

Susi Earnshaw Theatre School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	302/6111
Unique Reference Number	131830
Inspection number	333849
Inspection dates	28–29 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Sue Frater HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Susi Earnshaw Theatre School is a specialist stage school in Barnet, north London, for secondary pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 years who want to pursue a career in the performing arts. At the time of the inspection there were 47 pupils on roll, approximately 10 in each year group, with almost twice as many girls as boys. There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs, although a very small minority have a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia). The school opened as a full-time secondary school in 1999 and moved to its existing premises in 2004. It is housed in a former community theatre. Weekend and evening performing arts activities are provided for the pupils and other local children. An independent theatrical agency is also managed from the school and 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 in confidence and self-esteem, to provide a balanced education with a clear focus on the performing arts and to encourage pupils to develop self-discipline and a love of learning'*.

The school was last inspected in October, 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Susi Earnshaw Theatre School meets its aims fully and provides a good quality of education as the curriculum consists of a good balance of academic and vocational subjects, the quality of teaching and assessment is good, and this results in pupils making good progress overall. Pupils make excellent progress in performing arts subjects, where they constantly strive to improve their performance, and they reach high standards. They are not engaged in self-assessment in the core academic subjects and this impedes their progress. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and provision for their welfare, health and safety is good; through the encouragement of their teachers and the many opportunities to perform, pupils gain immensely in confidence and self-esteem. The school meets all of the required regulations, including those not met at the time of the last inspection.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The good curriculum meets the interests and aspirations of all pupils in focusing on the performing and expressive arts (dance, drama, music and art) and core subjects of English, mathematics and science. It meets their needs in leading to appropriate vocational and academic qualifications for their chosen careers, for example through GCSE and Trinity Guildhall Speech and Drama examinations. However, there is no provision to meet the needs of the few pupils with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia). The curriculum is enhanced by a range of other subjects including personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship, humanities (geography, history and religious education), French, and information and communication technology (ICT), which is taught through many subjects. A few parents' questionnaires indicated that they would like more educational trips for their children. Suitable plans and schemes of work support curriculum policies. PSHE promotes safe and healthy lifestyles and includes raising awareness of drug and alcohol abuse, sex education and careers advice. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made in the provision and resourcing of science. There is now a good emphasis on practical investigation covering biology, chemistry and physics. Other improvements include the introduction of French in Years 7 and 8, and of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualification in performing arts. The BTEC increases pupils' choice of courses in further education. The school no longer provides a sixth form and almost all pupils go on to further education colleges.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall, although it varies from outstanding to satisfactory. It is outstanding in vocational subjects relating to the school's specialist provision and in PSHE and citizenship. This is because these lessons are focused on pupils' progress in the learning objectives, make good use of the regular feedback from teachers and engage pupils in peer and self-assessment using examination criteria. As a result pupils are motivated to achieve their goals, make rapid progress and reach high standards. Teaching in English is good because excellent knowledge of the subject and examination criteria is used to engage pupils in discussing the texts. Teaching in mathematics and science is satisfactory. Pupils now enjoy science because of the introduction of practical investigation, although there are limited opportunities in mathematics for group problem solving and investigation, presentation of findings and explanation of methods. Assessment in the core academic subjects is thorough and relates to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, however, it does not engage pupils in evaluating their own progress. They do not know their actual and target achievement levels or grades, and there are few comments in marking to indicate how they can improve. A spreadsheet is being designed to track progress in the core subjects, but currently it does not include baseline or target levels and grades by which teachers can identify and address any underachievement. While end of year achievement is recorded in National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, six-weekly assessments are not and this makes it difficult to monitor pupils' progress. Although there are further improvements to be made to assessment procedures, they do nonetheless now meet

the regulation. The range of teaching resources, particularly in science, also now meets the regulation. In addition, the quality of displays around the school has improved since the last inspection.

Of the lessons seen during the inspection, the following are the most effective features, although they were not used in all subjects. In a few lessons, the objectives specify the learning that is to take place rather than emphasise the task. A starter activity engages the pupils immediately in the lesson and enables the teacher to ascertain their prior knowledge of the topic. The main lesson leads the pupils through a sequence of tasks to the learning objectives, and a plenary enables them to reflect on their learning. The most effective teaching methods include modelling the expectations for the pupils, for example in a dance movement or writing task, and the use of questioning to check and extend pupils' understanding. Another effective strategy, seen in a citizenship lesson, is the provision of guided opportunities for the pupils to apply their new learning independently, for example in role play using given scenarios. Pupils' questionnaires indicate that some pupils think that homework could be used more often and effectively to help them to understand and improve their work.

Pupils make good progress overall, although it varies from outstanding to satisfactory. They make good progress in English and satisfactory progress in mathematics and science. They make outstanding progress in the specialist subjects and citizenship because the lessons engage them in constantly improving their work and this leads to high standards. They also reach high standards in English and in Trinity Guildhall Speech and Drama (grade 8) examinations. In 2008, 100% of pupils achieved A* to C grades in BTEC performing arts and in GCSE English. Over 80% of pupils attained these grades in GCSE expressive arts, music, dance, drama and English literature, whereas only 67% gained them in mathematics and 50% in science.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

This aspect of pupils' development is outstanding, particularly their growth in confidence and self-esteem, and their appreciation of each other's talents. Pupils enjoy school very much, which is evident in their good attendance, positive attitudes to learning and in their supportive relationships with each other and with the staff. They say that the school is 'like a big family' where 'everyone is a friend'. Pupils develop good personal and professional skills, including skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, to support their future education and employment. They have high aspirations and receive effective careers guidance. Some pupils gain work experience through the school's agency. All pupils make a positive contribution to the school, for example as members of the school council, through work in the local community and by raising funds for charity. In providing workshops for primary school pupils, Age Concern and a multicultural centre, they develop understanding and tolerance of different cultures and social groups. Pupils develop self-discipline and their behaviour, in lessons and around the school, is good. They learn to respect the law

and human rights through lessons in citizenship. In these lessons they also develop a good understanding of public institutions and services such as local and national government and the United Nations.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Good provision is made for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils and all relevant regulations are met. Pupils thrive in the safe, caring and supportive environment of the school. They say that they feel very safe and that the school is 'just like home'. Pupils value the fact that there is always an adult to talk to if they have a concern. They report that there is very little bullying and that any behaviour issues are addressed promptly by the staff. Arrangements to promote good behaviour are effective and result in a calm environment for learning. Through the curriculum pupils learn to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. Dance provides regular physical exercise and the canteen promotes healthy eating, although the pupils would like a wider range of healthy options. The pastoral needs of all pupils are known well by the headteacher and proprietor who strive to meet them. All the required policies and procedures are in place to cover pupils' health and safety and safeguarding, including child protection. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust and are reviewed regularly, and risk assessments are completed appropriately. Any pupils at risk are identified early and effective arrangements are put in place to keep them engaged. There are sufficient levels of staffing and pupils are supervised well in school and on trips. The school meets all the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school continues to meet the requirements for safeguarding children by carrying out the necessary checks on staff. The procedures for confirming the suitability of the proprietor and staff ensure that the regulations are met and include the maintenance of a single central register of the checks undertaken.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn effectively and safely. The theatre is a positive asset to the pupils' development in the performing arts. It is also used well by the community in the evenings, at weekends and during school holidays. The buildings are clean, well maintained and adapted for wheelchair access. There are sufficient facilities for pupils, including medical facilities. Health and safety checks are carried out regularly and the premises and accommodation meet all of the relevant regulations.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of information for parents, carers and others, much of which is on the parents' site of the school website, in the parents' handbook and in the prospectus.

Parents receive a full report on their children's progress each year. The reports meet requirements, although the identified next steps to aid improvements are not sharply focused on skills in the academic subjects. A newsletter each term, a homework diary, and regular opportunities to attend their children's performances, engage parents successfully in the work of the school. A small minority of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, but the overwhelming majority of those who did respond were pleased with the school's work.

Procedures for handling complaints

Since the last inspection, the school has improved its complaints procedure. The procedure now meets all of the relevant regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations").

What the school could do to improve further

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

- improvement of pupils' achievement in academic subjects to be as good as their achievement in vocational subjects by:
 - involving pupils in self-assessment in English, mathematics and science through setting individual targets and informing pupils how to reach them, including through comments in marking
 - including baseline and target levels and grades in the progress tracking spreadsheets to identify and address any underachievement during the year and, to make monitoring easier, recording the six-weekly assessments in levels and grades, as in the end of year assessment.
- provision of staff training to support the pupils with a specific learning difficulty in dyslexia.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils		√		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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School details

Name of school	Susi Earnshaw Theatre School		
DCSF number	302/6111		
Unique reference number	131830		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	12 April 1999		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 16	Girls: 31	Total: 47
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,175 (Years 7-9) £6,750 (Years 10-11)		
Address of school	The Bull Theatre 68 High Street Barnet Hertfordshire EN5 5SJ		
Telephone number	020 8441 5010		
Fax number	020 8364 9618		
Email address	info@sets.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr David Earnshaw		
Proprietor	Ms Susi Earnshaw		
Reporting inspector	Sue Frater HMI		
Dates of inspection	28–29 April 2009		