguarding committee. Governors offer appropriate support and challenge. They continue to ensure that effective safeguarding arrangements are securely focused on pupils' wellbeing.

47. The school's safeguarding leaders are suitably trained and experienced. Detailed records are kept of any concerns raised. The resulting action is appropriate and swiftly enacted. When necessary, advice and guidance from specialists in the local authority is sought and followed. Effective communication is maintained with external safeguarding partners to ensure that pupils get the help and support that they need.

48. The safeguarding policy is suitably comprehensive, clear and well organised. Information is easy to find. The policy offers appropriate guidance to staff, including needs-specific guidance for the early years. Staff training is thorough. Their knowledge is tested regularly to ensure they are confident to apply the required procedures. Consequently, safeguarding practice is embedded in the school's culture. In line with policy requirements, staff record the detail of any concerns about pupils, or about adults working in the school. This includes any low-level concerns related to staff. Appropriate actions are taken as needed.

49. Opportunities to discuss safety are built into subject and wellbeing lessons. This means that pupils understand how to keep safe in different situations, including when working online. Staff monitor internet use appropriately, supported by the school's filtering and monitoring system. Pupils have access to a variety of methods to raise any worries or concerns. They know which staff have special safeguarding responsibilities. Well-implemented procedures support pupils' safety and welfare effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Sevenoaks Preparatory School
DfE number	886/6015
Registered charity number	1100021
Address	Sevenoaks Preparatory School Fawke Cottage Godden Green Sevenoaks Kent TN15 0JU
Telephone number	01732 762336
Email address	admin@theprep.org.uk
Headteacher	Mr Luke Harrison
Proprietor	Sevenoaks Preparatory School Ltd
Chair of governors	Ms Janette Berry
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	357
Date of previous inspection	22 to 25 March 2022

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Information about the school

51. Sevenoaks Preparatory School is a co-educational day school. The school is divided into sections, including a pre-prep for children in the early years and those in Years 1 and 2, and a prep for those in Years 3 to 8. It was founded in 1919 and became an educational trust in 2003. The school is a charitable trust, whose trustees act as the governing body.

52. There are 95 children in the early years in three classes, Nursery, Kindergarten and Reception.

53. The school has identified 68 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

54. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 53 pupils.

55. The school states its aims are to provide strong pastoral care, nurture each child and support parents and children alike, to understand that children are individuals who mature and different times and in different ways, and to encourage children to work and play according to the 'Way of Life'.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	25 to 27 March 2025

56. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

57. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

58. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

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- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
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