

Inspection report  
Susie Earnshaw Theatre School  
Independent school  
DfES ref no: 302/6111

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 3 – 4 October 2006

# Introduction

## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

Susi Earnshaw Theatre School is a small family-run independent co-educational day school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. The school opened as a full-time secondary school in 1999, and moved to the existing premises in 2004. It is housed in a former community theatre on Barnet High Street, North London. At the time of the inspection there were 52 pupils on roll. The school has 18 teaching and administrative staff, the majority of whom are part-time. There is a programme of evening and weekend performing arts activities, which is attended by pupils from the school and other local children. An independent theatrical agency also runs from the school which represents all pupils and many ex-pupils.

The school's stated aims are *'to provide a safe, healthy and friendly environment where individuals can be themselves and grow with a clear focus on the performing arts and to encourage pupils to develop self-discipline and a love of learning'*.

## Overall evaluation of the school

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The curriculum and quality of teaching ensures pupils are engaged and motivated in most lessons. They make satisfactory progress in the academic elements of the curriculum and good progress in the vocational performing arts. Assessment is underdeveloped. The broad range of extra-curricular and performance opportunities enable pupils to develop wider skills and interests. The school is good at promoting the broad personal and social development of all individuals. Its astute attention to the support, care and welfare of pupils ensures all activities are conducted in a safe, secure and supportive environment. The school fully meets its stated aims and ethos.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets the needs and interests of pupils and is underpinned by appropriate curriculum policies and plans. It maintains an appropriate balance between the academic and vocational curriculum. Although the school does not follow the National Curriculum, pupils cover an adequate subject range, including the core skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The school has recently introduced a programme of life-skills which incorporates citizenship and careers advice. Personal, social and health education (PSHE), are delivered as part of this programme, as well as through cross curricular links. Pupils also take part in a diverse range of performing arts activities covering speech, acting, dance, singing and music. They are also regularly

involved in public performances. Pupils are adequately prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. There is very limited provision or additional support available for pupils with special educational needs.

The quality of teaching across the school varies significantly but is satisfactory overall. There is some outstanding and good teaching, particularly in performing arts disciplines. However, there are also significant amounts of less effective teaching which, on occasions, fails to engage the pupils fully. Teaching does not always cater fully for the broad range of ability of the pupils. This results, on occasions, in the more able pupils being unchallenged by lesson activities.

The quality of assessment also varies from subject to subject and is inadequate. In creative arts subjects pupils receive comprehensive and supportive verbal and written feedback on their progress. In other areas however, work is not always marked regularly, and pupils receive insufficiently detailed guidance on their progress or advice on steps they might take to improve. The school has identified this area as an area for improvement and is in the process of introducing a more detailed pupil review system and individual education planning cycle. At the time of the inspection these new systems were in their infancy.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning. They make very good progress in developing their interpersonal skills, and their techniques in the performing arts disciplines. The academic progress made by pupils is more varied. Most pupils achieve high grades in the national diploma in performing arts in the sixth form, GCSE expressive arts and drama in year 10, dance drama and music in year 11. However, GCSE results in mathematics and science have consistently been relatively lower.

The personal development of pupils is good. Pupils gain confidence and self-esteem from their courses in the expressive arts. They love their school and behave well. They respect one another and their teachers, whom they hold in very high regard. The vast majority have positive attitudes towards their work and persevere when faced with difficulty. Many are quick to ask questions if they do not understand. Pupils are given many opportunities to take responsibility, such as being involved in public performances and standing for the school council.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. They have a clear understanding about the right actions to take. They collaborate very well, support one another and are friendly and polite to adults. They develop a broad understanding of different beliefs and customs through assemblies, the study of a range of cultures in the arts and through opportunities to celebrate their own cultures. In one assembly about Yom Kippur, for example, the rest of the school listened supportively and with great interest as two pupils explained their customs.

The theatre and after-school provision makes a positive contribution to the local community and is a key resource in the area. Pupils are prepared well for their future economic well-being through work experience, careers guidance, professional work through the theatre agency and their courses in the arts.

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. The school maintains a high level of care for pupils. They are well supervised around the school. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to help assure pupils' well-being. These address health and safety, child protection, first aid, disability discrimination, bullying, and healthy eating. Two staff hold valid first aid qualifications. Risk assessments take place regularly. Appropriate facilities are available for pupils who are ill. Staff do not tolerate bullying of any kind. Pupils recognise and respect this approach. Healthy living has been a focus of the school's work. The tuck shop offers a range of healthy options at break times. Drinking water is readily available throughout the day. Pupils are given plenty of exercise through the dance lessons.

The standard and suitability of accommodation is satisfactory, and generally meets the educational purposes of the school. Staff are creative in making best use of the relatively limited classroom spaces available. The dance studio and theatre are significant assets for the school. They provide a good resource to underpin the theatrical elements of the school's activities. The school has sufficient teaching resources in most areas, with the exception of science, which suffers from lack of access to a suitable range of resources or accommodation. Pupils have adequate access to outside play areas. There is a satisfactory level of décor and cleanliness round the building. There are too few displays of pupils' work in classrooms.

The staff team is highly committed to pupils' well-being, educational and vocational development. Pupils benefit from the first-hand industry experience of vocational staff who work in the performing arts industry. This level of professionalism pervades the work they do with pupils. The school carries out appropriate checks including Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on all staff prior to their appointment at the school. The school has a complaints policy and procedure in place; however, it does not stipulate that written records should be kept nor does it specify that correspondence from complaints should also be kept confidential so does not meet requirements.

The school maintains strong links with parents. The prospectus and parents' and pupils' handbooks are well presented and contain comprehensive information about the school. A few of the statements in the prospectus are slightly misleading. For example, it makes reference to pupils following the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3, and also that there is a special educational needs co-ordinator. Neither of these statements is accurate. Parents receive regular reports on their child's progress. They are highly supportive of the school and clearly appreciate the means by which the school achieves its stated aims.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of teaching and assessment (standard 1) and must:

- ensure there is an adequate range of teaching resources in all subject areas (paragraph 1(3)(f)), and
- improve the framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and to use the information to plan teaching so that pupils can make better progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that written records are kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)), and
- ensure the complaints procedure states that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

## What the school could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the full range of academic subjects
- review provision for pupils with special educational needs, and
- improve the quality of displays around the school.

## School details

Name of school:	Susi Earnshaw Theatre School
DfES Number:	302/6111
Type of school:	Stage school
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	1999
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 19    Girls: 33    Total: 52
Annual fees (day pupils):	£5,500 - £6,000
Address of school:	The Bull Theatre 68 High Street Barnet Hertfordshire EN5 5SJ
Telephone number:	0208 441 5010
Fax number:	0208 364 9618
Email address:	info@sets.org.uk
Headteacher:	Mr David Earnshaw
Proprietor:	Mrs Susi Earnshaw
Reporting Inspector:	Peter Nelson (HMI)
Dates of inspection:	3 – 4 October 2006

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