



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Sylvia Young Theatre School

March 2023

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School's Details

School	Sylvia Young Theatre School			
DfE number	213/6319			
Address	Sylvia Young Theatre School 1 Nutford Place Marylebone London W1H 5YZ			
Telephone number	020 7258 2330			
Email address	info@syts.co.uk			
Headteacher	Ms Frances Chave			
Proprietor	Mrs Sylvia Young			
Age range	10 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	207			
	Juniors	5	Seniors	202
Inspection dates	28 February to 2 March 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 The Sylvia Young Theatre School is an independent co-educational school. Founded in 1981 by the current principal and proprietor, the school moved to its present site in 2010, where it is based in a converted church. The principal, who has responsibility for vocational provision in the performing arts, is supported by an advisory board of executive directors. The headteacher oversees academic delivery and pastoral support. Since the previous inspection, a GCSE drama studio has been fully equipped and refurbished. Provision of support for pupils has been increased including the areas of wellbeing; counselling therapy; learning support; and information and technology communication (ICT) staffing.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to provide a happy working environment and to inspire pupils to achieve high academic standards and excel in the performing arts through a balanced and challenging curriculum. The school further aims, in partnership with parents, to enable pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, and to develop suitable skills and self-confidence to be successful in their future lives.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds mostly from within London and the surrounding counties. All pupils admitted to the school demonstrate a talent in one or more vocational areas. Assessment data in the junior school and nationally standardised data provided in the senior school indicate that the academic ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 50 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), with a range of needs including dyslexia, 36 of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil has an education, health and care plan. There are 14 pupils who have English as an additional language but none needs specialist support.

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 In the junior school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2020 to 2022, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, 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.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 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

2.13 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 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 wellbeing of the pupils.

2.20 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'.

Key findings

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

- Pupils are high achievers who attain exceptional standards in their vocational studies and excel academically.
- Pupils achieve excellent levels of knowledge, skills and understanding in both vocational and academic studies.
- Pupils apply higher-order thinking skills confidently to rapidly extend their academic and vocational skills.
- Pupils display extremely positive attitudes towards their learning, approaching their studies and technical work with rigour and purpose.

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

- Pupils are extremely self-disciplined and demonstrate strong self-confidence; they are reflective, resilient learners who know how to improve their performance.
- Pupils display a highly developed moral understanding; they take responsibility for their own behaviour and are sensitive to the needs of others.
- Pupils demonstrate a mature social awareness, working together with dedication and purpose.
- Pupils are respectful of each other and appreciate the value of diversity in their community.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enable pupils to gain a greater experience of the local community and wider society through extending opportunities for them to share their vocational talents with local schools.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils demonstrate extremely high levels of achievement in both their academic and vocational studies. This reflects the successful realisation of the school's ambitious aim to provide pupils with a challenging educational experience which broadens their academic understanding and simultaneously allows them to excel in the performing arts. Pupils derive great benefit from the arrangement of the school week to consist of three days concentrated on academic learning and two days devoted to vocational training. Pupils' attainment at GCSE in 2022 was extremely strong, with over a third achieving the highest three grades. Data indicate similar attainment in 2020 and 2021 in the centre-

and teacher-assessed assessments. This high level of attainment is a consequence of the pupils' extremely positive attitudes towards their learning which are supported by teaching which demonstrates a high level of subject knowledge combined with excellent learning resources. Data analysed show that almost all pupils achieve significantly higher examination grades than expected, representing rapid progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. Pupils of all ages achieve a similarly high level of progress throughout the school. The very large majority of parents state in their responses to the questionnaire that individual needs are met effectively and the teaching they receive enables their children to make progress. Inspection evidence confirms these views. There is no significant difference in attainment between the different groups within the school, and pupils with SEND make consistent and rapid progress over time. This is because tracking and monitoring procedures are comprehensive, which allows teachers and leaders to identify relative areas of weakness in the performance of cohorts and individual pupils. They then intervene effectively to support those pupils. Pupils consistently achieve entry to demanding sixth-form colleges and gain a high number of vocational scholarships to continue their training on leaving the school.

- 3.6 Pupils achieve at exceptional levels through participation in the school's vocational programme. They are highly successful in gaining a significant number of high standard professional awards which have included an Emmy, an Oscar, an Olivier and a Tony award, and nominations for BAFTA, amongst many others. Pupils are working constantly in the profession whilst they are studying at the school. Pupils tour regularly, appear in West End theatres and undertake roles in films. Musical achievements have included the 'Best Newcomer Industry Award' and an Oscar award. Pupils display an extremely high level of professionalism in the many school performances. Pupils are also successful in national mathematics challenges and in national poetry-writing competitions. A small minority of parents felt that the school does not provide a good range of extra-curricular activities, including sport. Inspection evidence does not support this view. Pupils undertake a wide range of very physical activity in their extensive vocational work, and the focus of their study includes many areas usually offered in schools as activities. This is in line with the school's aims. Pupils gain experience and life-skills through the comprehensive vocational training they receive, professionally supported by the school's leaders, directors and proprietor.
- 3.7 Pupils demonstrate an excellent knowledge of different subjects and apply their understanding effectively across all areas of their learning. Year 8 pupils demonstrated a keen understanding of historical context, ably comparing the backdrop to the Terror in France with the English Civil War. In Spanish, Year 10 pupils displayed clarity of understanding as they discussed changes of verb stems and the use of indefinite articles to conform to the following noun. Pupils progress rapidly in specialist tuition in dance, drama, singing and music. They do so particularly in dance where classes mix Years 6 to 8 and 9 to 11 in groups arranged by ability. Younger pupils identified changes in tempo and tone accurately in a music lesson, building on their understanding to include the concept of rubato in performance. In their 'development for performance' work, senior pupils used the patterns of the constellations to develop a sequence of choreographic moves incorporating the impact of light. They achieved a high-quality aesthetic effect by doing so. Pupils take great pride in the high standards they achieve. In doing so, they are strongly supported by the well-structured, challenging and professional curriculum and by the excellent teaching they receive.
- 3.8 Throughout the school, pupils are highly effective and confident communicators. They rapidly develop these skills, encouraged by the classroom ethos of positive interaction and the many opportunities for developing their individual skills in their vocational studies. Pupils speak and write with confidence, expressing complex ideas clearly and sensitively. Year 6 pupils ably discussed the role of micro-organisms in generating oxygen, accurately identifying differences between fungi, a virus and bacteria. In English, Year 7 pupils demonstrated excellent communication skills in a whole class discussion analysing a poem in terms of metaphor, imagery and tone. Younger pupils communicated a strong sense of emotion through song as they rehearsed in a singing lesson. In a drama session, older pupils used phrases such as 'his fragile wrists' and 'broken nails' to create a powerful image of the character

development. Pupils demonstrate high levels of achievement in their written work, displaying flair and imagination in creative exercises, and a high level of competence in technical work.

- 3.9 Pupils display strong numerical skills and apply these competently across the curriculum. Year 11 pupils evaluated the probability of an event occurring or not occurring accurately in mathematics, confidently employing fractions, decimals and percentages to support their reasoning. In physics, Year 7 pupils applied simple formula successfully and used metre rules accurately to assess the speed and distance of racing balloons. In music, pupils of all ages demonstrate a keen ability to work out numerical values of notes and effectively utilise their sense of rhythm in dance routines.
- 3.10 Pupils develop high levels of competence in information and communication technology (ICT), and routinely apply these skills across the curriculum successfully. They use technology effectively to promote all aspects of their learning, both academic and vocational, supported by excellent facilities. Year 8 pupils effectively used their research skills to prepare a script and logo for a podcast in an ICT lesson. Year 10 media studies pupils were highly adept in identifying the use of common media terms to promote a desired audience response. Senior pupils used advanced software to write scripts to industry standard. Pupils of all ages access lesson materials competently online and conduct independent research to promote their learning.
- 3.11 Pupils display extremely well-developed study skills. They participate confidently in academic and vocational classes, challenging their understanding and extending their knowledge through diligent engagement. Year 9 pupils applied their understanding of a range of chemical reactions effectively to develop problem-solving equations and make appropriate hypotheses to test their results. In a personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHCE) lesson, Year 9 pupils discussed and analysed with confidence the order in which to place human rights. Older pupils in a drama session, successfully analysed a Shakespearean extract, using their understanding of iambic pentameter to convey meaning through physical actions on the stress beats. Pupils are highly effective in employing their study skills. They develop a mature, dedicated approach to their learning and use mistakes as opportunities to improve their performance. As a result, they rapidly improve their subject knowledge, extend their academic understanding, and refine their creative performances.
- 3.12 Pupils throughout the school demonstrate excellent attitudes towards their learning. They are highly dedicated, committed learners who willingly work hard to succeed. They work collaboratively with their teachers and with the professionals who lead their vocational studies to achieve high levels of success. Pupils take responsibility for their own work and are proud of their achievements. They encourage each other, using peer evaluation as an effective, sensitive tool to improve their own performance and that of their contemporaries. They work independently and together with purpose and commitment, evidenced in their lessons, vocational sessions and through scrutiny of their written work. The very large majority of parents in their responses stated that the school helps their children to be confident and independent and this is evident in the mature approach pupils take towards their learning.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils demonstrate extremely high levels of self-confidence and self-discipline. They are busy, committed young people. They combine successfully the demands of their academic timetables with a full vocational programme, and also, frequently, with professional working engagements outside school. As a result, pupils develop strong personal qualities of organisation and self-esteem. These qualities are promoted by the school's ethos which recognises individual pupils' talents and offers them opportunities to use these professionally while developing their academic understanding. Pupils are self-reliant and reflective: they understand their own qualities and talents and know how they can improve themselves in all aspects of their lives. In a Year 11 English lesson, pupils considered effectively how they could improve their writing skills, honestly assessing their individual approach to

the task. Year 9 pupils explored how they could advance their theatrical skills in a drama lesson, writing articulate and well-considered targets for themselves. Older pupils demonstrated a strong understanding of their own level of expertise in tap. They supported each other in improving technique and developing an awareness of the smooth and accurate attack of the enchainement they were rehearsing. Pupils of all ages approach their studies with maturity and the perseverance necessary to succeed.

- 3.15 Pupils understand the importance of making decisions and taking responsibility for their lives. Each is aware of how their decisions affect their wellbeing and future. Senior pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of the importance of the choices they make and are appreciative of the academic and vocational careers guidance they receive. Throughout the school, aspirations and expectation of personal excellence are at an extremely high level in vocational fields as well as academic areas. This is shown by the pupils' understanding that only they are responsible for their own achievements and disappointments. They appreciate the need to be mature and honest in their decision-making from an early age. The independence they are encouraged to adopt is the basis of their life at the school. This supports their sense of responsibility and ownership of the decisions which will affect their futures.
- 3.16 Pupils demonstrate a vivid appreciation of the non-material elements of life and understand how these strengthen their self-awareness. Pupils are thoughtful and reflective, representing their awareness of the non-tangible in their physical performances and artwork, and in classroom discussions on ethical topics. Year 10 pupils chose personal artefacts thoughtfully, representing how they saw themselves and incorporated these into design work in the style of a chosen artist. Pupils studying media were adept at evaluating attempts to 'sell' the perfect life to magazine readers. Senior pupils performing a complex layered song in three polyphonic sections spontaneously broke into applause as the rhythms combined to highlight the meaning of the song. Pupils share a genuine understanding of different cultures and religions, enjoying opportunities to celebrate special religious occasions in assemblies and themed days.
- 3.17 Pupils display a strong moral understanding and a clear sense of right and wrong. They understand the school's system of rewards and sanctions and are fully cognisant of the need to behave sensibly in performance studios. The overwhelming majority of parents and pupils in their questionnaire responses stated that the school expects pupils to behave well. Inspection evidence shows that behaviour is exemplary, and pupils understand that sanctions are important in maintaining a harmonious, well-ordered community. In a Year 8 humanities lesson, pupils ably articulated the difference between right and wrong in the context of terrorism. They equated terrorism effectively to a form of aggression and abuse which undermines the rule of law. Senior pupils in a drama class successfully depicted moral standards as they worked on a scene displaying a lack of respect shown by a mother towards her son. Pupils gain a strong understanding of how to build positive relationships supported by the rigorous PSHCE programme.
- 3.18 Pupils develop excellent social skills. These are evident in pupils' demeanour, and they employ them effectively in their academic and vocational studies. They demonstrate a positive attitude towards each other and a willingness to work together. Most parents were satisfied that the school enables their children to develop strong teamwork and social skills. This is enabled through the high expectation of collaborative work in their vocational sessions and supported by the school's strong pastoral system. Year 8 pupils in biology worked purposefully in pairs to discuss possible ways to preserve species ex situ. In drama, Year 9 pupils demonstrated excellent collaborative skills as they completed a demanding warm-up exercise, working as a class. Older pupils in tap were highly successful in ensemble work performing the double and single rotation and rattle. Across all age groups, pupils learn to work with a unity of purpose in academic classes, in their vocational sessions and within their school community.
- 3.19 Pupils develop strong leadership skills as they undertake roles of responsibility within the school community. The mixed-age structure of many of the vocational classes encourages successful leadership and roles of responsibility across different year groups of the lower and upper schools.

Pupils gain valuable experience as they represent their forms on the school council, the food council or as part of the green team. They are active in raising money for local and national charities and have been zealous in their efforts to help after recent international disasters. Through links with a local school, pupils are encouraged to share their vocational talents with those unable to access specialist education. Currently, such opportunities to broaden pupils' awareness of wider society and the local community are limited.

- 3.20 Pupils are proud of their school and of its welcoming, inclusive ethos. They fully subscribe to the values of respect for each individual, regardless of ethnicity, culture, gender or disability, on which the school's ethos is firmly based. Pupils share a whole school commitment to foster a culture of respect and inclusion. Younger pupils clearly demonstrated their understanding of the possible effects of intolerance when discussing the fact that Joan of Arc was tried because she dressed as a man. Pupils' work on race incorporated strong evidence of sensitivity and a genuine respect for all diversities, including comments such as, 'Why would colour or race matter?' Year 11 pupils displayed an avid understanding of the benefits that can accrue from diversity in a musical production. They cited use of a wide range of different cultural instruments as beneficial, giving sitars and bagpipes as examples. Pupils develop a keen awareness and understanding of other cultures from their peers, through the curriculum, visits from external speakers and their performances. They value the many opportunities they are given to explore current issues through the literature they study and the themes they develop in their drama studies. The school's equality committee is run by pupils and is active in supporting the rights of each individual in the community. There is also an additional equality committee which consists of parents, staff and pupils working together. Pupils behave sensitively towards one another.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe and lead healthy lives, supported by the well-planned programmes of study and the strong pastoral system. Pupils maintain their physical fitness through the rigorous training they receive in dance and movement. They are aware of the importance of mental wellbeing and develop good mental health through support by trained mental health first aiders and school therapists. Pupils make healthy choices through suitable menu options. Changes in the menus are made in response to pupil requests. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online, receiving appropriate training in PSHCE and discrete ICT lessons. Pupils appreciate the support they receive from all staff and are confident to report any concerns they may have. Pupils feel valued as individuals and say they are well looked after, reflecting the very high quality of pastoral care and the excellent provision made available by the proprietor and senior leaders.

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 proprietor and attended form meetings. 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

Mrs Pamela Johnson	Reporting inspector
Dr James Raymond	Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, ISA school)
Mrs Karen Pickles	Team inspector (Former senior housemistress and director of drama, HMC and GSA schools)