When the inspector calls

Herne Hill School was recently inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), so Living South talks to the school's Headteacher, Jane Beales, its Director, Dominik Magyar, and two of its Year 2 pupils, Dan and Delilah

Who exactly is ISI?
DM: They are the body approved by the Secretary of State for Education for the purpose of inspecting independent schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council, ISC.

Presumably this requires a lot of preparation then?
JB: Actually, you have to always be prepared because you don't get any advance notice of when the inspector calls. Whilst we roughly knew that we were overdue for an inspection since our last one had been as far back as June 2005, it could have come at any time. So, you have to be ready all the time.

What actually happens?
JB: They conduct a thorough review of all the school's policies, procedures and paperwork to check if it meets the hundreds of regulatory requirements and to assess and rate the quality of the teaching and learning at the school, the pastoral care, health and welfare, etc. It's very intense, with the inspectors leaving no stone unturned and observing dozens of lessons. Every class and every teacher was observed at least once and typically several times, including class teachers, music lessons, sports, after school clubs, play rehearsals, etc. Some of our children were also interviewed. They were randomly chosen from class lists and included Dan and Delilah [pictured above], who just turned seven-years-old this year.

Q to Dan: Tell us about your interview with the inspectors - how did it work and what did they want to know?
Dan: There were several of us. Four from Year 2 were seen by one inspector, and about six Year 1's talked to another inspector in another room at the same time. They just asked us about how the school is working and we told them.

For example?
Dan: They asked if anybody was being bullied, and if you were hurt, to whom would you go. I told them that I didn't think anybody was being bullied, and that I would go to one of the assistants or the teachers if I were hurt. I think they liked my answers.

And you, Delilah, what happened with you?
Delilah: There were three of us from Year 2, one from each class. The inspectors asked us to come to the staff room at the top of the Mulberry building and bring along some of the work we are doing in the classroom. I brought my Happy Families book, my literacy book, my 1940's diary and my African scrapbook.

What did they want to know?
Delilah: They asked quite a lot of questions about our work, how we did it, what we thought of it, and so on. Even though we spent quite a bit of time with them, we didn't get through all of our work.

And how did it all end?
JB: The inspection report has just been published and is now available on the ISI website. I'm pleased to say that we were rated extremely well, achieving the highest possible marks in absolutely all aspects. Without sounding arrogant about it, it frankly doesn't get any better! Reading the report has made us very proud of our fabulous staff and children. Everyone always tries very hard to live out our school ethos of "love, care and an excellent education" and do their best for the children. But to have the quality of our provision and outcomes endorsed to such a high degree by such an authoritative body is beyond our expectations and highly rewarding and motivating for the future.

Herne Hill School, 127 Herne Hill, SE24 9LY; 020 7274 6336