

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

South Lee School

Full Name of the School	South Lee School
DfES Number	935/6025
Registered Charity Number	310491
Address	Nowton Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 2BT
Telephone Number	01284 754654
Fax Number	01254 706178
Email Address	office@southlee.co.uk
Headmaster	Mr Derek Whipp
Chairman of Governors	Mr Anthony Holliday
Age Range	2-13
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	30th October – 2nd November, 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 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.

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

1.1 South Lee School was founded in 1961 and operates as a charitable trust, of which all parents are members. At least five governors must be current parents. The current head has been in post since 1997.

1.2 The school is situated on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds. Pupils are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds in an area bounded by Newmarket, Sudbury, Stowmarket, and

Thetford. Pupils leave to a range of day and boarding independent schools, and to maintained schools in the area.

1.3 The school provides day education for both boys and girls aged from 2 to 13 years of age. At the time of the inspection, there were a total of 302 pupils, of whom 154 were boys and 148 were girls. One full-time and 59 part-time pupils were in the nursery, for pupils up to age 4. One hundred and eight were in the pre-prep department, for pupils in Reception and Years 1 to 3. One hundred and thirty-four were in the prep department, for pupils in Years 4 to 8.

1.4 The school is largely non-selective, though pupils are admitted after a broad-based assessment to ensure they can benefit from the education the school offers. As a result, the range of ability is wide but above average overall. At the time of the inspection, 47 pupils were identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), but none had a statement of special educational needs. One pupil came from a home where English was not the first language but spoke English fluently.

1.5 The school aims 'to provide an all-round education for its pupils, pursuing high standards within the bounds of each child's ability, fostering respect and a sense of community, and providing a supportive 'family' environment in which children can feel happy and appreciated.'

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

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

2.1 The school successfully fulfils its aim of providing an all-round education for its pupils through a broadly balanced curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Since the last inspection in 2000, the school has improved the guidance for curricular planning so that comprehensive plans are now produced; the time allocation for subjects is now well-balanced between year groups and parallel classes.

2.2 The education pupils receive successfully contributes to all aspect of their development. The curriculum for those in Nursery and Reception places due emphasis on each of the early learning goals. For pupils in the rest of the school, their literacy skills are developed in many ways. In addition to the time spent on formal skills, further stimulus is provided by a poetry anthology, started in Year 4, and by a verse speaking competition in Years 3 to 8; drama is included in English lessons and, along with music, enables pupils of all ages to take part in annual productions. Linguistic development is further extended by the teaching of French from age five and Spanish from age 11; in addition, Latin and Japanese are offered in clubs.

2.3 Mathematical development is encouraged through activities in many areas of the curriculum, such as science and geography. Interesting opportunities for developing reasoning and problem-solving skills are provided, for example when pupils in Year 4 find patterns while investigating the relationships of numbers in tables. Science and technology are supported by a good time allocation, excellent resources and interesting trips, such as that to a chemical factory in Year 6. ICT is used well in most areas of the curriculum; extensive ICT facilities include interactive whiteboards as well as two ICT suites.

2.4 Pupils' broader education is well supported in the curriculum. They learn from interesting debates and from the use of artefacts in history and geography. They have exciting opportunities for developing their creativity through art and design; an extensive and imaginative range of displays stimulates pupils' aesthetic awareness. Physical development is given a high priority by a generous time allocation for physical education and games, and by the use of local facilities, such as the adjacent county cricket field and local park; the latter is used for environmental studies as well as for the all-weather hockey pitch. The school seeks to ensure that most pupils have an opportunity to represent the school in matches, whatever their ability. A good

variety of non-sport options is available for those not wishing to participate in sporting events. Pupils also benefit from a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE).

2.5 A wide range of high quality extra-curricular activities and visits significantly enhances pupils' learning in many areas and broadens their educational horizons. Pupils talk enthusiastically about both their participation in team events and their individual successes. In addition, all pupils have the opportunity to participate in the annual music and drama productions, with pupils in the pre-prep having two productions each year. However, whilst opportunities in sport are excellent, those in music are more restricted due to limited staffing. Other activities include a photo and film club, which brings together art and ICT; pupils taking part in this won an award for a film they made last year. Activities also include academic pursuits, such as chess and ecology. A residential trip in Years 7 and 8 successfully extends pupils' geographical knowledge, as well as enhancing their personal development. Other trips include places of local historical interest, such as the abbey ruins and cathedral, and the Imperial War Museum.

2.6 Pupils of all ages are very well prepared for the next stages in their education. Each year-group spends some time with their next year's teacher before the start of the new academic year. Some prep teachers teach in the pre-prep department, so that Year 3 pupils are familiar with them; these daily links, together with careful discussions and planning, enable a smooth transition into Year 4. Pupils are well prepared for Common Entrance at 11+ and 13+. Formal and informal discussions help pupils to feel happy and confident when they move to their senior schools. For example, teachers and pupils from senior schools visit South Lee to talk to the leaving pupils. Pupils' strong personal development, and their well-developed ability to think and reason, all help them to progress more easily to their next school.

2.7 Curricular planning has improved considerably since the last inspection. All subjects now have detailed policies, with comprehensive long- and medium-term plans. Key priorities are clearly stated. Weekly plans ensure that all pupils' needs are met, with the best plans including the relevant pupils' individual development plans. Much improved assessment procedures are used effectively in all stages of curricular planning.

2.8 Positive help is provided for pupils in need either of support or of extension by the individual development department. Thorough assessment procedures are used from the early stages of the school, so that pupils with learning difficulties are quickly identified and given support. The strong team of committed specialists create individual development plans (IDPs) for these pupils, in consultation with class teachers. The register of pupils with IDPs identifies where help is needed for particular pupils, so that teachers can provide appropriate support in lessons. Specialist teachers take group lessons before and during the school day, and one-to-one support lessons are also available where necessary. In addition, pupils with learning difficulties are often supported during class lessons by teaching assistants or other teachers. In examples of the best practice, IDPs are readily accessible with short-term plans for constant reference, enabling the teacher to provide appropriate tasks in class activities.

2.9 A gifted and talented register identifies pupils who are gifted in English and mathematics, although not in other subjects. Pupils identified as talented in music, drama, sport or art and design, are directed to suitable opportunities for activities outside school, as well as taking part in activities which will develop their skills in school.

2.10 Currently no pupils need support for English as an additional language.

2.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

2.12 In accordance with its aims, pupils achieve good standards across all aspects of the curriculum, especially towards the top of the school. They develop considerable maturity in their

approach to their learning. Pupils' progress has improved since the last inspection.

2.13 Pupils make an excellent start in the nursery and progress well as they move up through the school, achieving particularly well in Years 7 and 8. By the time they leave the school, pupils produce sensitive and descriptive writing, which shows a subtle grasp of nuance and meaning. Well-developed numeracy skills, combined with the ability to think confidently and critically about unfamiliar situations, enable them to solve problems in mathematics. They show an excellent understanding of scientific concepts, ranging from the periodic table to the particulate nature of matter. They understand key issues in world affairs, such as the difference between developed and developing countries, and grasp the significance of different characters in biblical stories. Their artwork combines an appreciation of the nature and importance of design with both technical skill and bold execution. Physical skills are similarly well developed.

2.14 The ablest pupils are challenged most fully at the top of the school, where they benefit, in particular, from greater opportunities for independent work and thus take more ownership of their learning. Less able pupils, and those to whom some aspects of learning are more difficult, generally progress well as a result of the individual support they receive, although in a few lessons they fall behind their more confident colleagues when work is too hard for them.

2.15 The analysis of standardised data shows that pupils make good progress during their time at school. As a result of this progress, pupils are successful in their applications to senior schools. In recent years, all pupils have gained places at their first choice schools and a good number each year win scholarships.

2.16 Pupils also achieve much through individual and group activities. They develop their individual talents through participating in drama examinations, language competitions and mathematics challenges; they also develop their talents in partnership with others through success in sports teams at local, regional and national levels, as well as through participation in musical, dramatic and other events at school.

2.17 Pupils' learning is supported by their ability with the written and spoken word. They write independently in a wide variety of genres across the curriculum, and employ a wide general and specialist vocabulary. They talk fluently and confidently, whilst listening to others and taking their views into account. They explain technical issues clearly and use subtle word-play to inspire their work in art.

2.18 Pupils make good use of their mathematical skills, for instance plotting graphs in science. They use a wide range of ICT software to extend their learning across the curriculum, for example, using the internet for research and other programmes to improve the presentation of ideas. With their teachers, they are beginning to take advantage of the potential provided by the use of interactive whiteboards.

2.19 Older pupils gain a great deal of enjoyment from solving problems or thinking through issues for themselves. Pupils learn to find patterns in data, and often devise their own strategies for tackling the unfamiliar. They show considerable imagination, and respond well when asked to produce ideas of their own. For example, artwork conveys a strong sense of fun and excitement, combined with care and attention to detail; in it, pupils have the confidence to create bold, vital work that is very much their own. Similarly, they write independently and creatively about a range of issues and respond with enthusiasm to the range of challenges and quizzes posted around the school.

2.20 In some lessons, younger pupils have more limited opportunities for independent research; for example, Year 3 pupils are not familiar with the principles of fair testing. Older pupils show confidence when working independently and take increasing responsibility for their own learning. They collaborate well, whether in pairs or larger groups, often learning from each other or giving each other help.

2.21 Whatever the task, pupils settle and apply themselves well, are almost always committed and enthusiastic, keen to be involved and respond well to questions and activities in class. They clearly enjoy their learning and only occasionally does their interest flag, when an activity continues for too long or is not of sufficient interest. Even the youngest pupils enjoy a challenge; for example, pupils in Reception were keen to write in Arabic.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

2.22 Pupils develop well spiritually, morally and culturally, and their social development is outstanding, thus fulfilling the school's aims of instilling in them self-reliance, responsibility and respect. This emphasis on pupils' personal development has continued to be a strength since the last inspection.

2.23 Pupils' spiritual development is shown mainly by the sensitivity, self-confidence and self-esteem they develop, in part through the school's recognition of their wide-ranging achievements. They become willing to tackle unfamiliar problems independently. They develop increasing sensitivity to the range of human experience, relating to elderly people with blindness or loss of memory when visiting a residential care home. They relate to truths in the Christian story, whether considering Jesus' feelings in the Garden of Gethsemane, or writing harvest prayers written in Year 3. One pupil wrote in the school magazine how being caught up in the Indian Ocean tsunami made her value life so much more; elsewhere pupils appreciate the wonder of the natural world through science.

2.24 From an early age, pupils' growing moral awareness enables them to distinguish right from wrong, both in their behaviour around the school and in their understanding of their responsibility towards the needs of others. These issues are reinforced in assemblies, PSHE lessons and circle time. Debates in history and geography improve pupils' appreciation of their wider responsibilities, such as to the environment or to those in much poorer parts of the world. Staff provide excellent role models.

2.25 Pupils' outstanding social responsibility is developed in the first place by the excellent relationships they have, both with staff and with each other. It is further encouraged by class and school responsibilities and by the school council, which includes representatives from every class, and which takes a sensible approach to school issues. The different age groups are also brought together in lunch and through the house system. They also learn teamwork and to care for their fellows through taking part in residential trips.

2.26 Pupils are unfailingly courteous and well-mannered; friendliness and helpfulness are apparent throughout the school. Pupils understand that all must play their part in any community, whether in school or outside. However, although they are aware of key roles in society, such as the police and fire service who visit the school, the PSHE programme makes insufficient provision for pupils to develop a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England. As a result, whilst pupils show some understanding of the history of parliament, those in Year 7 were unable to explain the roles played by local councillors, MPs or parliament today.

2.27 Pupils' cultural awareness is well developed; they appreciate the values and beliefs of their own and other cultures. Events in the Christian calendar are celebrated in assembly and discussed in religious education lessons; work around the school shows they also appreciate the significance of festivals such as Eid and Divali in other faiths. Pupils are encouraged to bring their own wider experience, for example of visiting a Buddhist temple in Thailand while on holiday. Music from the Caribbean and literature from China extend their appreciation of culture beyond their own European experience, which they gain from much of the art and music they study in school.

2.28 The school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:

(a) provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England [Regulation 2.(d)].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

2.29 Teaching is good at all stages of the school; it is most consistently good in Years 7 and 8, and enables pupils of all abilities to progress well. The occasional unsatisfactory lesson, which was a feature of the last inspection, has been eliminated and the quality of teaching has improved overall. The use of assessment has improved. The school meets its aim of developing the full potential of each individual well.

2.30 Teaching is based on very thorough subject knowledge, enabling teachers to explain difficult ideas clearly and to know how skills and understanding are best built up. Teachers also know their pupils well, and relationships between teachers and their pupils are excellent.

2.31 Teaching is well planned and provides for a wide variety of activities to support learning including, in most cases, a suitable amount of group work as well as individual activity. Cross-curricular links broaden pupils' learning, ensuring that what is learned in one lesson is reinforced in another; for example, work in history in Year 2 on cave-men provided an excellent stimulus for work outdoors using sticks and natural materials to make 'cave paintings'. Most lessons have a lively pace, and the best move from one activity to another without loss of momentum. Only occasionally do pupils lose attention as a result of too long a period of a single activity; equally, in a few lessons, too much copying of information restricts pupils' opportunities to develop personal study skills. Teaching makes good use of resources, including interactive whiteboards. Behaviour is managed well in almost all lessons. Homework is set appropriately.

2.32 In many lessons, teachers provide well for pupils' differing needs. Carefully targeted questioning checks the understanding of less able pupils, whilst challenging the more able. Extension sheets provide an additional challenge for some, while individual support for others who find new ideas difficult enables them to maintain a good pace alongside their colleagues. Classroom assistants make a valuable contribution in this respect. In a few lessons, which are often but not always in the middle years, identical tasks set to pupils of all abilities do not provide appropriate challenge for the most able or cause weaker pupils to struggle.

2.33 Almost all teaching challenges pupils to develop their own thinking and ideas, especially in Years 7 and 8 where expectations are highest. Members of the Fiction Club are encouraged to deepen their understanding of characterization, while stimulating teaching in Year 7 enables pupils to develop a mature understanding of poetry. Progressively harder work in many mathematics lessons helps pupils develop problem-solving skills. Throughout the school, art teaching encourages pupils to develop their own style and approach, whilst building up their technique. In other subjects, opportunities for independent work, such as research, are not provided consistently but increase as pupils move towards the top of the school; for example, pupils in Year 7 research animals and their environment and those in Year 8 research the properties of the elements.

2.34 Marking, for the most part, is encouraging, stimulating and helpful, giving pupils a clear idea of where they have got to and how they might improve. Only occasionally, does it provide too little guidance or miss important mistakes. Elsewhere it is of high quality. In addition, pupils say that verbal feedback provides a valuable complement to comments in their books. The school has made an excellent start on setting targets which, in many cases, are evaluated by the pupils themselves.

2.35 The school now makes much greater use of assessment to guide planning and to track pupils' progress. Pupils with LDD are identified early and monitored closely. Data from standardised tests are used well and, combined with a good deal of informal discussion amongst staff, enables all to be aware of any problems a pupil may experience. For example, weekly staff meetings are used to change targets set to individuals.

2.36 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 Pastoral care is outstanding. The school has maintained a high quality of care since the last inspection and meets its aim to provide a supportive, family environment, in which pupils can feel happy and appreciated. Conscientious attention is paid to every aspect of pupils' welfare, health and safety and a caring atmosphere prevails throughout the whole school.

3.2 Staff provide outstanding support and guidance for all pupils. From their arrival in the morning, when they are warmly welcomed at registration, staff provide pupils with a happy, secure and supportive environment, which is much appreciated by pupils and parents alike. This very positive environment is created by the school's overriding ethos that all pupils have talents, and that it is the school's duty to nurture and foster them. For example, the head talks to pupils about their achievements on a regular basis, thus developing their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils are given strong guidance and know exactly what to do if they need support. They are confident that staff care for them and feel able to confide in staff should they experience difficulties. They are thus confident that they will be enabled to deal with any problems they may face, whether concerning school life, or elsewhere.

3.3 Staff are assisted by excellent pastoral arrangements. From the Nursery to Year 5, support is provided through class teachers; in Years 6 to 8, a strong and well-staffed house system provides a vertically grouped tutorial system which creates worthwhile links and social integration in the upper part of the school. These links are further encouraged through 'family' groupings for meals at lunch time. Pastoral lists giving information about current pastoral needs are issued at the beginning of terms and discussions of pupils at regular staff meetings keep all staff up-to-date with their needs.

3.4 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils is exceptional; relations between pupils and staff are characterised by warmth and humour. Staff are frequently to be seen chatting to pupils as they walk together around the school and pupils say 'we can talk to any member of staff'. Similarly, pupils feel that there is a good rapport between pupils: 'we are all really good friends'. Strategies such as the vertically grouped house system and the encouragement of mixing between parallel classes in Years 2 and 3 ensure that the school has a broad social base.

3.5 The school is proactive in promoting good relationships; for example, the buddy bench provides pupils with the opportunity to talk with others when feeling excluded in the playground. Participation by staff in school events ensures warm relations with pupils; for example, the head recently joined the Spanish class in Years 7 and 8 and he visits every class in the pre-prep to give out merit marks.

3.6 The school is successful in promoting good discipline and behaviour. It has robust procedures to guard against harassment and bullying, and deals constructively with unacceptable behaviour on the rare occasions when it occurs. Pupils and staff feel that bullying is not an issue but are confident that the school would deal with it should it arise. Similarly, it has appropriate procedures for managing disciplinary issues, and classes have their own codes of conduct. Merit and house marks are given for good behaviour, as well as for good work. PSHE lessons provide an effective forum for discussing social issues, such as how to handle peer pressure.

3.7 The school has well-developed arrangements for dealing with child protection issues. Staff are up-to-date in their training and the school takes advantage of a governor with professional experience in this field, who oversees it for the governors. The school is also well aware of pupils' other needs. For example, it has been involved in local initiatives in fitness and diet, and provides lunches of good quality and choice, which pupils enjoy. A large number of staff hold first-aid qualifications, with two at the higher level; a well qualified matron trains staff in medical

procedures as well as providing nursing cover. Pupils are well supervised around the school.

3.8 All necessary measures have been taken to protect against fire and to carry out checks and practices. The deputy head reports at each governors' meeting on health and safety issues, and risk assessments are carried out for activities in school as well as for residential and other trips. The school has an appropriate policy for auditing and improving access for disabled pupils.

3.9 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

3.10 Links with parents and the community are strong. The school fulfils its aims to encourage positive relationships between home and school, as was the case at the last inspection.

3.11 The parents of about half the pupils responded to a questionnaire distributed before the inspection. Their responses showed that parents are extremely positive about the school; in particular, they appreciate the teaching, the curriculum, the support their children receive and pupils' behaviour. A number of parents expressed concern about the range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for parental involvement in the school. Inspectors considered that the range of activities was wide and opportunities for involvement generous.

3.12 Parents feel that communication is good and that they are welcome to speak to staff whenever necessary; parents are a very visible part of the school from day to day. They can attend school lunches from time to time, help on outings and join in social events for parents and children. The thriving parent-teacher association holds coffee mornings for new parents, as well as fund-raising events. Parents are much involved in the running of the school; many governors are current parents and almost all the rest were so previously. The school is a trust of which all parents are members; the annual general meeting gives all parents an opportunity to hear about the school from governors.

3.13 Parents receive regular information about the school through bulletins and posters in school. Informative detailed reports are sent home twice a year, which give a clear picture of what pupils have achieved, with many showing how they need to improve. Parents meetings are held regularly.

3.14 The school handles parental concerns with due care, and has appropriate procedures in place for handling formal complaints though these have not been invoked. The examination of typical correspondence showed that concerns raised by parents are handled promptly and effectively.

3.15 Contributing to the life of the wider community is important to the school. Regular visits are made to a nearby residential care home to sing, read and teach computing. In the very near future, disabled children will be using the school at weekends, hosted by pupils from Years 7 and 8; the school also organises sports tournaments for local schools. Pupils take part in local fundraising events and are encouraged to join local sports clubs. A good deal of money is raised by pupils for charities, both at home and abroad.

3.16 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].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

4.1 The high quality of governance enables the school to achieve its aim to provide a happy and secure environment in which pupils feel valued. The vibrant and supportive board of governors, together with its associated committees, are well informed and dedicated to ensuring that pupils receive a good quality education. Since the last inspection, they have maintained their close and constructive relationships with both senior management and staff, and they continue to play a

very active part in the daily life of the school.

4.2 Governors are hardworking and very committed to the school. They are experienced and well qualified, offering a wide variety of relevant skills and expertise. Their management responsibilities are clearly defined and enable members of the board, nearly all of whom have long-standing family links as past or present parents, to provide effective oversight of the school. The full board and its sub-committees meet regularly, with decisions guided by the detailed and high quality information provided by the head. Regular meetings include discussion of all aspects of school life, ensuring that its aims are successfully implemented.

4.3 Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities for monitoring the quality of the education the school provides, including how well it meets its aims, and whether it fulfils regulatory and legal requirements. They are kept well informed about educational developments within the school and work closely with the head to devise, implement and monitor overall strategies and development plans. Close liaison with the bursar supports sound financial planning and effective budgetary control. Governors play a leading role in building and planning issues to secure the school's longer term future and direction. They are generous with their time, not only providing strong support for the head but also acting effectively as a critical friend. A governor takes responsibility for overseeing child protection, and governors work closely with the school on health and safety issues.

4.4 It is clear that governors have a great interest in, and are very supportive of school management and staff. Through the unusually high contact they have with the school, governors talk regularly with staff, attend social functions, and become very familiar with what happens during the school day. As such they gain a very good insight into the working of the school. Governors are committed to the growth and development of the school. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and provide effective advice, support and challenge.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

4.5 The quality of leadership and management of the school is good. This provides the school with clear educational direction, which is reflected in the good educational standards achieved and the excellent quality of pastoral care. The criticisms from the last inspection have been very effectively acted upon. As a result of this quality of leadership, the school's aims are admirably fulfilled. The school has a very caring ethos and sense of purpose, which supports effective teaching and learning and values a wide range of achievement.

4.6 The head, supported by the governors and by other senior staff, offers well-informed and decisive leadership, effected through energy and dedication. This leadership shows a clear vision for the school's direction coupled with a determination to pursue the school's aims and values.

4.7 The management framework is well defined. In almost every respect, the quality of leadership and management at all levels of the school influences the teaching and learning environment effectively, as reflected in the positive ethos, the quality of teaching, the excellence of pastoral care and the pupils' good personal development. The senior management team has been recently reviewed and responsibilities for various areas of school life are delegated well. However, members of the senior management team have only limited time to fulfil their role; for example, the pre-prep coordinator has insufficient time to monitor teaching and learning throughout the pre-prep department. Similarly, although subject coordinators play an increasing role in the teaching of their subjects, their role is more in managing and supporting the curriculum than in monitoring standards.

4.8 Those with management responsibilities play a full role in decision making. Since the last inspection, senior managers have made notable progress in ensuring that the school's aims and values are reflected in policies and procedures. As recommended, a successful audit involving wide consultation has resulted in a careful analysis of the school's needs. Priorities have been identified and clear action plans drawn up and implemented. This has resulted in a development plan that is

realistic and focussed on identifying specific needs in all areas of school life. Each area is linked to financial requirements and given an appropriate timeframe.

4.9 The work of senior managers is supported by good strategies. They have a sound understanding of their role and are well aware of the strengths and areas for development within the area of their responsibility. Together they ensure decisions are put into practice. A strong sense of purpose throughout the school develops happy, self-confident pupils who, by the age of 13, are ready to move to the next stage of education.

4.10 Successful management is reflected in the hard work and commitment of the teachers and other staff, who are strongly committed to pupils' welfare and development. Excellent opportunities exist for professional development to support the school's needs and members of staff's own professional development; in turn many staff say this is a school they are pleased to stay at. The increased focus, since the last inspection, on self-evaluation and professional development has resulted in a well-established professional review system linked to the school's needs. This includes classroom observations to ensure that learning is monitored and progress evaluated so that, in turn, standards are raised and both teaching and learning improved. Appropriate and helpful arrangements are in place for the induction of staff new to the school and for newly qualified teachers. The required checks are made on all staff before an appointment is confirmed and appropriate records are kept.

4.11 Finances are well managed. The bursar works closely with the head and governors, and financial resources are monitored effectively to ensure they are deployed so as to meet pupils' needs. For example, staffing levels are good; nursery assistants make a particularly important contribution to the progress of the very youngest pupils. Good use is made of the accommodation and outside space, which is well maintained.

4.12 Communication within and beyond the school is particularly effective. It is facilitated by staffroom notices and bulletins, the school intranet and website. Communication between staff within and between the two sections of the school is good, for example enabling them to discuss subject policies and handbooks effectively. Administrative and other support staff are valued greatly and provide high quality assistance, ensuring the school day runs smoothly. The work of the non-teaching staff throughout the school is supportive, well-directed and makes an important contribution to the school.

4.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].

4.14 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 South Lee School is a vibrant community which meets its aims, and the needs of all its pupils, well. The broad curriculum, coupled with good teaching, enables pupils to achieve high standards and gain places at schools of their choice. The school's intention to provide a supportive 'family' environment in which children can feel happy and appreciated is fulfilled as it draws parents, pupils and teachers close together in their pursuit of learning and care for each other. Strong leadership gives the school a clear identity and sense of purpose in meeting these aims, though new arrangements for monitoring standards and managing the curriculum have yet to be fully established.

5.2 Since the last inspection, the school has improved curricular planning and the use of assessment. The quality of teaching has improved overall, along with pupils' progress. The school now has clear aims and a more focussed development plan. Some monitoring of teaching takes place, but senior managers still have too little time to fulfill all aspects of their roles.

5.3 The school complies with almost all of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present meet Standard 2 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils).

Next Steps

5.4 The school has no major weaknesses. To improve further the good quality of education it already provides it should:

1. Develop fully roles for monitoring the curriculum to ensure that all lessons reflect best practice within the school. In particular:

- ensure that lessons always meet the needs of pupils of differing ability;
- ensure that pupils of all ages have appropriate opportunities to engage in independent work and achieve comparable standards;
- extend the use of target setting throughout the school.

5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:

(1) provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England [Regulation 2.(d)].

6. summary of inspection evidence

6.1 The inspection was carried out from 30th October to 2nd November, 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. 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.

List of Inspectors

Ian Newton	Reporting Inspector
Rosalind Cunnah	Former Head, IAPS School
Anthea Hickman	Former Deputy Head, IAPS School
Gail Purt	Former Head, GSA Junior School
Jane Tuckett	Head, GSA Junior School