



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Susi Earnshaw Theatre School

April 2022

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School's Details

School	Susi Earnshaw Theatre School			
DfE number	302/6111			
Registered charity number	1106006			
Address	Susi Earnshaw Theatre School 68 High Street Barnet Hertfordshire EN5 5SJ			
Telephone number	0208 441 5010			
Email address	info@susiearnshaw.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Julia Hammond			
Proprietors	Mrs Susi Earnshaw and Mr David Earnshaw			
Age range	9 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	46			
	Seniors	46	Juniors	0
Inspection dates	26 to 29 April 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Susi Earnshaw Theatre School is a co-educational academic and performing arts school. It was originally founded in 1989 as a stage school. It moved to its present site in 2004, where it is now housed in a fully functioning theatre. Susi and David Earnshaw, who founded the school, are its proprietors and have responsibility for the school's governance. The headteacher oversees the day-to-day operations. Pupils take GCSE examinations in their final year at the school and follow a timetable which enables time to be allocated to vocational studies in dance, drama, music and singing within the curriculum.
- 1.2 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a safe, healthy and friendly environment where individuals can be themselves and grow in confidence and self-esteem. It strives to provide a balanced education with a clear focus on the performing arts whilst encouraging pupils to develop self-discipline and a love for learning.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come mostly from Hertfordshire, London and the surrounding counties. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils on entry is broadly in line with the average for those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 17 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), with a range of needs including anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), developmental co-ordination disorder (dyspraxia), dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyscalculia and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Seven pupils have an education, health and care plan. All pupils identified as having SEND receive additional specialist help. No pupils are identified as having English as an additional language (EAL). Most pupils attending the school are talented within the performing arts. Their needs are addressed by providing individual extension work within the school and through access to specialist coaches and facilities.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 At GCSE, the small numbers of pupils entered prevent reliable comparison with national averages, but inspection evidence confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are

maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Throughout the school, pupils attain highly in all aspects of the performing arts.
- The achievement of pupils with SEND is good, as shown by the progress they make in relation to their additional needs or their starting points.
- Pupils attain mostly in line with or above their predicted grades in GCSE examinations, but their potential is not always fully realised because attainment data is not fully utilised to plan teaching.
- Pupils develop a wide range of study skills within their learning in the performing arts, but these skills are not applied effectively in other subjects.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils demonstrate exceptionally high levels of self-understanding for their age.
- Pupils develop an excellent understanding of spirituality through their performances.
- Throughout the school, pupils develop excellent levels of moral and social development.
- Pupils are inclusive, showing excellent respect for and appreciation of those with additional needs and those from cultures different to their own.
- Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to be physically and mentally healthy.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements.

- Raise the academic attainment of all pupils through more effective use of the school's data analysis and tracking to plan teaching and set targets for pupils.
- Raise the attainment of all pupils across the curriculum through the wider application of the high-level study skills they develop in the performing arts.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 Pupils' achievement throughout the school fulfils to a large extent the school's aim to provide a balanced education with a clear focus on the performing arts, whilst encouraging pupils to develop self-discipline and a love for learning. The vast majority of parents who responded to the pre-

inspection questionnaires stated that the school meets their children's educational needs effectively with all stating that teaching, including any online provision, enables their children to make progress. Inspection evidence shows this to be true although progress in some academic areas is less rapid than in the performing arts.

- 3.6 Throughout the school, pupils including those with SEND, attain highly in all aspects of the performing arts. During the inspection individual pupils and groups demonstrated high levels of performance in dance, in drama and when singing and accompanying original compositions. Most pupils enter London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA) examinations and achieve considerable success, with several pupils attaining grades 7 and 8 and a high proportion achieving distinctions at all grades. This high rate of achievement and progress within the performing arts is linked strongly to the passion, dedication and expertise of the proprietors, leadership and staff. There is a strong, caring culture throughout the school with a determination to enable all pupils to express themselves creatively at the highest level they can through the performing arts. Performance is particularly enhanced through the daily use of the onsite theatre which enables pupils to perform to a range of audiences and learn all aspects of theatre including staging, costume, lighting and sound. Pupils additionally benefit from individual support from caring and sympathetic staff combined with high expectations and relevant careers guidance based upon extensive knowledge of the requirements for a career in the performing arts. This enables most pupils to manage the audition process for further vocational training successfully. Pupils stated strongly during discussions that they feel well-prepared for life after school, including if they choose not to follow a career in the performing arts. Inspection evidence supports this view. They particularly appreciate what they learn in life skills studies and business studies, stating that these experiences prepare them well for independent living. Most pupils attain places in colleges of their choice, including those that specialise in the performing arts.
- 3.7 The small number of pupils taking GCSE examinations does not enable reliable comparisons with any national measurement of academic attainment. Scrutiny of results indicates that individuals taking GCSEs mostly attain at or above their predicted grades. This reflects good progress and in some cases progress is excellent. This achievement is also reflected in pupils' written and digital work and was seen in lesson observations and in discussions with pupils. The achievement of pupils with SEND is good and, again, sometimes excellent, as shown by the progress they make in relation to their additional needs or their starting points. This is due to the careful assessment of the needs of each pupil by highly skilled special needs staff and the implementation by all staff of specific individual education plans (IEPs) that include input from pupils and parents. Pupils' attainment is not yet matching their full potential because tracking and the analysis of data is in the early stages of development. It is not yet used effectively throughout the school in order to inform the planning of teaching, target-setting for pupils and individual IEPs.
- 3.8 As they move through the school most pupils develop good knowledge, skills and understanding in subjects studied in addition to the performing arts. This is because the curriculum and timetable has been carefully balanced to enable pupils to focus on performance two days per week and their other studies for the rest of the week. Specialist subject staff and a range of support staff including an occupational therapist and speech therapist, contribute strongly to pupils' good attainment and progress outside of the performing arts. The vast majority of pupils who responded to the questionnaires stated that teachers know how to help them and are supportive. Pupils' good level of achievement is evident in their work and was observed in most lessons. For example, during an English lesson pupils articulated confidently the definitions of prejudice and its Latin root giving relevant examples linked to class, race and health. During a science lesson pupils completed independent research on cells successfully to further develop their knowledge and understanding. Good progress in science is linked strongly to access to laboratory facilities at a nearby college where pupils can deepen their scientific knowledge through practical experiments. Most pupils naturally and confidently use information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning across the curriculum. For example, the use of music software to enhance musical compositions. A number of pupils have developed high levels of technical skill when involved with the technical aspects of theatre

production such as lighting and sound. Younger pupils benefit from subject-specific ICT teaching which enables them to develop good skills in coding and presentation.

- 3.9 Pupils develop excellent communication skills which are fostered within the high expectations of the performing arts where pupils express themselves to a high level in a variety of ways. During discussions, pupils spoke clearly about the importance of communication in all aspects of their daily lives. Through performance and studying related subjects including music, dance and drama, they become extremely competent listeners, speakers and communicators. Performances observed during the inspection included the singing of outstanding original compositions involving drama, music and dance. Pupils conveyed deep messages about broken relationships and feelings of isolation. Pupils write fluently and clearly beyond the literal. For example, older pupils commented on Dickens' use of pathetic fallacy in *A Christmas Carol* and the use of complex metaphor and allegory in their writing about *The Sick Rose* by William Blake. Younger pupils commented with sensitivity on sensory imagery in a piece of work based on *Black Beauty*.
- 3.10 By the time they leave the school, the majority of pupils develop good mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding. With effective support, most develop a good understanding of mathematics including place values, factors and multiples, powers and roots, ratios, decimals and percentages. For example, in a mathematics lesson most pupils show that they understood the difference between direct and inverse proportion and solved problems using this knowledge in real contexts. Pupils stated that grouping for foundation and higher-level mathematics combined with the individual help they receive enables them to understand mathematics and to make good progress. Scrutiny of the work shows this to be the case. Opportunities to conduct mathematical investigations and to apply knowledge when problem-solving are still being developed across all aspects of the mathematics curriculum.
- 3.11 Pupils develop a wide range of study skills within the performing arts. This includes creativity; thinking independently and collaboratively drawing knowledge from a wide range of sources; hypothesising; reading critically; analysing text; synthesising information; and making predictions. For example, in GCSE drama studies, pupils selected a challenging stimulus linked to the abduction of a young child. They demonstrated the ability to read widely and critically around the subject in order to obtain relevant information which enabled them to produce a devised piece with meaning and impact. Pupils are extremely confident with regard to examination and performance requirements, whilst at the same time pursuing their own talents and interests. Most pupils manage their time well and are persistent in taking responsibility for their performance outcomes. They review their own performance and that of their peers critically and effectively in order to continually raise their standards to levels of excellence. Application of these study skills is less well developed in subjects outside of literacy and the performing arts. The use of worksheets in some subjects restricts opportunities and challenge for pupils to undertake independent work and research.
- 3.12 Through the performing arts, pupils achieve well in competitions and auditions with some pupils performing in professional London productions. These wider achievements are linked strongly to the school's culture developed by the proprietors, whereby the group of pupils who attend the school are akin to a theatre production company. This enables them to strive continuously to produce professional productions that are performed for a range of audiences in a working theatre that is part of the school and the community.
- 3.13 Pupils throughout the school display an excellent attitude to learning. The vast majority of pupils are enthusiastic and driven by a passion for the performing arts. Pupils take great pride in their work. They challenge themselves individually as well as collaborating effectively when producing high-quality productions for internal and external audiences. They give and receive positive criticism as they strive to perform to the best of their abilities. During discussions pupils demonstrated positive yet realistic attitudes. They stated maturely how they recognised that there are frequently financial and emotional pressures as a result of choosing to follow a career in the performing arts. They stated strongly that the school helps them to understand the need to achieve in other subjects. In particular, they

appreciate the breadth and depth of the carefully planned life skills programme and opportunities for open discussion, stating strongly that these prepare them well for life beyond the school.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 The school successfully meets its aim to provide a safe, healthy and friendly environment where individuals can be themselves and grow in confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' excellent personal development is nurtured within an ethos of support, care and challenge. This strong culture of care and understanding of individual needs and talents, stems from the original vision of the proprietors and their continued dedicated support of the school. Leaders and the proprietors have strongly supported the development of a comprehensive life skills and health education programme that permeates the school. Responses from parents to the questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive with regard to how the school contributes to the development of their children personally, socially and emotionally. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- 3.16 During discussions, most pupils demonstrated exceptionally high levels of self-understanding for their age. They are self-reflective and have a mature awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Their experience of the demands of audition processes and performance particularly enables them to develop and demonstrate resilience and an approach to their development that embraces continual self-reflection. For example, in a LAMDA speech lesson, pupils actively supported and critiqued each other's monologues in order to enhance their performances and the power of the message. During discussions, pupils stated strongly that they feel well prepared for the next stage of their lives personally and academically. They appreciate the way their learning in school equips them for the practical aspects of life including managing money and living independently.
- 3.17 Pupils who choose to come to the school share a passion for the performing arts and creativity. Through working on individual and collaborative performances they make a range of effective choices. This empowers them to make mature decisions including how to develop their performances through music, story and interpretation. During discussions pupils demonstrated an impressive understanding of how the decisions they make regarding a career in the performing arts may impact their lives. They were appreciative of how the school enabled them to prepare for making decisions such as which auditions to try for, which parts to accept, how to manage rejection and periods of being out-of-work.
- 3.18 Pupils show excellent appreciation of the non-material aspects of life particularly within the current world context. During discussions they stated with great depth of feeling that it is important to give others happiness and that they can do this through their performances. Pupils demonstrate a deep and wide-ranging understanding of how spirituality may be developed through religion, meditation, yoga and life experiences. Pupils throughout the school stated that they appreciate deeply opportunities to reflect and to experience and share spirituality through all aspects of performance. During many performances observed during the inspection, including dance, music, drama and readings, pupils shared their deepest feelings enabling those watching to understand, appreciate and share at a spiritual level.
- 3.19 The vast majority of pupils have an excellent moral understanding. They behave respectfully and appropriately in lessons, throughout the school and when interacting with their peers socially. During discussions, pupils demonstrated a mature understanding of justice, rules and the law. They interpret information discerningly, including through considering the reliability of sources and they understand the importance of taking account of individual circumstances. For example, during a lower school business lesson pupils discussed with compassion the moral dilemma of whether it can be right to break the law in order to survive. In their daily lives, most pupils accept responsibility for their own behaviour and challenge others to exhibit shared standards of kindness, tolerance, and caring. Where behaviour falls below this standard, pupils understand the need for sanctions or other intervention from staff. Pupils' excellent moral understanding is supported strongly through respectful

relationships with staff. During discussions, pupils stated strongly that sanctions such as detention are rarely needed as there is a culture of discussion and education enabling people to reconcile any differences quickly and amicably.

- 3.20 Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate excellent levels of social development. Pupils socialise and integrate positively and supportively across all ages during rehearsals and during breaktimes. They form a wide range of productive and respectful relationships with each other particularly sharing common goals linked to their performances. They support and encourage the efforts of each other in lessons and when performing. During performances, all pupils listen respectfully always clapping and encouraging each other at the end. During discussions pupils stated that they are like a family where different year groups are happy in each other's company. Most older pupils show unprompted concern and support for those younger or new to the school. Pupils of all ages were observed interacting positively during breaktimes including working together to improve their performances.
- 3.21 Pupils willingly take on leadership roles including heads of school, form representatives and digital leaders. All pupils are included in weekly meetings which provide opportunities for them to express their thoughts and opinions. Pupils stated that through discussion they are able to reflect upon their school as a community and to suggest changes. Pupils stated that a homework club and additional LAMDA lessons had been introduced upon their request. Pupils appreciate the circumstances of those less fortunate than themselves and are involved in significant activities that benefit others within school, the local community and the wider world. These include supporting a charity that reaches out to isolated people, fundraising for victims of war in Ukraine, the Barnet Christmas Fayre and engaging in performances for audiences with additional needs.
- 3.22 Most pupils are thoughtful, perceptive, inclusive and respectful. Throughout the school, pupils show excellent respect for and appreciation of those with additional needs. During discussions they also expressed respect for their own and other cultures demonstrating sensitivity and understanding. This deep understanding and appreciation of culture permeates a wide range of performances. For example, traditional Indian dance and celebration of the Mardi Gras through music and dance. Pupils stated that they appreciate being able to share their cultural traditions and beliefs with others at a deep level in presentations to the whole school. Pupils stated how their life skills lessons have helped them to understand British values and the importance of respecting others and making adjustments in order that all can experience equality.
- 3.23 Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to be physically and mentally healthy. This is particularly apparent in their approaches to diet, exercise, and a balanced lifestyle within the context of the demands of the performing arts, where individuals are continually being judged and compared. All of the pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaires stated that they could speak to an adult if they were worried or concerned. During discussions, pupils demonstrated extensive knowledge about how to stay safe online including not sharing passwords, giving personal information and not responding to or befriending strangers. They said that their life skills and health education lessons help them to cope with the pressures of performing at a high level as well as understanding healthy relationships, boundaries, consent and respect. The safety and well-being of pupils throughout the school is a high priority for governance, leadership and staff. All of the parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaires stated that the school safeguards their children effectively and inspection evidence confirms this.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, attended form meetings and an assembly. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Dr Patricia Preedy

Reporting inspector

Mrs Jane Stanley

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Mr Luke Harrison

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