ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

29 April to 1 May 2025

Sedbergh School

Station Road

Sedbergh

Cumbria

LA10 5HG

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 have an informed oversight of all areas of school life. They ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including those for pupils in the school's boarding accommodation. Leaders are reflective. They adjust their approaches to ensure that pupils' wellbeing is continuously promoted. The school's small number of day pupils are fully integrated into boarding houses.

2. The school provides a stimulating environment, including in the refurbished boarding houses. Pupils have all their meals in their boarding house and have access to an extensive sports, social and activities programme that is well designed to support boarders' wider development. The boarding houses are suitably staffed. Staff are well trained and well informed about boarders' individual needs and their wider interests. As a result, pupils gain a compelling benefit from boarding, for example, in their high levels of self-confidence, the opportunity to follow a comprehensive range of activities in depth, and ready access to staff who understand their needs. Hence, the quality of the boarding provision is a significant strength of the school.

3. The curriculum and co-curricular programme meet pupils' needs and interests. The Year 9 curriculum is structured to develop pupils' knowledge and skills coherently, including in the context of the local environment. Subject choices preserve breadth and balance, while allowing specialism at GCSE and in the sixth form. The boarding day is organised so that pupils can commit to a wide range of activities alongside their academic studies.

4. Tutors and other subject-specialists support pupils with their studies in boarding houses. Extra 'booster' sessions are on offer throughout the school day.

5. The effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is supported by regular visiting speakers.

6. Pupils receive careers and higher education advice appropriate for their age. However, there is no planned programme to ensure that all pupils gain experience of the world of work. Pupils learn about some aspects of finance ready for leaving school, but there is no comprehensive scheme of economic education.

7. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They plan lessons to ensure that pupils make the progress they should. Pupils achieve examination results that are above national averages.

8. Teachers use effective strategies in lessons to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils who have SEND make progress in line with other pupils.

9. Pupils show respect for those of different faiths, national backgrounds and gender differences. Male and female pupils, boarders and day pupils enjoy equal opportunities.

10. The school's behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy are effective. Expectations are understood by staff and pupils Most pupils are well behaved. Occasionally, a few younger pupils do not behave as well as they should in lessons. Bullying is rare.

11. Buildings and grounds are well maintained. Any potential risks to pupils are minimised through the systematic detailed checks of health and safety and fire procedures. Mitigation of risk in pupils'

programme of activities on the fells and on water is rigorous. The security of all pupils throughout the day and night is prioritised.

12. Pupils are kind. They recognise the value of service to others, including in their commitment to volunteering as part of local and national projects. They are supportive to each other in boarding houses. The boarding environment makes a considerable contribution to their personal development.

13. School structures ensure that the views of all pupils are channelled to senior leaders. The initiative has had a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing, including for boarders.

14. Safeguarding arrangements are effective in promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders are especially mindful of the additional risks for boarders. Effective pastoral care ensures that pupils who may be at risk of harm are identified quickly and appropriate action taken. Safeguarding leaders liaise effectively with external agencies when required.

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:

- develop the careers programme further to ensure that pupils have opportunities to gain experience of the world of work
- introduce a coherent programme of financial education throughout the school so that all pupils extend their economic awareness
- ensure that all teachers manage behaviour consistently well in lessons and in line with the school's policy.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. The governing body has relevant experience and skills to oversee the school's work effectively. Leaders' reports to governors collate appropriate evidence to demonstrate that the school continues to meet the Standards.

16. Governors validate the information that leaders provide through regular visits and audits of documentation. They spend time in boarding houses and hold meetings with staff, boarders and day pupils. As a result, the implementation of school policies and procedures is monitored and evaluated effectively.

17. Leaders have a detailed knowledge of pupils' needs and ambitions. They are actively involved in school life. Senior leaders and house staff work closely to promote pupils' wellbeing. Leaders' open working relationships with external agencies, including national park authorities, children's services and the police, mean that additional wellbeing support is accessed when needed.

18. Academic and pastoral leaders have secure knowledge of the subjects that they teach. They apply this knowledge skilfully so that pupils' needs are met. Appropriate strategies are used to adapt learning effectively to meet the needs of pupils who have SEND. Leaders are mindful of the risk of pupils' over-commitment to their studies and other activities in the boarding school environment. Consequently, they provide social activities for separate age-groups every Saturday evening so that boarders can relax and socialise across houses and lead balanced lives.

19. Leaders' decisions are underpinned by the school's values of humility, ambition, resilience and kindness. Pupils are highly supportive of each other. They reflect the school's values in their academic achievements, as well as in music, sport and in the resilience that they show in their adventure activities.

20. Governors and school leaders are committed to continuing to secure the positive impact that Sedbergh's boarding environment has on boarders' academic, co-curricular and personal development. Boarding houses are refurbished regularly, so the boarding environment is conducive to positive lifestyles and learning. Leaders have put in place a thoughtfully planned co-curricular programme, that is responsive to the interests and talents of pupils. Leaders ensure that boarding houses are well staffed. As a result, boarders receive high levels of pastoral and academic support.

21. The school's website provides accessible and clear information for staff, pupils, and parents of both current and prospective pupils. All the required policies and documents are available, including those relating to boarding.

22. Governors and senior leaders have a strategic approach to identifying and managing any risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing. They are aware of the potential physical risk to pupils in the adventurous activities and fell-running. They ensure staff involved have up-to-date and relevant training. Pupils entering the annual historic 'Wilson Run' must pass through rigorous qualifying checks. Pastoral staff are vigilant to the mental health and wellbeing of boarders and day-pupils in their house.

23. Leaders have devised a structure in which all pupils can present their views. The youngest boarders share their ideas and experiences with house prefects, who formulate suggestions through cross-house and cross-school groups. Senior pupils make formal requests to school leaders, who report termly to pupils in assembly. As a result, pupils feel that they are listened to, that their views are

valued and that action is taken when needed. As a result, the school has, for example, amended its mobile telephone policy, provided evening study cafés for sixth form pupils and increased its support for boarders who might encounter 'Sunday blues'.

24. The school's complaints procedure is appropriate and effective. Parents are encouraged to share concerns with house staff or senior leaders. All concerns, including at the informal stage, are recorded centrally and reviewed by governors to identify any themes or patterns that require further action.

25. The school reports to the appropriate local authority any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times in the school year.

26. Leaders make appropriate adjustments for pupils who have SEND, and others with disabilities, through an accessibility plan. All documentation is provided in a variety of fonts. Video clips on the school's website are subtitled. Teachers provide printed handouts for pupils for whom note-taking is difficult. Leaders have strategies to enable any pupil who has a physical disability to board. Consequently, the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

28. The curriculum enables pupils to be ambitious, in line with the school's values. Year 9 pupils follow a programme that integrates academic studies with an adventure programme and planned trips. Pupils studying the Lakeland poets, for example, spend a day creating their own verse in the Lake District. In geography, pupils follow field work on the fells with a visit to a university geology department. Pupils experience a wide range of subjects, so they are well prepared to make GCSE choices by the end of the year.

29. They study a core of English, mathematics and three sciences at GCSE, alongside four or five optional subjects. The curriculum supports pupils to preserve a balance between creative subjects such as drama, music and art, as well as computer science, technology and the humanities. Most pupils study at least one language chosen from French, Latin or Spanish.

30. The curriculum responds to pupils' needs in the sixth form by offering both A-level and BTEC qualifications, including in sport, geology and agriculture. Pupils' interests are further stimulated intellectually through mathematics and science Olympiads and other academic competitions. Many pupils gain awards. They attend a weekly series of academic societies in a range of areas, including philosophy and theology. Specialist tuition is available when needed to support university entrance.

31. Pupils benefit from a coherent programme of PSHE. This is enhanced further by regular visiting speakers. Those teaching sport draw on their own experience of competing at a high level to support pupils' wider development as well as their sporting expertise.

32. Leaders identify the support needed by pupils who have SEND when they join the school. Teachers are provided with detailed information about pupils' needs and plan lessons accordingly. Consequently, pupils who have SEND make good progress. Teachers are trained to identify potential needs, which they communicate to SEND support leaders, who decide on appropriate strategies. Almost all support for pupils is provided in lessons. Teachers provide additional 'booster' sessions in nearly every subject. Occasionally, after consultation with parents and pupils, a few pupils follow an alternative curriculum by reducing the number of subjects studied at GCSE.

33. Pupils entering the school who speak English as an additional language (EAL) typically have a working command of English. However, some need support with technical language and idiom. This is provided effectively by specialists.

34. Leaders organise over 200 trips each year. These deepen and broaden the curriculum, allowing pupils to develop their skills and knowledge directly, for example, in the classics, art or modern foreign languages.

35. Lessons are thoughtfully structured. In mathematics, for example, pupils were provided with practice in simultaneous equations as a foundation for solving questions on arithmetic series. Teachers provide regular feedback on pupils' work in lessons and through one-to-one support for individuals. Pupils are encouraged to collaborate in their learning.

36. In most lessons, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. Pupils know what is expected of them. Typically, they work hard and reflect on their achievement. In a very small number of lessons, teachers' response to some low-level behaviour is ineffective, which slows other pupils' progress.

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37. Academic leaders have embedded a framework to evaluate individual pupils' progress relative to their starting points. Teachers have an accurate and up-to-date awareness of pupil's achievement. They base this on regular checks and discussions with pupils so that any gaps in learning are addressed quickly.

38. Overall, teaching and learning is effective. At GCSE, typically, about one-third of examinations are graded 9 to 7, and at A level, about one-third are graded A* to A. Achievement in BTEC courses is similar. For almost all pupils, results are above national averages.

39. Academic and pastoral leaders communicate daily with house staff at suppertime. As a result, tutors provide support immediately to pupils as needed. Boarders receive help with their academic studies during the evening from specialist subject and learning support teachers in their house. In this way, boarding arrangements contribute effectively to pupils' academic progress.

40. Pupils' resilience is promoted through an extensive range of sporting and co-curricular activities that are planned throughout the week. Year 9 pupils follow a programme of adventure pursuits that often take place in the nearby Howgill Fells. Older pupils participate in the Army, Royal Navy and Pipes and Drums sections of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), and in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Many pupils achieve gold and silver awards. Pupils of all ages contribute to drama productions and concerts and achieve drama and music qualifications.

41. The games curriculum is organised so that nearly every pupil represents the school in one or more sports. Specialists provide individualised coaching for elite players. Pupils achieve at a high level, with many gaining national recognition as individuals or in selection for national teams.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

43. Extensive curricular and co-curricular opportunities help pupils to acquire self-esteem and awareness of their strengths. The programme enables pupils to develop ambition and resilience in line with the school values. The school week is carefully planned. Boarders have enough time after lessons to include physical or cultural activities, to study and to attend a choice of academic societies or external lectures.

44. Leaders plan and implement well-organised PSHE tutor-sessions. Pupils are taught all the required aspects of relationship and sex education. Leaders systematically preview the content in assemblies. This stimulates discussion in subsequent lessons. Boarders feel able to share their views confidently because they are supported by the peers they live and work closely with. Pupils treat each other with respect.

45. Pupils are taught the importance of physical exercise to their wellbeing through the sports and outdoor education programme. Teams and individual pupils are successful nationally, for example, in cricket, rugby, hockey and shooting. Governors' investment in a state-of-the-art sports centre is targeted to meet all pupils' needs. The curriculum includes canoeing, mountain-biking and high-rocks activities. The boarding environment allows time for all pupils to develop skills and self-confidence in a variety of areas.

46. Almost all pupils build their spiritual awareness alongside their physical fitness through fell-running. Many boarders see running sessions as time to contemplate and reflect. Leaders highlight the spiritual context of the annual Year 11 visit to the Belgian and French battlefields. House photographs remind boarders of their many predecessors who were killed in the two world wars. Pupils value time for worship in Chapel. They appreciate singing as a community-enhancing activity. House staff ensure that pupils of different faiths have protected times and space to pray.

47. House-staff and senior pupils promote the school's value of kindness in their interactions with other pupils. Boarders understand the individual expectations underpinning boarding houses as environments in which pupils feel happy and secure. Boarders are encouraged to learn from others with different national, ethnic or religious backgrounds. Assemblies, PSHE sessions and external lectures promote debate about wider moral issues.

48. Pupils take responsibility for their actions. Leaders set clear expectations in the school's behaviour policy. Sanctions are understood by pupils and staff but rarely needed. Pupils are orderly and punctual. They behave well in houses and around school. Occasionally, a few younger pupils do not meet the school's expectations in some lessons.

49. Pupils are taught to identify and address any possible bullying behaviours. Younger boarders change rooms each term, so they build good relationships with everybody in their year group. House prefects are effective in mediating between pupils if necessary. Incidents of bullying are rare.

50. The school's medical centre is well appointed. Nursing staff liaise closely with house matrons to ensure a consistent approach to managing any medical issues, including the administration of medicines. Staff supporting adventurous or sporting activities receive relevant training.

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51. The school's buildings and grounds are well maintained. Regular maintenance checks are carried out across the site. Appropriate records are kept. Health and safety protocols are thoughtful and diligently implemented. These include those related to fire safety and security. Fire evacuation procedures are regularly practised, including during the times when all boarders are in their houses. Leaders ensure that assessments of risk in all school activities are regularly evaluated. Staff are appropriately trained, including in specialist activities on the fells.

52. Governors have initiated a cycle of refurbishment to boarding accommodation. Boarding accommodation is warm and comfortable. Boarders have access to food and drink outside normal mealtimes. They eat all their meals in their houses. Consequently, they have regular interaction with other boarders and staff. The arrangements allow them to discuss any dietary requirements directly with house chefs.

53. Pupils are effectively supervised. Leaders make regular checks on pupils' whereabouts and have clear procedures to follow if a boarder was missing. Guardianship arrangements are monitored closely to ensure boarders are safeguarded.

54. The school's admission and attendance policies are implemented effectively. The policies reflect the statutory guidance for both day and boarding pupils. The school's attendance champion liaises regularly with the relevant authorities. The school informs the local authority about any pupils who leave or join at non-standard transition points, or if a boarder does not return to school at the start of term.

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

55. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

56. The curriculum cultivates pupils' human and social development. Pupils show respect for each other and the individual differences reflected in society. Outside lessons and co-curricular activities, boarders live, work and eat in their boarding houses. As a result, house staff and boarders have an early awareness of the concerns or pressures that others might encounter. They are supportive and responsive. Relationships between boarders are trusting and empathetic.

57. Senior pupils are trained to identify and address issues of diversity, equality and inclusion in the school's provision. The school's culture enables all pupils to express different views and to explore different characteristics, for example, gender-related issues. Taught sessions and discussions in school are supported by external speakers covering topics such as homophobia in professional sport.

58. Boarders enjoy community life. They have strong loyalties to their houses and often show humility when considering the achievements of their predecessors. They collaborate in many activities and in house competitions such as in music or sport. They allow each other space if they sense that is appropriate and put small annoyances into perspective when they need to.

59. Senior pupils are highly supportive of younger boarders. The house 'family system' formalises a channel through which senior pupils are alert and immediately responsive to younger boarders' concerns. House prefects ensure that new boarders settle quickly. Day pupils are included in all activities available to boarders. Leaders make no distinction between the two groups, apart from the protocols for attendance.

60. Sixth-form pupils support each other in training and in qualifying for the school's annual ten-mile fell run, often sacrificing their own time to help those who are struggling to finish.

61. Pupils recognise the democratic process through the school's structures in which they represent their own and each other's views. They are aware of the need for behavioural codes associated with living in a small town in a national park.

62. A range of external speakers extend pupils' understanding of wider national and international issues. Presentations from the police, for example, explain the practical applications of the rule of law. Others address the status of women in other countries. Boarders value opportunities to discuss international issues with those from different countries, or formally through debates in the Model United Nations (MUN) group. Leaders ensure that any political views are impartial and carefully balanced.

63. Pupils' cultural insight is extended through art, music and drama events. Boarders have extensive opportunities to follow particular interests in depth alongside other activities. Boarders are supportive of others' performances and as a result extend their own cultural experiences.

64. The school's 'Pathways' careers programme provides careers guidance at appropriate ages throughout the school. Leaders track pupil's engagement to ensure that they are prepared for decisions about subject and university choices. Pupils attend planned lectures, careers and university fairs. Opportunities for pupils to experience the world of work are limited, including by the school's geographical location. Tutors oversee the careers guidance for individual pupils. They ensure that

pupils are directed to specialist advice. As a result, most pupils are successful in meeting their first choice offers at university. Leavers study a broad range of subjects at the next stage of their education.

65. The nature of their boarding life means that pupils are well prepared for the practicalities of life beyond school. For example, they cook, clean and organise their laundry. Leaders have recently introduced ad hoc sessions that look at aspects of finance. However, there is no coherent programme of financial or economic education that threads through the school.

66. Pupils have strong regard for the importance of service to their houses, their school and the local community. Pupils are quick to offer help. Many undertake sustained voluntary work in the local community, supporting the elderly or befriending groups. The 'Sedbergh Gives Back' programme involves nearly all pupils in contributing to local and national charities and projects overseas.

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

67. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

68. Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively so that the wellbeing of both boarders and day pupils is promoted. Leaders have created a strong safeguarding culture. Governors are well trained, so they oversee the implementation of safeguarding arrangements effectively. They review records, hold discussions with staff and pupils, and visit boarding houses. Governors meet formally with representatives from boarding and pupil committees. They maintain an informed oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. This ensures that the required procedures and protocols are followed.

69. Staff receive frequent and detailed safeguarding training, including in preventing the risk of radicalisation and in countering extremism. Leaders keep an accurate register of training provided and who has attended. The customised training reflects the role of each member of staff in identifying potential risks to pupils, such as in boarding houses or during co-curricular activities. Safeguarding leaders, for example, meet with staff involved in boarding, sports coaches and minibus drivers to focus on their specific roles.

70. The safeguarding policy includes suitable definitions of abuse and is in line with latest statutory guidance. The boarding arrangements mean that house staff regularly see both boarders and day pupils in their care. This means that they notice changes in behaviour or demeanour quickly. Staff share concerns with senior leaders to ensure that pupils are appropriately supported. Issues that reach the thresholds for formal reporting are immediately addressed.

71. Records are up to date, thorough and show details of how concerns are followed up, notes of any action taken, decisions reached, and outcomes arrived at. They include formal risk assessments for pupils when needed. Action taken is tightly monitored and evaluated. Boarding staff have a prominent role. They work closely with safeguarding leaders so that support for individual pupils promotes their emotional and physical wellbeing.

72. Safeguarding leaders engage regularly with local safeguarding partners, including children's services and, when necessary, the police. Leaders and staff seek immediate advice if needed. They understand their role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies as required. The low-level concerns procedures work effectively. Staff are aware of the increased risk associated with both a boarding community and the high levels of both staff and pupil participation in physical activities. Staff know to report issues if they feel uneasy.

73. Leaders have introduced and implemented effective procedures to prevent access to inappropriate material online. Website and other online use by staff and pupils are closely monitored. Governors regularly review and test the effectiveness of the arrangements.

74. Pupils feel safe, including online. Protocols to keep boarders secure are reviewed regularly, for example when attending events to which others outside the school community are invited. Clear signage ensures that members of the public do not stray from public footpaths that cross the school site. Pupils are clear about the action they should take if they see adults without lanyards.

75. Pupils are confident to speak with safeguarding leaders and the wellbeing team, housemasters and housemistresses, tutors, nurses and matrons. They know they are listened to. Senior pupils are trained to recognise potential safeguarding issues. The pupil committees ensure that safeguarding and wellbeing are discussed regularly and communicated to senior staff. As a result of concerns

raised by pupils, for example, the school has increased the time that some year groups can access mobile telephones. Boarders are aware of the identity and contact details of people independent of the school that they can speak with if they are worried.

76. Recruitment checks are undertaken on governors, staff, volunteers and visiting speakers according to their role. The information is recorded accurately in the school's single central record of appointments. House staff ensure that they test the suitability of guardians and mitigate risks arising from travel arrangements, when pupils go home.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

77. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Sedbergh School
Department for Education number	943/6026
Registered charity number	1080672
Address	Sedbergh School Station Road Sedbergh Cumbria LA10 5HG
Phone number	01539 620535
Email address	hm@sedberghschool.org
Website	www.sedberghschool.org
Proprietor	Sedbergh School Company Ltd
Chair	Mr Richard Gledhill
Headteacher	Mr Dan Harrison
Age range	13 to 19
Number of pupils	564
Number of boarding pupils	538
Date of previous inspection	23 to 25 February 2022

Information about the school

78. Sedbergh School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school in Cumbria. Almost all pupils are boarders. The proprietor is Sedbergh School Company Limited, which has an appointed board of directors to oversee the operation of both Sedbergh senior and Sedbergh preparatory schools.

79. There are nine boarding houses situated on the main school site. Six of the houses are for male pupils, and three are for female pupils.

80. The school has identified 222 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

81. The school has identified English as an additional language for 67 pupils.

82. The school states its aims are to nurture each pupil so that they realise their full potential in a unique and rigorous environment of excellence, characterised by humility, ambition, resilience and kindness.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	29 April to 1 May 2025

83. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

84. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

85. 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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How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- 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.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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