



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

TRING PARK SCHOOL FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

APRIL 2017



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SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Tring Park School for the Performing Arts			
DfE number	919/6041			
Registered charity number	140330			
Address	Tring Park School for the Performing Arts Mansion Drive Tring Hertfordshire HP23 5LX			
Telephone number	01442 824255			
Email address	info@tringpark.com			
Principal	Mr Stefan Anderson			
Chair of governors	Mr Michael Geddes			
Age range	8 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	331			
	Boys	94	Girls	237
	Day pupils	134	Boarders	197
	Preparatory	20	Junior and middle	176
	Sixth Form	135		
Inspection dates	20 to 21 April 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. Ofsted monitors the work of independent inspectorates on behalf of the DfE, including a sample of inspections, and you can find the latest report on the work of ISI on the Ofsted website.

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 the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. 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

Mrs Colette Culligan	Reporting inspector
Mrs Rachel Glover	Team inspector (Headmistress, ISA/SofH school)
Miss Adrienne Richmond	Team inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mr David Warwick	Team inspector (Former director of music, HMC school)

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Tring Park School for the Performing Arts is one of nine specialist schools which are supported by the Department for Education under its Music and Dance Scheme. It is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged 8 to 19. Pupils are admitted on the basis of their talent in dance, drama, musical theatre or music. The school is owned and governed by the AES (Arts Educational School) Tring Park School Trust. Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured and additional senior posts created. Additions to facilities include a new medical centre, additional teaching and practice rooms, and some additional boarding provision.
- 1.2 The school currently has seven boarding houses, five for girls and two for boys. The school is structured into four sections: Preparatory for Years 4 to 6 who are taught together; Junior for Years 7 to 9, Middle for Years 10 and 11 and Senior for Years 12 to 14.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a curriculum which combines vocational training with academic study so that pupils' natural talent and creativity in dance, drama, musical theatre and music can be developed alongside their intellectual ability. It seeks to create an energetic, stimulating and supportive culture which demands dedication from pupils as they grow into fully rounded individuals and performers. The aim is to give pupils the best possible chance in their future careers.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Day pupils come from within Hertfordshire and the surrounding area, while boarders come from across the United Kingdom and a range of European and Asian countries. The school does not use standardised tests for pupils in the preparatory school but its own data indicates that pupils are of above average ability. Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicates that the ability of pupils in Years 7 to 11 is above average and that of pupils in the sixth form broadly average. All pupils are identified as having a special talent in dance, music, drama or musical theatre. The school has identified 110 pupils as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), the majority for dyslexia or mild learning difficulties. Specialist support is provided within the school for 53 of these pupils and also for nine pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL). There are no pupils who require educational or health care (EHC) plans.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Preparatory	Years 4 to 6
Form 1	Year 7
Form 2	Year 8
Form 3	Year 9

Form 4	Year 10
Form 5	Year 11
Sixth Form	Years 12 to 14

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils' achievements in their vocational work are outstanding.
- Pupils' attitude in vocational lessons is consistently excellent.
- Pupils' excellent progress in vocational training is supported by first-rate facilities, and superb specialist teaching by highly experienced and dedicated staff.
- Pupils' progress in academic learning is good overall.
- Inconsistencies in academic lessons of pace, expectations of pupils, standards of marking and use of data mean that pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable.

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

- Pupils achieve outstanding levels of self-knowledge, self-discipline, perseverance and resilience.
- Pupils' ability to work together to achieve success in group ventures is exceptional.
- From an early age pupils develop a strong understanding that the choices they make will have a significant impact on their futures.
- Pupils respect each other enormously, value each other's talents and are generous in their admiration of their peers' success.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure that all academic staff fully understand the standardised data now being collected and utilise this to help pupils achieve their full potential.
- Share the best practice in setting appropriate pace and high expectations seen across the school so as to ensure consistently rapid progress of pupils in all their learning.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 Pupils of all ages reach exceptionally high standards in dance, drama, musical theatre and music, achieving at an excellent level in their vocational work. The school is highly successful in meeting its aim to create a culture and environment in which pupils learn the vital importance of dedication and determination as they work to achieve their ambitions. They are supported in this by first-rate teaching that combines professional rigour with encouragement, so that pupils are extremely well prepared for external examinations in dance, drama and music. Parents are highly satisfied that the school's range of subjects is suitable for their children.
- 3.3 Pupils' basic skills across the required areas of academic learning develop well overall. They are exceptionally articulate, reading and writing fluently and are well able to express their ideas clearly in discussion. They confidently apply their numeracy skills across subjects, show a good understanding of scientific concepts and use information and communication technology (ICT) not only in dedicated lessons but to enhance their learning elsewhere. Pupils' creativity reaches extraordinary levels, continuously honed by a curriculum in which training in physical and performance skills constitutes half the school day. All pupils take GCSE drama in Year 9, the majority being awarded A* or A grades.
- 3.4 Pupils reach good levels overall in their academic work. The following analysis uses the national data for 2013 to 2015, the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are available. Results in GCSE and A-level examinations have consistently been above in relation to the national average for maintained schools. Examination results and scrutiny of work show that pupils identified with SEND achieve well in relation to their starting points and those with EAL achieve in line with their peers. This overall good standard of academic attainment has remained consistent over time. The school is starting to use standardised data to ensure there is consistent assessment and analysis of variations in performance between subjects, as recommended previously, but such usage is in its infancy. The vast majority of leavers go on to a range of vocational courses at universities or specialist colleges, with others choosing to embark on academic courses at university. Each year some leavers go straight into employment as performers.
- 3.5 The progress that pupils make in their vocational studies is rapid and they very swiftly develop their understanding of the professional skills of their chosen performance art. They ask probing questions of their teachers to help them improve. When not themselves singing, on stage or at the barre, their focus is maintained; they listen intently to their teachers and watch others carefully to learn from them, while continuing to learn lines or to stretch. As a result, they achieve outstanding levels of success in external examinations, with many distinctions at intermediate and advanced levels for ballet, modern and tap dancing. Senior leaders and governors are keenly aware of the need for investment in excellent staffing and facilities and this supports the pupils' progress. Governors and senior leaders have put in place measures to ensure that they are monitoring the work of the school more effectively, as recommended by the previous inspection, and this has contributed to the excellence of the pupils' vocational experiences and tuition.
- 3.6 Pupils make good progress over time in their academic studies, although the rate of that progress varies across subjects. On some occasions, pupils become distracted and disengaged because lessons provide insufficient challenge and have low expectations. In most subjects, pupils show sustained interest and their understanding deepens swiftly thanks to well-planned lessons which maintain good pace, use probing questioning and set high expectations. These qualities were seen in lessons for the younger pupils, for example, and in an A-level lesson

- requiring pupils to analyse the techniques used by different composers in writing string quartets. In such lessons, pupils work with the same drive and determination to succeed that they demonstrate in vocational lessons, and their subject knowledge and understanding improve rapidly.
- 3.7 Pupils' study skills are very well developed, especially in their vocational classes. Pupils focus carefully on their teachers' instructions, swiftly absorb the advice given on small incremental steps to improve and patiently go over these again and again, persevering until they achieve success. They are able to synthesise the skills learnt across their vocational curriculum. For example, senior dancers drew on their acting skills when exhorted by the teacher not to let their faces show the effort involved in repeated strenuous exercises at the barre. In choir rehearsals pupils show acute awareness of the need not just to sing accurately but to perform with emotional engagement and understanding. Pupils' attitude to learning in their vocational lessons is consistently excellent and they show remarkable focus, self-discipline and determination. For instance, dancers keep up their training over the summer break and further enhance their technique by taking up placements on demanding summer school courses. Pupils are constantly made aware by their teachers that wholehearted commitment to excellence is required in lessons and rehearsals. As a consequence, they achieve notable success in their activities beyond formal examinations. Pupils have joined professional dancers in recent ballet productions in London; many pupils have had parts in films, television dramas or professional musicals. There have been successes in international dance competitions as well as in local festivals, and a senior choir won a prestigious television singing competition in 2016.
- 3.8 Pupils show good ability to analyse and understand concepts in their academic studies, as seen in English and philosophy lessons for older pupils and mathematics lessons for younger ones. They apply that ability well when analysing their own work. Older preparatory pupils exclaimed aloud with satisfaction when they saw where they had made an error and swiftly set about correcting it. Pupils throughout the school demonstrate a marked ability to analyse and understand the impact of vocabulary, rhythm and symbolism on meaning. They made rapid progress in a session which focussed on helping them to observe the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare's language without obscuring meaning. Boarders find the organised prep sessions very useful in helping them to manage a workload of up to ten GCSE subjects alongside their vocational studies and rehearsals. Given the nature of the school, there is limited time available for involvement in academic activities or competitions outside the curriculum. However, some pupils have achieved success at the silver level of the mathematics challenge and a junior debating team enjoyed considerable success in a local public speaking competition. Individual successes include being accepted on a summer school for mathematics and quantum physics at a prestigious American university and winning a scholarship to read English at an equally prestigious English university.
- 3.9 At times, academic teaching does not provide sufficient challenge to encourage the development of high order thinking skills, being satisfied with simple factual recall. Some progress has been made in ensuring consistency and cohesiveness in teaching and assessment as recommended in the previous interim inspection but some differences remain. In questionnaires, a small minority of pupils said that they do not always know what they need to do to improve their work. The inconsistent quality of marking and lack of clear targets for the next steps to improve work for some subjects supports these concerns. Teaching overall does not make confident use of the data available when planning to ensure all pupils achieve their full academic potential. In some subjects, however, analytical and encouraging feedback, combined with precise teaching on technical matters such as essay structuring, helps pupils to make confident progress.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 The atmosphere in the school successfully reflects the energy and supportiveness of its aims. Pupils thrive on the range of opportunities offered and develop into fully rounded individuals, well prepared for the challenges of the next stage of their lives. They are very happy, feel proud to be part of the school, and are determined to make the most of the excellent training they receive in performing arts. The experience of boarding further enhances the tight sense of a community working together with common interests and goals. Boarders say that boarding helps them to become increasingly independent and organised, qualities which they know will be essential if they are to achieve their ambitions. In discussion boarders spoke of the fun of living and working together and named many staff to whom they would turn for help or support. A very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school promotes an environment which successfully supported their children's personal development. Some pupils mentioned turning to tutors for support but there remains a lack of clarity about this role, so that not all pupils feel they are given clear advice both on academic and vocational matters. The school is in the process of re-thinking its pastoral support structures in order to find a system which works successfully given that staff teach either vocational or academic subjects, making it difficult to form a holistic knowledge of a pupil's personality, progress and pastoral needs.
- 4.3 Pupils' contributions to others are excellent. Older pupils are aware that their status and experience makes them role models for the juniors, who will also turn to them for advice. Prefects speak of acting as older brothers or sisters to their juniors; they undertake their responsibility to contribute to the life of the school community seriously. Younger pupils are also invited to take on responsibilities, for example by becoming members of the school council or the food committee. Pupils contribute to the local community by activities such as taking theatre in education productions to local primary schools but mostly by staging performances which are open to the public and well supported. The revenue from some of these is contributed to charities for causes including a local hospice. Preparatory pupils have been involved in a range of charitable activities, the money raised going to good causes of their choice.
- 4.4 The pupils have a degree of self-knowledge that is mature beyond their years. They are constantly critically aware of and assessing their own progress in vocational lessons, often reflected in literal mirrors as well as the mental ones they hold up to themselves. From an early age pupils develop a clear-sighted recognition of their own strengths and weaknesses and seek advice to improve, especially concerning their vocational work but also from teachers of academic subjects. They are highly aware of the challenges of the work environment they hope to enter and that the decisions they make every day will impact on the likelihood of their own success as well as that of others. They have assimilated the warnings on internet safety given in personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHCE) lessons, for example, that images or messages they place on social media could be detrimental when they seek to join a professional company. Sixth-form pupils spoke of weighing up the lure of social invitations against the demands of work, saying they have learnt to think less about the present and more about their long-term goals. All pupils are encouraged to recognise the importance of getting good academic qualifications in case they do not achieve their performance ambitions or decide on a non-vocational route for their futures. Even the youngest pupils have strong, well-defined personalities and high levels of self-confidence. The latter can be knocked as they realise that others are better and they experience failures in auditions for major roles. However, such experiences help pupils to develop considerable resilience, supported by the honesty, encouragement and very precise guidance of their vocational teachers. Pupils spoke

- appreciatively, for example, of honest advice that had helped them decide to change their chosen route and in a factual way of the frustration of simply having to wait until physical strength develops sufficiently to allow them to perform certain dance moves. They are well-prepared emotionally by the school for the reality of the professional world, developing the core sense of their own intrinsic value that is essential to maintaining confidence.
- 4.5 Pupils have a very well-developed sense of fairness and justice. Their behaviour is almost invariably excellent; they are courteous, friendly and socially adept, able to converse happily with visitors. Pupils are conscious of current political affairs, appreciate the fact that these are brought into assemblies, and are determined to use their right to vote when the time comes. They are highly sensitive to the rights and needs of others. A discussion on whether individuals' social background should be taken into consideration if they get into legal trouble showed a sensitive understanding of complex issues of moral and social justice. Pupils know and appreciate the school's determination that they should become not just good performers but good people.
- 4.6 Pupils exhibit outstanding social development and collaboration. During the inspection pupils frequently spoke of the vital importance of working together, knowing that the success of the whole depends on the commitment and hard work of everyone on stage, not just of those in the lead roles. This understanding is nurtured within lessons as pupils are taught the importance of trusting others around them and literally knowing where they are and what they need from their fellows. They reflected in discussion on the importance of making the most of whatever role they are given, citing the saying that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.
- 4.7 Pupils know that values well beyond the material are vital in shaping successful lives. They have a heightened appreciation of beauty, which permeates the air they breathe and surrounds them every day in the environment in which they dance, sing and act. Pupils have a deep-rooted and instinctive appreciation of loveliness in all its forms, but especially in movement and in music. While there is little time in their busy lives simply to sit and reflect, the school ensures that texts are selected for study and performance which stimulate thought on philosophical and spiritual issues. Pupils engage in debate on these matters soberly and seriously, recognising the role that theatre can play in questioning and shaping social attitudes. They respect and value other people on the basis of skills and personal qualities, irrespective of social or ethnic origin, and appreciate the inclusive nature of the school and the contribution made by overseas pupils. Their cultural awareness is excellent, extended by the study of a range of sources from the classical music of Western Europe to that of the Indian sub-continent, from ballet to Kathak dance. A very large majority of parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire thought that the school encouraged pupils to be tolerant of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- 4.8 All pupils spend large parts of each day in strenuous exercise and they know how to keep themselves prepared for this by eating healthily. They are very aware of the importance of good nutrition in providing them with the nourishment they need in long, demanding and energetic days which make considerable demands on their bodies. The pupils know that the school places a high priority on their welfare and appreciate the considerable resources put in place to support them should they face physical or mental pressures. They value the easy access to the school counsellors, physiotherapists and other medical professionals to help them keep mentally and physically strong during strenuous training and performances. Pupils were unanimous in telling inspectors that they feel safe and well looked after by the school. Their lives are not 'balanced' as would be understood in most other schools but pupils see the day as perfectly balancing their academic development and vocational ambitions. They told inspectors that their days are long and arduous but were adamant that they would not have it

any other way. The sheer fun and exhilaration of what they are doing, they say, and the thrill that comes when they succeed make all the hard work worthwhile.