

Curtain swish reveals talent

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By Hilary Porter

THE Swish of the Curtain Drama School in Southbourne is celebrating the success of four of its pupils in winning places at leading theatre schools.

Claire Westwood and Kate Mussell, both 18, have gained places and scholarships to the prestigious Italia Conte Academy of Performing Arts.

Claire took A-levels (including Theatre Studies) at the Jellicoe Theatre School at Poole College as well as training with Swish of the Curtain for six years.

Kate, meanwhile, said: "I have had a passion for singing and acting since my first rendition of Burlington Bertie at St Katharine's Primary School, Southbourne. My life-long ambition is to become a professional actress and singer."

Natalya Hammond-Bretts, 19, of Winton, hopes to follow in the footsteps of Julie Walters when she attends Manchester Metropolitan where the star of *Educating Rita* studied herself.

The Paris-born former Avonbourne and Brockenhurst school pupil appeared in many productions with school and Swish of the Curtain. Her talent was recognised when she won the prestigious Ivy Owen Award in 1998 for the Best Young Performer.

Finally, James Witham, 20, of Talbot Park, has been studying drama since he was seven and has spent the last six years with Swish of the Curtain. He appeared in several productions including *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* at the Pavilion, *The Wind in the Willows* at the Bryanston Arts Centre in Blandford, and the BBC drama series *Pie in the Sky*.

After studying A-levels at Bournemouth Grammar School and a diploma course in audio/visual at Bournemouth Arts College, he has become the only British applicant so far who has been accepted on an act-



SUCCESS: Natalya Hammond-Bretts, Kate Mussell, Claire Westwood and James Witham

ing in film and television course at the Canadian College on Vancouver Island, Canada.

Swish of the Curtain principal Tina Smith said: "I am very proud of these pupils. Entry into theatre school is extremely tough and every year our senior pupils gain places at the most prestigious ones in the country.

"It takes a great deal of technical work and dedication on both parts but it is wonderful when the hard work pays off." The successes rounds off a successful year for Swish of the Curtain who achieved 23 firsts and overall junior and senior champions in this year's Bournemouth Music Competition.