



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION**

**THE ITALIA CONTI ACADEMY OF THEATRE ARTS**

**JULY 2017**



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### SCHOOL'S DETAILS

<b>School</b>	The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts		
<b>DfE number</b>	206/6162		
<b>Registered charity number</b>	290261		
<b>Address</b>	Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts 23 Goswell Road London EC1M 7AJ		
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7608 0047		
<b>Email address</b>	admin@italiaconti.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Karen Dwyer-Burchill		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Ms Samantha Newton		
<b>Age range</b>	10 to 16		
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	73		
	<b>Boys</b>	24	<b>Girls</b> 49
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5 to 6 July 2017		

## 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.

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 following their inspection 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.

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.

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 an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

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 the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. 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'.**

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a representative of the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mr Bill Burn

Reporting inspector

Mrs Diane Durrant

Team inspector (Former deputy head, ISA school)

Mrs Clare Margetts

Team inspector (Former director of studies, ISA school)

## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **About the school**

- 1.1 The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts is an independent day school for girls and boys aged between 10 and 16 years. It is owned and governed by the proprietor, who replaced her sister as proprietor in September 2016. Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a specialist teacher to work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- 1.2 The school was founded in 1911 by the actress Italia Conti, and moved to its present site in central London in 1973. The current headteacher was appointed in May 2014.

### **What the school seeks to do**

- 1.3 The school's aim is to nurture confidence, self-esteem, and the fulfilment of technical and artistic potential, training pupils to pursue a career in the performing arts or educating them to follow a different path. The objective is that pupils develop a love of excellence, a strong work ethic and a high level of social skill and maturity.

### **About the pupils**

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of business and professional backgrounds mostly from white British families with increasing representation of pupils from minority ethnic groups. Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average. The school has identified 18 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional specialist support. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs and one has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. No pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). All pupils have been selected for their vocational talent, and the school's curriculum is modified to meet their needs.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. KEY FINDINGS**

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

- Pupils' academic achievements are good in relation to their abilities.
- All pupils' good progress and attainment are enhanced by dedicated teaching and a curriculum carefully matched to their needs.
- Pupils' achievements in vocational training are exceptional.
- Pupils are very industrious and their attitudes to their work are highly positive.
- Pupils do not always know how to improve their work because the quality of marking is inconsistent.

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

- Pupils are notably self-confident and highly motivated to succeed.
- Pupils are determined to bring the best out of themselves. They collaborate well and celebrate others' success.
- Pupils have an excellent capacity for self-criticism as a means of improvement.
- Pupils have an outstanding understanding of right and wrong.
- Pupils have a highly developed understanding of what is in their own best interests, whilst contributing effectively to their community.

### **Recommendations**

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Improve the consistency of the quality of marking.

### 3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 Pupils achieve standards in their academic work that are broadly in line with their abilities. The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2013 to 2015. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. GCSE performance has been similar to the national average for maintained schools. Lesson observations, interviews with pupils and scrutiny of pupils' work show that both girls and boys make good progress over time in relation to their starting points. Pupils progress well during lessons because of teaching that is carefully planned and takes account of their different aptitudes. Pupils are confident that their teachers know them well and so are able to adapt their strategies to meet the needs of the full range of abilities, and match the tasks they set to the learning styles of individual pupils. So senior pupils in a history lesson were given a choice of assignments in class based either on discussion or a written summary of a topic. Teaching is highly effective in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND, who make progress at least as good as that of other pupils. The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that the school has met the recommendation of the previous inspection report to provide staff training in meeting the learning needs of all its current pupils, especially those with SEND. Those pupils who are away from school for long periods because of professional commitments say that they are well supported in their academic work, with the result that they progress and learn well. Their teachers make arrangements for work to be set as appropriate. All pupils confirm that teachers are available constantly to help them, and are aware of the competing demands on many pupils' time. The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that the school has fully met the recommendation of the previous inspection report to ensure that a designated member of staff takes responsibility for the monitoring of academic standards in classroom teaching, with the result that a very large majority of parents and all pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school enabled pupils to make progress and develop skills for the future. Similarly, a very large majority of parents said that their children's educational needs were met effectively by the school.
- 3.3 Pupils' learning has been enhanced by leaders' strengthening of the way the school monitors pupils' progress. These changes, however, have yet to be fully implemented in all teaching. Verbal feedback in lessons is plentiful and effective, and pupils are frequently asked to assess their own progress at the end of lessons. The quality of marking, however, is inconsistent, so that pupils do not always know how to improve their written work. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all pupils confirmed that teachers are supportive and enable them to learn and make good progress. Pupils said, in discussion, that their progress is enhanced by the small classes, and the high quality of relationships between staff and pupils. Individual pupils are given specific targets for their academic work that take account of their strengths and weaknesses, with the result that their achievements in the academic subjects are good. Pupils find their interests and abilities are matched by the curriculum that the school offers, and the narrow focus creates a sense of urgency. Pupils have competing demands on their time so that academic work occupies only half the school day. Therefore, there is no time to be wasted and pupils have to rely on their own motivation to ensure that subjects are covered thoroughly.
- 3.4 Pupils do not have a programme of extra-curricular activities organised by the school because the working day is already full. Instead, leaders ensure that pupils concentrate on learning and practising skills in acting, singing and dancing, and achieve exceptional success in these areas. Many pupils across the full age range have already worked in the professional theatre, film and television. All pupils have the highest expectations of themselves and of their professional



- coaches, and so normally reach the highest standards. Their willingness to work hard to make the most of their abilities is outstanding.
- 3.5 Pupils' attitudes are highly positive, especially towards their vocational training. They are disciplined, prepared to work hard, and demand exacting standards of themselves. Pupils are prepared to rehearse the same piece over and over without complaint, and show excellent persistence. They welcome criticism as a means of improving and take advantage of every opportunity to listen and absorb guidance. The ambition and independence that pupils bring to their vocational work are beginning to transfer to their academic work.
- 3.6 Pupils have excellent communication skills, especially in reading and listening. Their speaking is also excellent, as shown by the high quality of reading aloud in lessons and the fluent contributions to discussion in an assembly. This is a reflection of the value placed on it by the school. Pupils have opportunities to speak out in all lessons, and they grow in confidence and self-belief. Acting coaches insist on high standards of diction. Pupils show a range of writing skills, and some make excellent use of the frequent opportunities to write in continuous prose available in some subjects. Pupils have been increasingly successful in poetry and essay writing competitions.
- 3.7 Pupils have a good grasp of mathematics. They show good mental arithmetic abilities and can handle complex calculations successfully, although their skills and knowledge are not consistently applied elsewhere in the curriculum, notably in science. Pupils have good skills in information and communication technology (ICT), and are able to make effective use of it for their academic work, especially in research for the longer projects which the school's curriculum offers. Pupils learn from using websites recommended by the school to support subjects across the curriculum. Pupils with SEND are enabled to learn more effectively using laptop computers.
- 3.8 Pupils have well-developed study skills, for example a good capacity for summarising and writing notes. In a senior English lesson, they were able to speculate about what might have preceded the scene they were studying, using the available evidence to support their theories. They shared ideas and developed them imaginatively, especially when encouraged to do so by sensitive questioning by the teacher. Pupils responded well to open-ended prompting.
- 3.9 Pupils have recently earned medals, including gold, in a national mathematics competition. Similarly, they have achieved success in a national essay competition, and been chosen for publication in a poetry competition. This is because pupils enjoy this kind of academic enrichment of the curriculum, and have been encouraged to take part by the school's leadership and management, who see this as an important development. Similarly, pupils are beginning to lead academic activities of their own outside lesson time, such as coaching in mathematics and study skills, with the result that they have an increased awareness of how they can raise their own standards.
- 3.10 The vocational achievements of the pupils are exceptional, and the school fully meets its aim to fulfil pupils' technical and artistic potential, training pupils to pursue a career in the performing arts or educate them to follow a different path. The school is highly flexible in tailoring its demands to enable pupils to acquire professional experience and develop their vocational expertise. Pupils are supported by expert coaching and advice, as seen in a chorus line rehearsal, where highly accomplished performers came together for a common purpose, showing an outstanding sense of collective responsibility and responding in precise detail to modelling by the teacher.

## 4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils have excellent self-knowledge, and a clear understanding of why they have chosen their path. Their ambition in the vocational element of their education is to achieve the highest possible standards. Pupils are unanimous that the demands made of them mean that they have to be dedicated in order to make the most of their opportunities. They also have to enjoy it, and show resilience at every stage, given that coping with disappointment, and even failure, is an inevitable part of their lives. They recognise that self-discipline is an essential element of their growth as performers. Pupils develop maturity and a sense of proportion from dealing with setbacks, which the school successfully equips them to cope with through providing a safe environment where all are supportive of one another. While pupils are competitive in that they constantly strive to bring the best out of themselves, they are always enthusiastic about applauding and celebrating others' success. All members of the community say that the school feels like a family. A very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school promotes an environment which successfully supports their child's personal development.
- 4.3 Pupils achieve outstanding success in the performing arts. This derives in part from the exceptional quality of the training they receive. The proprietor and school leaders ensure that the school requires excellence and consistency, and the pupils would not want this expectation to be any different, since it reflects what they demand of themselves. Pupils respond positively to the fast pace of their rehearsals, and to the intense and detailed feedback they receive. They also respond extremely well to the requirement to be self-critical. Pupils develop the habit of keeping their own performance under review at all times and exhibit substantial self-knowledge. Similarly, all pupils have to concentrate and be prepared to critique others at a moment's notice. They do this with perception and honesty, and always with a positive intent. They expect the same approach from others. They also need to be able to say immediately how they might individually or collectively improve their work. In this way, they become naturally reflective.
- 4.4 Pupils are excellent decision-makers. They show mature independence, which comes from their understanding of how single-minded they are required to be if they are to be successful. Pupils are able to consider all the aspects of the next stage of their education, and make shrewd and balanced judgements about what is in their own best interests. They are supported effectively in this by the school, which brings expertise to this field, and careful coaching for individual audition pieces. Pupils are enabled to choose how much time they devote to different elements of the performing arts. Through the work of the school council, pupils have had an important influence over issues such as the quality of food on offer in the canteen. Similarly, pupils have recently asked to conduct an assembly with a particular charitable cause of their own choice in mind, and to support it through fundraising. Such pupil-led initiatives are supported by school leaders, who encourage independence and initiative of this kind.
- 4.5 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the non-material aspects of life, with an especially strong appreciation of the expressive arts, including visual art. They place a high value on being able to pause for reflection in the welfare room.
- 4.6 Pupils demonstrate an outstanding sense of right and wrong, and are able to articulate strong views about current events and issues. For example, in one lesson, senior pupils passionately

discussed the subject of terrorist violence. Pupils are able to reach qualified judgements in debate, and enjoyed the role-playing involved in the recent mock general election. Within the sphere of performance, pupils have a high level of contact with one another, and so have a substantial understanding of the need to accommodate differences, make judgements about one another's behaviour, and exercise tolerance and restraint. Pupils do this with practiced ease. They automatically understand and respect systems of rules and laws, and accept responsibility for their own behaviour and the effects on others. Likewise, they attach importance to the way in which the school's system of rewards and sanctions is based around restorative justice and seeking positive outcomes to disciplinary matters. They are enthusiastic supporters of all attempts to manage and resolve conflict in a constructive way. As demonstrated recently in an assembly on stereotyping, run largely by the pupils, they have exemplary levels of tolerance and respect for those of different backgrounds. The characteristic response from pupils to questions about mutual respect and tolerance was: 'Everyone's the same'. Most parents and all pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

- 4.7 Pupils collaborate frequently in academic work and they take full advantage of the opportunities this offers. They are conscious of the benefits of working effectively as a team. Pupils say that they feel that they must never cut corners in collective enterprise, since there are no excuses when others are relying on them. Collaborations sustain the culture, tradition and ethos of the school. There are no age barriers, with pupils working together regardless of their level of experience. Older pupils model behaviour that is a positive influence on younger pupils. The school entirely meets its aim for pupils develop a love of excellence, a strong work ethic and a high level of social skill and maturity.
- 4.8 In addition to the work of the prefects, pupils serve the school in organizing charity initiatives, running assemblies and sitting on the school council. They are quick to volunteer at the summer school and elsewhere, sharing what they have learned with the wider community. They have a well-developed understanding of their responsibilities to the school and the wider community.
- 4.9 Pupils have an excellent awareness of how to keep themselves healthy and safe. They appreciate and remember the lessons of a visiting drama production about the possible dangers of being on-line and how to avoid these. Pupils' acute understanding of the need to keep healthy to support the physical demands of their training was demonstrated when they celebrated, with the enthusiastic support of the school, the removal of sugary drinks from the canteen.