

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Arts Educational School

November 2019



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School's Details

School	Arts Educational School		
DfE number	313/6064		
Registered charity number	311087		
Address	The Arts Educational School Cone Ripman House 14 Bath Road Chiswick London W4 1LY		
Telephone number	020 8987 6600		
Email address	info@artsed.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Adrian Blake		
Chair of governors	Mr Kevin McGrath		
Age range	11 to 19		
Number of pupils on roll	267		
	Seniors	130	Sixth Form 137
Inspection dates	19 to 21 November 2019		

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 The Arts Educational School is an independent co-educational day school, with around three-quarters of pupils being female. The sixth form represents slightly more than half of the school. The school was founded in 1939, amalgamating two existing schools founded by Grace Cone and Olive Ripman, to prepare young people for professional careers in or related to the theatre. It moved to the present site, which includes separated provision for higher education courses, in 1986. Some sixth-form teaching takes place in the Polski Centre in Ravenscourt Park. The school provides vocational training in dance, drama, music and art subjects, leading to BTEC qualifications, alongside GCSE and a small number of A-level courses in academic subjects. The school is part of the Arts Education Schools London, a registered charity overseen by a board of trustees. A specific sub-committee oversees the school. Since the previous inspection, the school has commenced the second stage of a building project, due for completion in 2020. This currently necessitates the use of some temporary teaching accommodation onsite.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to nurture individual pupils and their unique talents and encourage each one to flourish and to leave school as a creative, articulate and imaginative young adult, assured of his or her ability to achieve their best in their chosen field. It seeks to do so by providing pastoral care and teaching at the highest levels to inspire pupils' confidence, curiosity and commitment to all of their studies, both academic and vocational.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils are drawn from a wide range of countries and from professional and business families. Around 50 sixth-form pupils live away from home in accommodation they source independently of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly above average. The school has identified 75 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyscalculia, as well as autism and behavioural needs. No pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 2 pupils, whose needs are supported in class. All pupils have special talents in the performing arts. More able pupils are identified and provision made within class.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. Additionally, the inspection reports 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. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was 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 report of which appears later in this document. The 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 regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, supervision, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; premises and accommodation; 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 full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\)](#).

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 and A level the small number of entries does not allow reliable comparison with averages for pupils in maintained schools to be made, and comparative data is not available for BTEC courses; but all pupils make at least good progress.
- 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 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 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

- 2.11 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 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.

2.18 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include 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 excellent.
- Pupils' performance in dance, acting and musical theatre is at a very high level for their age and is often exceptional.
 - Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning, notably a strong desire to fulfil their ambitions; they often apply the attributes developed in vocational work to other learning.
 - Pupils develop a strong ability to evaluate their own and other pupils' work, inviting and accepting criticism readily and acting upon it.
 - Pupils are prepared to move into higher level vocational courses and the theatrical profession very effectively.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils are confident and develop high levels of self-esteem without arrogance.
 - Pupils develop strong resilience in line with the school's aims.
 - Pupils are socially mature and mix very well across year groups.
 - Pupils' understanding of how to maintain mental and physical health is very strong because of the guidance they receive.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes the school is advised to consider the following:
- Maximise the benefit to pupils' broader development of current building alterations, particularly through sporting opportunities and space for relaxation.

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' performance in dance, acting and musical theatre is at a very high level for their age and is often exceptional. The school fulfils its aims with resounding success. In response to pre-inspection questionnaires the overwhelming majority of parents and pupils agreed that teaching enables pupils to make progress. Pupils perform solo singing, dancing and acting roles in West End musicals and in film, for which they audition externally in highly competitive fields. These levels of achievement are enabled by expert teaching and senior leaders' refined approach to organising the vocational curriculum. This includes examination courses and activities which would in other situations be considered extra-curricular, for example choirs for actors who are not primarily singers, the contemporary dance company and song-writing classes. Achievement across all these different types of activity is uniformly very high. The pupils' outstanding success as performers owes much to the curriculum being kept under constant review and being well-informed as to the changing needs of the profession which most pupils aspire to enter.
- 3.6 Pupils' excellent ability to evaluate their own and their peers' performances in writing, required regularly throughout BTEC courses, enhances their understanding of how to improve still further. Evaluative writing in the acting strand of BTEC performing arts is of very high quality. Written evaluation of performing a role in a Berkoff play was exceptional in its insight into complex character and its understanding of the methodology needed to convey this. These high levels of understanding are enabled by excellent assessment by teaching staff which is focused and individually tailored, using examination criteria.

- 3.7 The notably high level of pupils' technical skills is consistent across different disciplines, demonstrated in the refinement of individual dance steps in tap, where Year 12 pupils made precise adjustments to foot positions, to the position of their arms and to the scale of their movements. The bodily and verbal projection of emotion or character in both dance and acting is outstanding. Vocal performances across a wide range of genres are compelling and technically highly assured. Typical was a GCSE music performance lesson where pupils sang at levels far above that expected for their age, for example including virtuosic versatility in free-style additions to Ariana Grande's *breathin'*.
- 3.8 In their academic work pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are good. Their understanding of technical language is fluent and subject-related terminology is well understood. Younger pupils in art showed excellent understanding of what they were doing and why in collage work. Pupils extend their understanding particularly when teaching builds on their vocational interests through role play or physical identification with the topic studied. Pupils in GCSE history studying the emergence of the British Empire took a lively interest in the introduction of tobacco in the seventeenth century when they handled contemporary clay pipes dredged from the Thames. Sometimes pupils' progress is inhibited in a few academic subjects when teaching provides limited challenge for them to extend their understanding. Pupils' progress is enhanced by additional one-to-one support, for example as examinations approach, through the school's systematic mentoring programme. Pupils identify in individual booklets areas where they need help to improve and they are given appropriately focused guidance. Pupils' creative skills are strong, exemplified in the creation of compelling transformed images in photography and imaginative work when devising drama.
- 3.9 Results in vocational subjects are excellent. Since the school began to offer the three pathways of acting, musical theatre and dance at BTEC Level 3 in 2015 the proportion of pupils attaining all three at D*, the highest grade, has risen, with 85% doing so in 2019. Results at A level vary because of different cohorts but the proportion of pupils achieving grades at A* to B is high, with 78% doing so in 2019. Performance at GCSE shows that, consistently, over 90% of pupils achieve grades 4 to 9. In achieving these results pupils benefit from small class sizes and much individual attention. The results of those pupils with SEND are consistent with those of all pupils due to the systematic support they receive through well-informed provision in vocational and academic classes, one-to-one support where necessary and consistent monitoring of performance. Sixth-form pupils are enabled to achieve places to study performing arts at leading conservatoires and colleges in the UK and abroad. Those who choose to pursue academic study at universities are equally successful. Pupils who decide to leave after Year 11 are well prepared for studies in other independent schools or maintained sixth-form colleges. The levels of knowledge, understanding and skills, particularly high in the performing arts, demonstrated during lesson and rehearsal observations and in work scrutiny, together with examination results and evidence from standardised tests of progress, suitably developed since the previous standard inspection, show that pupils make excellent progress.
- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate good written skills overall and gain confidence in refining their writing through help from teaching. For example, A-level English pupils identified the progress they had made and consolidated their understanding when encouraged to review how they had improved their writing since GCSE work. Pupils with SEND are able to improve their writing because effective strategies such as use of different coloured paper are employed consistently by teaching staff. Pupils distinguish well between descriptive writing and analysis, avoiding undue narrative. Pupils are highly articulate, discuss ideas succinctly and listen to one another and their teachers well.
- 3.11 Pupils in Years 7 to 11 develop good numeracy skills and they apply these effectively, for example to calculations in science. Older pupils have fewer occasions when numeracy skills of any sophistication are needed but they identified that they are able to utilise their numeracy skills successfully in planning production budgets in BTEC studies. Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) well in a wide variety of situations in vocational and academic subjects. They use ICT to write regular logs of activities in vocational subjects which they store online. They and their teachers then comment on the logs which enable pupils to enhance their understanding of how to improve their work through an

ongoing dialogue. Pupils use ICT skills in sophisticated and creative ways to embed images in documents successfully and manipulate them and also create plotting diagrams of stage positions electronically. They use musical notation software with confidence and regularly record their own singing and group performances to enable individual practice between rehearsals.

- 3.12 Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning and develop many excellent learning skills. They often apply the techniques that they develop in vocational studies to other learning, encouraged to do so when teaching shares good practice between different areas of the school, as recommended at the previous standard inspection. A notable feature is their strong ability to evaluate verbally their own and other pupils' work independently with clarity and focus within rehearsals and classes. Sixth-form pupils demonstrating prepared dialogues to another pair of pupils received positive and helpfully critical feedback which they then were able to reciprocate when the other pair performed. In their questionnaire responses the overwhelming majority of pupils agreed that they are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. This strength of the pupils' learning is used to enhance pupils' progress in some academic teaching, but not all. When pupils are required by marking to identify the steps they will take to improve and when they will take them, they usually do so and make good academic progress. Sometimes teaching identifies these steps for them unnecessarily or does not insist that pupils take them, hindering progress.
- 3.13 Pupils take the initiative in asking questions and are not afraid to do so. Their questioning is often incisive and thoughtful. They are curious, as the school's aims envisage, and interested in many areas of their non-vocational work. A key attribute of pupils is their ability to accept criticism and direction and they often show a strong desire for this, indicative of the desire they show to be the very best they can. This is a common feature of the frequent collaborative work that pupils undertake. They excel in working with others, continually supporting and encouraging each other, and driving one another on to further achievement.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 Pupils demonstrate highly developed confidence and high levels of self-esteem with no suggestion of arrogance. This is because they so readily evaluate their own success and receive criticism willingly from their peers and teachers. Their resilience is very strong, as one of the school's key 'pillars of development' envisages, because they receive plentiful support and guidance to deal with what they refer to as 'knock-backs', particularly with regard to success in their performance opportunities. In this way they are as prepared emotionally as they are in terms of skills to become professional performers should they choose that path. In their questionnaire responses the overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the school helps their child to develop skills for their future. Negative reactions to others' success are unusual because pupils celebrate one another's achievements and give understanding support when things are not going as well. Older pupils explained that they listen out for any unkind or jealous comments that they may overhear around the school and let staff know of them.
- 3.16 Pupils show great maturity in preparing for their futures. Older pupils make informed decisions about applications for future study because they know they can rely on well-informed support from experienced staff. They appreciate the flexibility in the school's curricular organisation that enables them to change pathways within sixth-form work should they wish to rethink their earlier decisions after reflection on their experiences, for example to focus more on acting rather than musical theatre work. Younger pupils are aware of the need to keep their options open in making choices of courses and where to pursue sixth-form studies. In these areas they are well supported by careers advice within different subjects as well as vocational guidance.
- 3.17 Pupils' understanding of how to maintain their mental and physical health is very strong, enhanced by their experience as performers and strengthened by the excellent support and guidance they receive from the school to promote their well-being. They also take their own steps to promote these

attributes through the well-being meetings they have devised. A minority of parents in their responses to questionnaires disagreed that the school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular activities and some pupils' comments reflected this view with regard to sports provision. Inspection evidence shows that pupils' physical health, and their understanding of how to maintain it, is enhanced and promoted well by dance and drama activities, and some sporting activities are available for relaxation outdoors, as recommended by the previous standard inspection. Other opportunities for relaxation to enhance pupils' physical and mental health, including through sport, are less extensive currently, particularly for the youngest pupils during a busy school day. The building work underway intentionally offers the potential for more open space and the chance to enhance pupils' physical and social development outside their studies.

- 3.18 Pupils have a keen understanding of how to stay safe online and of how to handle social media. The overwhelming majority agreed in their questionnaire responses that they know how to stay safe online. Pupils in the sixth form who have moved away from home to be able to access the school's education, and who live independently or with friends, develop excellent awareness of how to stay safe. They say they gain confidence in their unfamiliar situation from the school's 'living away from home' club, at which attendance is compulsory initially. This enables them to develop effective practical understanding in areas such as shopping, cooking and laundry. They gain reassurance from the focused pastoral care provided for this group. All pupils develop good awareness of how to keep safe in London, including on long commutes to school for some, aided by regular advice from visiting police officers.
- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate high levels of spiritual fulfilment through their performances. Their experiences enable them to have strong empathy with others, in line with another of the school's 'pillars', and to explore their own emotions fruitfully. They demonstrate their spiritual understanding very successfully when evaluating their performances in dance, drama or music theatre which deal with philosophical subjects or reflect others' life experiences. In choosing topics for work in art pupils similarly show spiritual awareness of diverse kinds, whether reflecting their perception of humanity's mistreatment of the earth through use of plastics or issues of race.
- 3.20 The nature of their performing experience means that pupils experience and perceive spiritual qualities inherent in many different cultures. This results in well-developed appreciation of the differences between various cultures and lifestyles. The overwhelming majority of pupils agreed in their questionnaire responses that the school encourages them to respect and tolerate other people. The fruits of this encouragement are clear in pupils' demeanour towards others. Pupils commented on the benefits they discern in living in multi-cultural London and what they have learnt from varied cultural experiences. Older pupils demonstrated sophisticated awareness of diversity in reflecting how a play from the 1980s that they had seen, about racial differences, no longer seemed relevant to issues of race today. The school has a thriving LGBT+ group which is strongly supported by pupils across the school, irrespective of sexuality, evident from the photographs of large numbers of pupils celebrating the school's 'Pride' event. Dance pupils referred maturely to discussions they have held about perceived gender issues in society about boys choosing to study ballet. Younger pupils spoke sensitively about drama they devised to be performed to children with physical disabilities and wrote perceptively in their dance logs about ballet focused on the subject of disability.
- 3.21 Pupils have an undemonstrative but well-grounded moral understanding. They recognise the need for laws and rules of behaviour. Their behaviour is excellent. The pupils are energetic but always co-operative. It was hard to draw out of pupils in interview what would be considered poor behaviour in the school because they feel it is so seldom evident. They stated that there is a 'family' atmosphere in the school and that pupils behave well towards each other and to adults because they understand what drives and motivates others, including staff. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- 3.22 Pupils are socially mature and mix very well across year groups. Collaborating to achieve common goals is a frequent strength of pupils' vocational and academic work. Pupils are competitive and focused but understand the need to support others. Even when working hard to refine a matter of

technique or solve a problem, pupils are socially aware and provide each other with friendly support. They interact positively with staff, maintaining awareness of the distinction between the positions of pupil and teacher but engaging warmly with their teachers to maximise the potential for learning. Sixth formers discussed current affairs and the general election with interest. They considered that their awareness and understanding, previously dormant, had been awakened by school leaders presenting such matters in interesting ways in personal education lessons and assemblies. Awareness of issues in society is at a high level, particularly amongst older pupils. Pupils support and participate in climate change action and some older pupils give a strong lead, for example travelling to participate in climate conferences abroad. Pupils participate readily in events to benefit those who are homeless, choosing to support events initiated by students from the higher education course to show their own commitment.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons and rehearsals, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff, and with the principal of Arts Education and the chair of the governors' sub-committee to oversee the school, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Martin Bussey	Reporting inspector
Mrs Pat Clayfield	Team inspector (Head, ISA and SofH school)
Mr Darren Morton	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)