

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Felsted School

Full Name of the School	Felsted School
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Registered Charity Number	3548755
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Age Range	13 to 18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	24th to 27th September 2007

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 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 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report 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. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Felsted Schools are independent boarding and day schools for pupils aged 4 to 18, where individuals strive for achievement in academic work, drama, sport, music and a wide range of other activities. This inspection focuses on the work and activities of the senior school, for boys and girls aged 13 to 18, although facilities and a few staff are shared between the preparatory and senior schools on site.
- 1.2 The school's aims refer to enabling Felstedians to achieve their individual best. It is intended that by the time pupils leave, moving on to higher education and employment, they will enjoy learning and participating in cultural and sporting pursuits. The aims include the following expectations. 'Felstedians should know and understand their strengths and weaknesses, be confident in themselves and be respectful and tolerant of others. They should appreciate the significance of spiritual values, be capable of developing their own living faith and be compassionate and considerate to those of different backgrounds.' The school has additional aims for boarding: 'The school wishes to work very closely with parents providing an environment at Felsted that promotes personal development, one where the pupils' skills are nurtured.'
- 1.3 This long established school, which dates from 1564, has an Anglican foundation, but one where boys and girls from all faiths are welcomed. Surrounded by open farmland, the school occupies an 80-acre rural site, with its buildings at the centre of the Essex village of Felsted.
- 1.4 Since the last inspection 6 years ago, the senior school has increased in size from 430 pupils to the current 472, comprising 285 boys and 187 girls. The sixth form has 214 students. The school roll is increasing each year, with a move to equal numbers of boys and girls. Those in full boarding number 254, with a further 159 boarding for at least 3 days a week; there are 59 day pupils. New facilities provided over the past six years include the music school currently being built, a sixth-form centre and a second all-weather pitch. The school has introduced the International Baccalaureate (IB) into the sixth form, changed the way the working week is organised, acquired many more computers, and refurbished several boarding houses.
- 1.5 Pupils enter the senior school at age 13, about 50 from the preparatory school and around 30 others from 15 main feeder schools. Entry depends upon pupils' academic capability as shown in the Felsted transfer examinations, Common Entrance examinations, an interview, school tests and pupils' previous school reports. Most preparatory school pupils wishing to move into the senior school do so. Each year about 35 students join the sixth form from elsewhere, following success in GCSE and/or an interview, and a suitable report from their current school.
- 1.6 Evidence from nationally standardised tests indicates that the average ability of the pupils is above the national average for all maintained schools but below that in maintained selective schools. The school has several very high attaining pupils and about one in five who are average or below. If the pupils perform in line with their abilities, their results would be above those in all maintained schools and below those in maintained selective schools. About one in six of the pupils are from overseas, and for most of them English is not the first language spoken at home. The majority come from Germany, with small numbers from Spain and China. About a third of these pupils receive support for their English. The school has identified about one in five pupils as having dyslexia or other additional educational needs, and provides specialised support for around half of them. No pupils have statements of special educational needs.

- 1.7 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 education offered fulfils successfully the school's aims and philosophy. It caters very well for pupils' intellectual, cultural, social and physical needs. The school's main aim, 'enabling Felstedians to achieve their individual best', is met through the very broad curriculum and opportunities offered by a richly varied extra-curricular programme. The school has successfully dealt with almost all issues identified at the time of the last inspection.
- 2.2 The carefully constructed academic curriculum is highly effective and is kept under review by the school's curriculum committee to ensure it is appropriate and the direction is clear. In Year 9, pupils take 16 compulsory subjects, covering all expected curriculum areas. They have good opportunities to acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. In Years 10 and 11, a central core of mathematics, science, French and English is well supported by optional subjects, which cover languages, humanities and the technological, physical and creative areas. Provision in the sixth form has become a strength of the school. A levels and the IB run side by side; 23 different A-level courses are available, and 15 IB subjects, most of which run at both higher and standard levels. The introduction of the IB has provided greater choice and a welcome opportunity for students to develop a broad base of skills at a high level. The time allocated across the curriculum is generally well balanced. However, while a good personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is offered in Year 9, the school is aware that provision in Years 10 and 11 is not sufficient as it is limited to occasional lectures. Time allocated to the sciences is more than sufficient for three separate sciences and generous for those taking the dual award. The school promotes a healthy lifestyle very well, not least through the high quality of food provided.
- 2.3 The curriculum is planned to provide an appropriate programme for all pupils. Pupils are placed in sets by ability in the core subjects and movement between sets is common. In some subjects, pupils are taught in mixed ability groups. All departments use schemes of work to define what should be taught, though with relatively few examples of work being planned to match pupils' varying needs. A worthwhile example of academic enhancement was observed in a Year 9 club, focusing on a task set by the Royal Society for Chemistry. The learning support department offers additional lessons for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, taught to pupils either singly or in small groups. This department links well to other areas of the school, providing useful information through individual education plans which are on-line. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and the specialist tuition is decreased or increased as necessary. Good provision is made for pupils for whom English is an additional language, though many overseas pupils show such fluent linguistic skills that extra help is not necessary.
- 2.4 The programme of activities is outstanding. Younger pupils take part in sport four times a week; such strong provision has enabled sport to flourish into excellence. Beyond the school's major sports, pupils have opportunities in activities such as sailing, shooting and polo. The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) provides a particularly strong contribution to pupils' development, as does The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, which enables pupils to be of service to the local community by working in a hospice, for example. Musical groups, art, technology, drama and a rich variety of clubs are on offer in the afternoons and evenings. In recent years, the school has organised many trips overseas, including a CCF trip to the Zulu battlefields, music tours to Boston and Catalonia, and several tours for sports teams.

- 2.5 Pupils receive detailed information on subject option choices and have ready access to a careers adviser and a well-equipped careers room. A programme running from Year 11 through to Year 13 encourages pupils to reflect on possible career paths and to choose appropriate university courses. The careers department also provides good advice on GAP Years.
- 2.6 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.7 Pupils make good progress and achieve well, in line with the school aim of 'enjoying the adventure of learning and the acquisition of knowledge of the world around the'. The good progress and standards identified at the time of the last inspection have been maintained.
- 2.8 Pupils have good subject knowledge and are able to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in new situations. They do not often have the opportunity to think and act creatively and critically in lessons. When this is encouraged however, for example in English and modern foreign languages, pupils become involved and participate enthusiastically.
- 2.9 Good attainment was noted in all curriculum areas although the achievement of boys does not match that of girls. The school, through its own excellent research project, has identified a substantial number of ways to address this. Appropriate action is being taken, for example by increasing the amount of time boys spend on homework, which the school has found is currently less than girls spend.
- 2.10 Pupils' results in public examinations are good in relation to their abilities. The GCSE and A-level results over the three year period 2004 to 2006 were similar to those in maintained selective schools. Results in 2007 were similar to those of 2006, with strong performance at GCSE and A level.
- 2.11 The school has an excellent record in individual and team achievements. Sports teams are very successful. In 2007, the under-15 cricket XI were finalists in the national 20/20 schools competition. In 2006, the rugby under-15 XV reached the semi-finals of a major national competition. Both boys' and girls' hockey XIs are county champions. Individuals also enjoy success in sport, some at a national level. Pupils achieve The Duke of Edinburgh's Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards. Each year about 45 pupils attain music examination grades in a wide range of instruments, and the school orchestra has more than 10 players who have achieved a high grade in one or more instruments.
- 2.12 Pupils develop the essential skills and attitudes for work. They study well, listen effectively and write fluently in all subjects. Throughout the school they speak confidently and express themselves articulately.
- 2.13 Pupils apply numeracy skills effectively and with confidence in most cases. Teachers promote numerical work, for example, in geography and science lessons, and pupils' skills develop further as a result.
- 2.14 Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are much improved since the last inspection, as are pupils' computer skills. However, in a few subjects, computers are not used sufficiently, which is limiting the growth in pupils' skills.
- 2.15 In discussion and writing, pupils sustain their arguments and defend their points of view in detail and with authority. This is seen, for example, when sixth-form modern foreign language students learn how to debate in French and Spanish presenting clear, logical

argument. Year 13 mathematics students show similarly effective skills as they extend their understanding by deducing and discussing results from challenging questions.

- 2.16 The organisation and presentation of note taking in the GCSE years and sixth form are good, indicating significant progress from Year 9, where over-reliance on worksheets and copying from the board in some lessons limit development. By Year 13, students carry out extensive independent research using a variety of sources when preparing coursework and essays. This is particularly apparent in the work of the students studying the IB, who write an extended essay in a subject of their choice and a substantial essay on the theory of knowledge.
- 2.17 The high quality of pupils' co-operative working, seen throughout the school, reflects an extremely caring and supportive ethos. Excellent working relationships help pupils to make progress and learn from their teachers and each other. In many lessons, pupils are highly motivated to participate; they listen sensitively and offer ideas.
- 2.18 Pupils throughout the school settle quickly and work hard in lessons and activities, confidently asking for help if they encounter difficulties. Pupils particularly enjoy the sports, drama and music activities in which they become involved. Their commitment is apparent in their punctuality to practices and rigorous perseverance.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.19 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This is central to meeting the school's aims and contributes to its special atmosphere. The quality of relationships, mutual respect and pupil leadership are great strengths of the school. Parents who responded to the questionnaire almost unanimously agreed that the school promotes worthwhile attitudes and values. Pupils think beyond themselves and there is a well-understood shared ethos amongst the pupils, who all know what it is to be a Felstedian. Since the last inspection the personal development of pupils has continued to improve to a very high level.
- 2.20 Pupils' spiritual awareness, self-knowledge and self-control are excellent. The chapel is central to school life and the full-time chaplaincy, supported by other teachers, provides pupils with an opportunity to explore belief at different levels, through Confirmation preparation and retreat, the Christian Union and an informal discussion course. Other faiths are supported and a strong emphasis on respect for others is evident as pupils listen to each other sensitively in class, care for each other in their houses and demonstrate empathy for others in the wider community. An outstanding sixth-form-led chapel service, offering a modern interpretation of the deadly sins, exemplified much of the school's spirituality and ethos. The delivery was humorous but laughter gave way as pupils listened carefully to the underlying message. For the sixth-form committee, the deadliest of the sins are 'arrogance and sloth'; indicative of the assured yet unassuming characteristics of the pupils and their belief in seizing the wealth of opportunities available to them.
- 2.21 Moral development is of a high order. Neither pupils nor staff are afraid to say what they believe is right or wrong. In theory of knowledge work on ethics, students drew up statements of what they felt was right and wrong and then collectively identified "it is right to respect others" as the most important and relevant of their ethical statements, reflecting the excellent school ethos. School rules are clearly defined and explained; as are rights and responsibilities. Pupils understand the rules and recognise their importance in a community. High standards are set and maintained by staff and prefects, and pupils respond co-operatively to peer and teacher expectations of behaviour and dress. The prefects' strong leadership skills and the manner in which they conduct themselves provide excellent models for their peers.

- 2.22 Pupils develop excellent social skills, show initiative and make contributions to community life. The small citizenship elements of the Year 9 PSHCE course, and the Year 12 enrichment programme, provide pupils with reasonable but not detailed knowledge of public institutions. An emphasis on co-operative learning in the classroom and challenging community service contribute significantly to social development. Pupils organise social and fundraising events, not just raising money but at times offering practical help, assisting with the riding for the disabled scheme, for example. Pupils show initiative through membership of various pupil committees and especially 'the forum'. Suggestions emanating from these groups have resulted in positive changes such as 'late night feeding', a snack delivered to houses in the evening.
- 2.23 Cultural development of pupils is good. The school's proximity to London and use of its own theatre facilities enable pupils to attend and perform in a range of drama and musical productions. A very successful annual arts festival and popular music concerts take place and some extremely good examples of pupils' art work are displayed around the school. Pupils broaden their understanding of culture through school trips abroad and a biennial USA drama tour. Over 50 students learn to see world affairs from an international perspective through their membership of the Model United Nations. Pupils celebrate some cultural differences through special events, such as Chinese New Year, a day promoting European languages and an annual international dinner. They are highly tolerant of one another's different backgrounds.
- 2.24 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.25 Good teaching enables pupils to learn and do well, and to achieve placements in higher education, thus achieving the school's aims. Assessment systems are effective. The quality of teaching and assessment is similar to that seen at the time of the last inspection.
- 2.26 Occasionally teaching observed was outstanding, and the majority was good, but a small number of lessons had unsatisfactory elements. In good practice, work is challenging, interesting and well explained, and carefully related to pupils' prior learning. In a particularly effective Year 9 mathematics lesson about the correct order of applying arithmetic operations, very well planned tasks required pupils to lead their own learning; they became totally involved in the process and the outcome was excellent achievement. In less successful teaching, work was insufficiently demanding, teachers did not question pupils in such a way that they could build on what they already knew. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those for whom English is an additional language, are accurately assessed and effective specialist teaching is provided for those whose needs warrant it.
- 2.27 Teachers are hard working and help to create the outstanding environment in which pupils live and learn. In almost all lessons, application of intellectual or physical effort is encouraged. Often teaching is of a traditional teacher-led nature, which ensures that learning is effective and pupils make good progress, but opportunities for independent learning are underdeveloped. In many English lessons, however, and in several others, opportunities for sustained discussion help pupils to develop insight and independent work improves pupils' study skills and understanding.
- 2.28 Lessons are usually well planned, and demonstrate good time management and use of resources. Several included a wide range of tasks – often short introductory activities which involved the pupils, followed by taught concepts, ideas and skills and involvement of groups or individuals in problem solving. Where there was a lack of variety, boys appeared to be

- less inclined to apply themselves than girls. Few lessons included a summary session, where teachers identified what had or had not been understood.
- 2.29 Substantial work has been done in developing the monitoring of pupils' performance. Work is graded and progress reviewed by looking at all pupils' grades in a given subject and by considering all of a pupil's subjects. Grades are based on a pupil's efforts, measured against the school's aims and against examination criteria. Tutors discuss gradings with their tutees and the pupils often set their own targets for improvement; many value this process. Where effort is not as good as it should be, teachers and tutors intervene, set challenging targets and monitor a pupil's progress towards them. Teachers use measures of pupils' progress to help them plan subsequent work, but only to a limited extent.
- 2.30 Teachers throughout the school are well qualified in the subjects they teach. They demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects, responding in accurate detail to pupils' questions.
- 2.31 Teaching is supported by effective use of a good quality, quantity and range of resources. In sixth-form mathematics lessons, for example, a graph-plotting program enhances teaching of both two- and three-dimensional topics and helpful modern textbooks abound. The practical equipment and facilities for science, art, physical education and design and technology are very good and are used effectively for pupils to develop the necessary skills and knowledge. Interactive whiteboards have been introduced where the department justifies this on educational grounds, such as in modern foreign languages and economics. The school's intranet is a very worthwhile development and is becoming an excellent resource.
- 2.32 Departmental marking policies, developed from the whole-school version, are implemented in a variety of different ways. The school is aware that this is an area for development and is working towards greater consistency of good practice. In the best examples, work is thoroughly marked against clear criteria and pupils are provided with targets and constructive advice for meeting them. A small proportion of marking is less effective, with hard-to-read comments, or grades without explanation of ways to improve; in a few cases too little of the work is marked. The school's commendation system offers positive encouragement, and is valued by pupils; they appreciate the praise they receive for their efforts, whether or not they have been successful.
- 2.33 Teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly and to develop good attitudes and skills. The relationships and bearing of pupils are prominent aspects of the school, and are reflected in lessons as excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes to learning. These are encouraged by teachers' positive approaches.
- 2.34 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 The pastoral care and guidance is of an outstandingly high quality. This reflects the pivotal role it has in helping to achieve the school's aim of producing the friendly, supportive and socially responsible Felstedians. Improvements since the last inspection have made it one of the great strengths of the school.
- 3.2 A caring atmosphere pervades the school. Staff provide excellent support and guidance for pupils, who in turn are very positive about their housemasters, housemistresses and tutors. Whether in academic or personal matters, or in careers guidance, staff are accessible and available to listen, discuss and help.
- 3.3 The recently restructured house system, with effective house staff and tutors, is recognised by pupils and parents as developing happy and supportive pupils. Dedicated tutorials are mostly developmental, focusing pupils on their own efforts and achievements and on realistic target-setting. Tutors work closely with their charges and in the sixth form pupils are able to choose their own tutor, which is excellent practice. The tutors are trained by housemasters and housemistresses to deliver robust and high quality care, and are supported by a committed body of prefects. Senior management receives regular formal and informal feedback about the pastoral arrangements, helping policies and practice to remain effective.
- 3.4 The excellent relationships between pupils and staff tend to be formal but relaxed; relationships amongst pupils are amiable, friendly and supportive. Classes in which pupils know their teacher cares about them are both common and popular, enhancing the progress achieved.
- 3.5 Policies to guard against harassment and bullying are highly effective. Appropriate definitions and guidelines exist for staff as well as pupils regarding their rights and responsibilities. Prefects and pupils understand the need to act responsibly. The clear anti-bullying policy is effective and pupils report that they feel extremely safe. Peer mentoring also illustrates the positive application of policies. Teachers show a clear understanding of their role in promoting good behaviour and preventing poor, dealing appropriately with difficulties when they arise. They use the system of rewards and sanctions fairly but firmly.
- 3.6 Child protection measures are extremely thorough and successful. The child protection officer ensures that all teaching and non-teaching staff are fully trained every three years, to which an improvement since the last inspection. New staff are trained on arrival. All are required to read the school policy annually and to sign to that effect. Pupils are made aware of how to contact confidential listeners. The rigorous procedures for appointing staff support the safeguarding of pupils.
- 3.7 Comprehensive systems for risk assessment and management are very well co-ordinated, resulting in realistic measures being taken to reduce risks from hazards including fire. Procedures are well understood by teachers and regularly practised by all on site. Fire appliances and signs are appropriate and regularly maintained. Long-standing traffic and parking issues on two minor public roads passing through the school site have been discussed regularly with the local authority and the police continue to monitor the situation. For staff, on-line risk assessment forms make the necessary procedures easier to understand and carry out consistently.

- 3.8 Health and safety arrangements are secure and the school has excellent regard for appropriate statutory obligations. Since the last inspection report, the number of staff qualified in first aid has increased, both teaching and non-teaching. Priority for training and re-training has been given to those working in key areas and further staff are now being added to the list. The school has a centrally positioned medical centre that is staffed 24 hours a day by nurses and supported by doctors. An on-call ambulance is on the playing fields for house and home sports matches.
- 3.9 The school maintains an accurate admissions register and appropriate attendance records.
- 3.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.11 The school has very good links with parents, the great majority of whom are very pleased with the education and support provided for their children. The aim of working closely with parents is fulfilled well. Links with the local community are good. In both areas, strengths identified at the time of the last inspection have been improved further.
- 3.12 Levels of parental satisfaction are high, identified through the pre-inspection questionnaires. The great majority were particularly positive about the impact teaching had on their children's progress, the information supplied and opportunities to discuss it, and the help and guidance given to their children. A small minority felt that the school did not do enough to involve parents. Inspectors considered parental involvement to be substantial.
- 3.13 Parents are actively encouraged to support their children when they are playing sport or participating in concerts or plays. Recent productions, such as *The Sound of Music*, *Snow White*, performed in Spanish, and *Antigone*, have attracted large audiences of parents. Many parents come to see their children playing in matches at weekends and during the week, and are welcome to visit boarding houses when they wish to discuss any pastoral or academic matters concerning their children. However, no formal link has been established between parents and the school, such as a parents' association.
- 3.14 Parents receive good information about their children's successes through effort and achievement grades, published eight times a year, and two full written reports and one summary report each year. These grades and reports are available through the school's intranet, which is very helpful. Subject reports summarise academic progress, effort and attitudes well, but do not always indicate how work could be improved. Housemaster, housemistress and tutor reports are generally good and clear, showing a thorough knowledge of individual pupils, though not all have a similar depth of detail.
- 3.15 Prospectuses are well presented and informative, and leaflets such as 'Information for new pupils and their parents' provide very helpful guidance. The school magazine, termly house and half-termly headmaster's newsletters, as well as other occasional brochures, give a clear and interesting picture of school life. The recent development of an on-line newsletter, including articles and pictures, is excellent.
- 3.16 The school has established procedures for handling complaints at both formal and informal levels, and members of staff involved in pastoral care recognise the need to deal with any concerns speedily and effectively. The parental complaints policy is issued to all new parents and is freely available to parents upon request.

- 3.17 Good links with the local community include pupils' community service, often linked to The Duke of Edinburgh's Award or to the creativity, action and service component of the IB. Around 100 pupils are involved weekly in community service, working in about 25 locations, such as local schools and charity shops. This is a substantial increase since the time of the last inspection. A number of national and local societies, including the Royal British Legion, are given free use of school facilities, and the village fête is held on school property. Local children have access to a football pitch on the playing fields. Old Felstedians have established a very successful mission in an East London church and a small number of pupils are involved with this Christian work.
- 3.18 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

The Quality of Boarding Education

- 3.19 The school provides an excellent boarding experience which supports and enriches pupils' education and personal development. Reflecting the school's aims, pupils learn to live together happily, taking a high level of responsibility for themselves and others. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and the school is working very effectively towards the implementation of all the recommendations of the most recent report by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).
- 3.20 Relationships between boarding pupils of all ages are extremely supportive. Pupils enthusiastically cite the quality of friendships as a major factor in their desire to board. The positive personal support received from pastoral staff, such as housemasters, housemistresses, their assistants and the matrons, is warmly praised by boarders. In boarding houses the atmosphere is friendly and welcoming. Older pupils take responsibility for their younger peers and link prefects from the newly formed Year 13 houses continue to play a significant role in their previous house. Pupils of all nationalities and ages mix together very well.
- 3.21 House staff are enthusiastic, committed and passionate about the role of boarding in preparing pupils for later life. They look for opportunities to enable pupils to develop self-reliance. The safety and security of pupils underpin many of the management systems in the boarding house. The use of a house duty mobile telephone was seen to good effect when a pupil was unavoidably delayed at a signing-in session, and when other pupils were late returning from a fixture. Housemasters and housemistresses have extensive knowledge of boarders and their individual needs. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils in shared dormitories have a harmonious blend of personalities. The use of a house log to ensure detailed communication between all duty staff is very effective.
- 3.22 An excellent range of activities is offered to boarders out of school time and at the weekends. Saturday socials are popular and, as well as providing entertainment, offer house teams the opportunity to take responsibility for organising events. Shopping trips, visits to London and paintballing are examples of popular Sunday activities. Boarders spoke positively about attending the six Sunday chapel services each year.
- 3.23 The quality of accommodation is generally good, and outstanding in the case of the Year 13 girls' house. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have resulted in greater equality of provision across the range and age of buildings. Communal areas have been updated with investment in furniture, games and gymnasium equipment. Re-decoration, pupils' art work and photographs of house events that decorate walls do much to enliven the environment and give a sense of house identity. The introduction of an annual budget to enable house staff to plan and prioritise further improvements is a good development. Pupils

of all ages speak positively about the recent creation of the Year 13 houses. Older students appreciate the greater freedom and the ability to focus on academic work in their final year, whilst younger pupils enthusiastically anticipate their turn.

- 3.24 A great majority of parents agree that the school makes good provision for boarders. Many of them make a commitment to full boarding even though they live in close proximity to the school.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governance is very effective, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The work of the governors is driven by a desire to support the ethos of the school and the education provided, continuing its success. Governors have an appropriate committee structure that enables them to keep abreast of developments within the school and to challenge and sustain what is taking place. Governors appreciate the balance they must retain between ‘interference and abdication’ and are fully aware of their responsibilities. A recent change in the frequency of committee meetings is giving a stronger focus to pupils’ academic standards, the curriculum and teaching and learning. This timely development reflects current priorities in the school. It is being achieved at the same time as maintaining a close and highly effective oversight of financial matters and building developments. Through prudent use of available finance, improved facilities have been possible, such as the new music centre, and the thorough refurbishment of boarding accommodation.
- 4.2 Governors are highly analytical and self-evaluative. A recent review of their own expertise and that needed to help the school led to the appointment of two new members. The school’s strengths and areas for improvement are known by governors, who keep a watchful eye on what is taking place. They have good involvement and understanding of the school development plan process. The chairman is in close and frequent contact with the headmaster, whose reports for governors are informative. Staff have regular opportunities to meet with governors at organised social events which facilitate good communication and understanding.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.3 Leadership is very effective in promoting the school’s aims, particularly those concerning pupils’ self-knowledge, showing respect and tolerance of others, contributing to society and developing their own spiritual values. The vision for the school is clear and understood by all in the school community. Senior staff work closely together, using complementary skills, to promote high expectations and standards. All aspects of the school’s provision are good or better as a result. Pupils and staff have benefited from sustained and very worthwhile improvements since the last inspection.
- 4.4 Good communication and regular meetings of different groups of staff enable school-wide issues to be discussed. At the end of each year, the progress that has been made is reviewed before deciding upon priorities for development for the coming year. This effective process involves all teachers, though not support staff, and results in the school development plan. Targets are clear, such as raising the quality of written work, but success criteria are not always sufficiently specific, which makes improvement difficult to gauge. Pupil performance data is substantial and analysed in great detail. Monitoring the extent to which development plan priorities are successfully implemented, and to which pupils’ targets are used to improve achievement, is not as strong as the planning process. As a result, inconsistencies in implementation are not always identified nor weaknesses resolved.
- 4.5 Close management and curriculum links have been established with the preparatory school, from which pupils benefit. Improved continuity in learning between Years 8 and 9 has been achieved through staff from both schools working together.

- 4.6 The school has an excellent common room manual which provides easy access to a multitude of systems and procedures for new and experienced staff alike. It is backed up by good, succinct policies covering all required areas. All departmental handbooks are useful and most are of good quality, with plans for development which build from the whole-school issues for the year.
- 4.7 Most middle leaders, both heads of department and support staff managers, are effective in their roles. Some of these staff are exceptionally efficient and organised, with very good expertise in their chosen fields. Others are less effective because they do not monitor progress in the task in hand. New staff are properly checked before appointment and well inducted into the school over their first term. Although many staff attend courses which enable them to expand their expertise, not all staff do so regularly and the focus on improvements in teaching and learning is less than is desirable. Recent changes in management are beginning to deal with this situation. The introduction of the IB is adding an extra, positive dimension to the work of the school, not least through the training staff receive. The school supports newly qualified teachers well and meets the expectation that they should have a reduced teaching timetable. Some encroachment on their non-contact time results from their involvement in many school activities. Staff morale is high; they feel valued by senior colleagues and pupils.
- 4.8 Finances are well managed throughout the school, with good resources, staff and accommodation. Although some accommodation is rather dated, such as the science laboratories, it is clean and well cared for and displays are used in several areas to enhance the learning environment. The library is rather small but additional study areas for the sixth form ensure that provision is sound. The noise from the sixth formers' common room below their study area detracts from its working atmosphere. The school has a large number of modern computers available and several departments make good use of them. Games facilities are good.
- 4.9 School administration is very efficient. The school's central computer system is excellent. All staff have easy access to a multitude of information on their class computers: for example, the timetable and assessment data on every pupil in the school. The database is evolving rapidly as departments use the school intranet to provide resources for pupils. The large number of support and organisational staff, line managed very effectively, is facilitating developments by releasing teachers from administrative tasks.
- 4.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.11 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 Felsted School is highly successful in meeting its overall aims: ‘enabling Felstedians to achieve their individual best’, and providing an environment for boarders that promotes personal development. Staff have generated an excellent ethos where pupils feel valued and their welfare has the highest priority. As a result of this consistent support and care for boarding and day pupils, their personal development is excellent. They are articulate, confident learners, achieving well as they move through the school. They perform well at GCSE and A level, with results similar to those achieved in maintained selective schools. Teaching is good overall, although much better in some lessons than others and with variation in the quality of assessment. Very effective support staff and an exceptional ICT system enable teachers to focus more time on pupils’ learning needs. Extra-curricular activities and sixth-form courses are excellent. Pupils make very effective use of what is available, but have few opportunities to learn about being a citizen in today’s society. Governors provide a strong and helpful vision for the school, both supporting and challenging the headmaster to improve the school further. Leadership is very effective and supported fully by the management group. High quality policies and procedures are leading to improvements across many areas. Some inconsistencies in practice remain and monitoring is not always rigorous. Many staff are involved in continuing professional development but this is not linked sufficiently to the school’s focus on teaching and learning.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in 2001, leaders have made great strides in resolving the issues identified, and in maintaining and building upon the school’s strengths. Very good progress has also been made in responding to the CSCI recommendations from 2006, for the school’s boarding community.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 To improve the quality of the educational provision the following actions are recommended.
1. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment through rigorous evaluation of what is taking place and providing appropriate guidance where needed.
 2. Ensure that staff’s continuing professional development is sufficiently related to improving teaching and learning.
 3. Enhance PSHCE provision in Years 10 and 11, so that pupils gain a better understanding of how society and its institutions work.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 24th to 27th September 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the sanatorium. 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

Mr Peter McGregor	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Jane Corlett	Deputy Headteacher, HMC school
Dr Nicholas England	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Keith Hamflett	Senior Head of Department, HMC school
Dr Ian Selmes	Professional Tutor, HMC school
Mrs Sarah Williamson	Deputy Headteacher, HMC school