



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

ARTS EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL, TRING PARK

**Inspection of dance and drama schools in receipt of awards allocated by the
Department for Education and Skills**

This inspection was carried out by OFSTED under section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. It was a joint inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

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**ARTS EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL,
TRING PARK
INSPECTION REPORT**

Inspection: January 2002

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Arts Educational School, Tring Park
Type of college:	Performing Arts College
Principal:	Jane D Billing
Address of college:	Arts Educational Schools The Boarding School Tring Park Tring Herfordshire HP23 5LY
Telephone number:	01442 824255
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Name of reporting inspector:	Tim Clark HMI
Dates of inspection:	January 2002

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Part A: Summary

Information about the college

The Arts Educational School, Tring Park, is an independent co-educational school for pupils with particular interests in dance, drama and music. The school was founded in 1945. It was formerly part of the same organisation as the Arts Educational School, London, but there is now no connection between the two. The school provides tuition in the performing arts, in addition to an academic curriculum, for pupils from the age of eight and prepares 18 year olds for professional dance work, or to go on to university or further training. The school has 87 day pupils and 175 boarders.

There were 25 students on the two-year professional dance training course, at the time of the inspection, forming a sub-group of the school's sixth form. The other specialist groups in the sixth form follow drama and musical theatre courses. Of the 15 students in the lower sixth, 12 receive financial awards allocated by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). In the upper sixth, seven out of ten receive awards. The school also participates in the DfES' music and dance aided places scheme. Thirty places, five each year, are awarded to pupils aged 11, selected for their potential in dance. There is a junior associate school for part-time pupils from the local community aged 5 to 17.

There are six full-time teachers, four part-time contracted teachers and seven hourly-paid part-time teachers working on the dance professional training course. Additional guest teachers and visiting artists contribute workshops and occasional sessions. The school is a non-profit making company limited by guarantee. It has a governing body of six, all of whom are trustees. There is a full-time chief executive responsible for non-academic development, in addition to the principal.

How effective is the college?

Key strengths

- wide-ranging skills of teachers
- much highly effective teaching
- effectiveness with which students take responsibility for organising much of their own learning
- thorough assessment and monitoring procedures
- highly effective leadership and management
- rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
- strong emphasis on healthy dancers and safe dancing.

What should be improved?

- failure to make drama elements an integral part of the dance course.

Students' views of the college

Students' views of the college were taken into account and are summarised below.

What students like about the college

- the ability to study General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) level subjects alongside the dance training
- learning programmes which are designed to suit the individual
- performance opportunities
- wide choice of career options.

What they feel could be improved

- drama classes
- amount of jazz dance on the course.

Part B: The Dance Course

Inspectors judged the provision to be **good (grade 2)**

Inspectors observed 15 classes.

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Grade	Teaching	Learning
1	6	5
2	4	5
3	2	4
4	2	1
5	1	0
6	0	0
7	0	0

Key: The range of grades includes: excellent (grade 1), very good (2), good (3), satisfactory (4), unsatisfactory (5), poor (6) and very poor (7).

Strengths

- wide-ranging skills of teachers
- much highly effective teaching
- effectiveness with which students take responsibility for much of their own learning
- thorough assessment and monitoring procedures
- strong emphasis on healthy dancers and safe dancing
- high standard of support for students.

Weaknesses

- constraints on the range and intensity of training imposed by the two-year course
- failure to make drama elements an integral part of the dance course
- incomplete records of students' destinations.

Scope of provision

1. The two-year dance course has ballet as its central discipline. Jazz and contemporary dance comprise two other core techniques. Supporting studies include pointe work, pas de deux, tap, body maintenance and fitness training, drama and singing. A distinctive feature of the provision is the wide range of GCE AS/A-level subjects offered. All students take GCE AS dance, which is used to provide supporting studies in dance notation, choreography and set works, and anatomical studies. Students can take dance teaching qualifications in ballet, tap and modern dance, in addition to the new national dance qualification. Each student has an individual programme of study, tailored to his or her interests and career aspirations.

Achievements and standards

2. The standard of students' work is high and there is some outstanding achievement. However, what stands out is students' all-round ability and sound technique rather than conspicuous achievement in any particular area of dancing. Students adapt well to different techniques and teaching styles. Retention rates are high. Students are streamed according to their ability. The classes to which they are assigned reflect their levels of ability, not necessarily the year of study. These arrangements work appropriately and enable students to make good progress.

3. Good practical training and supporting studies provide students with a broad education and training which equips them for a variety of careers, whilst they develop and secure their technique. GCE A-level results are good. The emphasis on health and safety encourages the students to take responsibility for their own well-being and safety in training and work. Although this is not a musical theatre course, the school's specialist music provision, regular choral singing and the individual singing lessons taken by some students helps to enhance students' work and improve their employability.

4. Records of students' employment destinations after leaving the course are incomplete and only partially reliable. They indicate a range of destinations related to the work which students have done. Twelve recorded destinations over the last two years show that two students joined United Kingdom tours of popular musicals, three took employment on cruise ships, one went to work for Ballet Ireland, two entered further training, one went on to dance performance work in Germany and Italy, one joined a vocal/dance group, one began teacher training in dance and one became involved in modelling and promotional work. One student who left in 1999 succeeded in gaining work with English National Ballet.

Quality of education and training

5. Students have a mature, self-reliant approach to their work. They display an unforced sense of discipline and a quiet confidence. Much of the teaching is good and some of it is outstanding. In the good classes, students were encouraged to produce the best work of which they were capable, activities were conducted at a lively pace and teachers effectively integrated technical with expressive elements. In less successful classes, the work lacked the same degree of artistic expressiveness and was less demanding and less firmly set in a performance context. Students respond well to the challenges set by teachers and teachers' different but equally effective methods of working. Classes have clear objectives. Students are at ease working in groups and they collaborate effectively. An early rehearsal

for a complete ballet showed highly effective work on an unusual and interesting piece, *Graduation Ball*. The large cast rehearsal included corps de ballet work for males and females, a classical pas de deux on pointe with lifts, a boy's virtuoso solo, and a principal dame character danced en travesti by a male. All these complex elements were brought together effectively, the students worked hard and the rehearsal was highly successful and productive.

6. Teachers are well qualified. They have experience of teaching in the United Kingdom and abroad, and of professional performance in ballet and other dance contexts. The school is a national centre of expertise in safe dancing, injury prevention and treatment. This expertise underpins and strengthens all the dance teaching. Dance teachers work effectively as a team. Dance studios are well equipped. The school responded to the pressure on studios identified in the last inspection by hiring a large hall nearby. Resources include a small but well-chosen selection of dance videos and books, but students do not always have access to these when they need them. The stock is listed in the students' handbook. The school library is small. The musical accompaniment provided at dance classes is of a high standard.

7. Students are encouraged to assess their own work. Their views on teaching are welcomed and taken account of by staff. Students undergo a thorough and rigorous assessment twice a year. The assessment sessions are recorded on video and then discussed. The outcomes of assessment are used effectively in guiding students, and helping them to develop their work. Students are good at evaluating their own performance and at organising their own work.

8. The overall design of the course is modified as far as possible, to suit each individual. There are suitable opportunities for students to perform. They also have the opportunity to see a good range of performances and sometimes to take part in related workshops. Students have a very full working day. Mornings are given over to GCE AS/A levels and dance examination courses, afternoons to vocational dance training. Some students chose the course because of its mix of performance and academic studies, which will help to sustain their careers in the long term. The course takes two years rather than the three years for most other professional dance training courses. Students and teachers work long hours and have to manage the resulting levels of fatigue. There is a limit to the intensity of training which can be sustained over the full range of professional dance disciplines within a two-year time span. Some students expressed a wish for more jazz dance and ballet repertory studies and more effective integration of dance with drama. At present, drama is an enrichment study and opportunities are missed to relate drama directly to the students' dance work.

9. Auditions for applicants are thorough. The panel of assessors includes a suitable expert from outside the school. However, formal audition procedures have not been rigorous enough. There has been no grading scheme and there have been no explicitly stated criteria to guide assessors in making their judgements. Some of the recorded judgements of students' performance at audition have been insubstantial. The school has drafted a new set of standards for auditions, due to take effect for all applicants from September 2002 onwards.

10. Students are very well supported and their progress is carefully monitored. The induction process is thorough and effective. The student handbook includes a full description of support systems. Students, with their tutors, develop individual learning plans for each

term and use these plans to adapt their courses where necessary. Students' progress is monitored at three-weekly intervals. Issues are dealt with effectively by teachers and/or the director of dance. Parents and guardians receive progress reports twice a year. Students can choose the teacher who is to act as their pastoral tutor. Trained counsellors attend the school for two evenings a week. Students are referred to specialist agencies if necessary.

11. Students benefit from good injury prevention and treatment procedures. They have an annual screening to check their health and fitness, at which they receive advice on how to avoid injuries. They also receive lectures on injury prevention. Physiotherapists visit the school each day. They keep staff informed about the students who consult them, and they meet fortnightly to discuss injury avoidance in the context of current activities. Learning support needs are met by the teacher responsible for special educational needs throughout the school and by a visiting educational psychologist.

12. Students are given an appropriate preparation for the practicalities of employment. They get advice on how to promote themselves when seeking employment on contract law and tax, and on insurance. Teachers have some good links with the dance profession, which are helpful in preparing students for employment and in providing occasional professional work for students.

Part C: Leadership and Management

Inspectors judged leadership and management to be **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- outstanding leadership and highly effective management
- a well-considered and consistent vision for the course
- rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
- good staff development opportunities
- careful attention given to students' views.

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses in leadership and management.

13. Managers have a well-considered vision for the course and leadership and management are strong. The school seeks to provide good professional dance training, together with good opportunities for academic study, and to promote a thorough understanding of the physical attributes and care necessary to ensure the health and fitness required of the professional dancer. Students are encouraged to develop a realistic understanding of the dance profession and to make informed choices about their futures.

14. An informative staff handbook sets out the department's vision, approaches to teaching and the aims and objectives of training. The quality of teaching is carefully monitored. There are twice-yearly formal observations of classes and detailed feedback to staff on teaching and assessment practices. The feedback includes comments from students. Senior staff also carry out frequent informal observation of classes and give feedback on the teaching. Teachers value this active approach to maintaining standards and are eager to share good practice.

15. Information from annual staff appraisals is used to build up a programme of varied and valuable staff development activities aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the dance industry and dance teaching and to uphold respected and valuable traditions. The annual 'away-day' for all dance staff provides an opportunity to address the purpose of the professional dance course. This is a key feature in creating a consensus about future developments.

16. The management of the dance course is excellent. Teachers work well together to develop the course and to maintain and raise standards of work. Communications throughout the dance department and between the separate department heads within the school are good. Department heads meet with the school principal and chief executive officer once a week and all dance staff meet with their department head on the same day. There are weekly meetings of teachers from the various dance disciplines. Managers have a clear view of priorities. Key messages are transmitted quickly and important issues are dealt with promptly. The

regularity of meetings means that most dance teachers and support staff remain up-to-date on long-term developments and more immediate issues. Staff from servicing departments and some part-time staff are not always able to attend the relevant meetings.

17. There are good arrangements for assuring the effectiveness of teaching and learning. These include annual course review, procedure for monitoring the quality of teaching, staff development, student questionnaires, analysis of achievement and destination data and self-assessment. The information obtained from quality assurance and self-assessment then helps in shaping the department's development plan. The school completed its second self-assessment prior to inspection, drawing up its report under the headings used in the *Common Inspection Framework*. The report contained some sections which demonstrated sound critical analysis of departmental practice. Judgements were supported by evidence and strengths and weaknesses were identified clearly. However, too many sections simply described the existing situation and there was no critical analysis.

18. Students are well protected from inequality and harassment. School policies and the taught curriculum reinforce respect for self and others. Codes of behaviour are contained in the students' course handbook. The handbook also outlines the course, associated studies, curriculum content and what students can expect in class. All aspects of the handbook are explained during the students' induction programmes. Elected student representatives meet twice a term with their head of department. Students are provided with good opportunities to express their views on the course and to make suggestions for its development, through the pastoral system, questionnaires and student representatives. The assessment system also allows them the opportunity to comment on teaching and includes an appeals procedure. Staff take the views of students seriously and the respect which staff and students have for each other is very evident.

19. The board of governors is active in setting the strategic direction of the school and establishing its distinctive character. Governors are well informed about the day-to-day operation of the school. They have recently instigated the preparation of a school development plan for the next five-year period. Governors are also in the process of reassessing the school's aims and objectives. Expert guidance from external sources is called upon when necessary.

20. The school manages its resources efficiently. Much care is taken to design the timetable so that teachers are deployed effectively. The dance department prepares a yearly expenditure plan, covering staffing and capital resources. School governors, the college principal and chief executive officer review the plan. Decisions on expenditure are taken on the basis of an informed knowledge of the dance department, its work, the student cohort and planned objectives. The dance department has benefited from new floors to two dance studios and has obtained external funding for information technology equipment and staff development programmes. The resourcing of the dance department is well planned and meets its needs.