

# SLP College Leeds

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

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**Unique reference number:** 50070  
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## Information about the college

1. SLP College Leeds is a private performing arts college that trains students for employment in the musical theatre industry. It runs one three-year course in musical theatre and almost all students take the national diploma in professional musical theatre awarded by Trinity College, London. The college is accredited by the National Council for Dance Education and Training.
2. The college is based on one site in Garforth, Leeds, but attracts students from across the country and abroad. There are currently 111 students enrolled at the college, of whom 48 are in receipt of dance and drama awards (DaDA) funded by the Young People's Learning Agency.

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>

## Overall effectiveness

3. SLP College is a good college, with good capacity to improve. Over the last three years, all students who have stayed to the end of their course have successfully completed their training and gained their professional diploma. A very high proportion has then secured professional work within six months of completing their training. However, not enough students who start the course stay to the end and complete it. Despite very good support and flexible arrangements to allow for short-term deferral, more than one third of students who started their three-year course failed to complete it in 2009 and 2010. Students thoroughly enjoy all aspects of their life at the college. They appreciate the friendly, caring and supportive environment in which they work. Students feel entirely safe and very well looked after.
4. Students are taught well. Teachers establish a good rapport and create an effective environment for learning. Technical tuition is good, and students are taught to integrate the disciplines of dance, singing and acting on the foundation of strong physical fitness and stamina. Professional practice and expectations are properly emphasised. In performance, however, speech and singing are less technically secure than dance. Teachers do not do enough to enable students to watch and learn from each other, nor to develop adequate levels or vocabulary of self-criticism. Note-taking is irregular and so students do not develop the habit of reinforcing what they have learned in lessons. Teachers do not always check what students have learned, and their questioning is often too general for them to know if each student has grasped a concept or technical point.

5. The curriculum is very well balanced and fully equips students to gain work in their chosen fields. Students benefit from a personally tailored timetable, responsive to their individual strengths and ambitions. The three core disciplines are very well integrated across the curriculum. The college has developed some close relations with local schools to improve its teaching and learning. Support and guidance are outstanding, with students' welfare and learning needs being catered for expertly at an individual level.
6. The college is led and managed well. Students achieve good outcomes, although the retention of students on the course has been low for the last two years. The college continues to build its reputation in the profession and has an important presence in the region. Students' performance work is now shown regularly in Manchester and London. The evaluation of lessons is insightful and largely accurate. Self-assessment and action planning are effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses and setting realistic goals for improvement.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What students like:**

- the professional background of teachers and the way that their professional experience is made available for the benefit of students
- the frequent visits by guest teachers who bring current professional practices and approaches directly into their lessons and workshops
- the closely-knit family environment that makes them feel personally secure and well looked after
- the high expectations that teachers have of them
- the variety and balance of the performing disciplines within the curriculum, and their integration in production projects
- the location of the college, which means that many students can train in their home region
- the wide range of opportunities for performing, especially to external audiences, and the transparent way in which roles are allocated
- the excellent facilities and resources, including students' ready access to them outside lessons.

#### **What students would like to see improved:**

- the relative lack of challenge that they experience in acting lessons
- the poor timekeeping by one or two teachers at the beginning and end of a few lessons
- the fact that many no longer have a late start or early finish on one day of the week, thus making it difficult to arrange appointments in traditional office hours.

## **Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What employers like:**

- the consistent professionalism and reliability of students when placed in a working environment
- the adaptability and versatility of students
- the ready availability of students for local pantomime work.

### **What employers would like to see improved:**

- no areas for specific improvement were identified by employers.

## **Main inspection report**

### **Capacity to make and sustain improvement**

**Grade 2**

7. The college enables a high proportion of students who complete their training to secure related employment within six months of finishing their course. Students produce good work, especially in dance. The individual progress they make is good, and is very well monitored and measured by the college. Teaching and learning are good, as are leadership and management. Self-assessment and planning for improvement are astute and effective. Communications across the college are excellent and teamwork amongst staff is very good. Students are fully engaged in the life of their college.
8. The proportion of students who stay to the end of their course and complete their training, however, is low, and in 2009 and 2010 was unsatisfactory. The college analyses the reasons for students leaving very carefully, and supports them assiduously and flexibly in an attempt to enable them to complete. Current statistics for the student cohort which is due to complete in 2011 show that more students have been retained over their first two years than was the case with the previous two cohorts.

### **Outcomes for students**

**Grade 2**

9. Most students who complete the course secure related employment as performers within six months of leaving. At least 85% of students have achieved this ambition in each of the last three years to 2010, and in 2009 100% did so. This shows an improved trend for the college since the last inspection. Typical jobs secured on completion of their training include cruise ship ensemble and cabaret contracts, vocal and backing groups, pantomime, West End and national touring shows and commercial dance work.
10. The numbers of students who complete their training has, however, declined since the last inspection. Of the cohorts that started in 2006 and 2007, fewer

than two thirds completed their course in 2009 and 2010 respectively. In-course retention for 2008-11 appears much better, with 75% of the cohort still expecting to complete; historically, almost all students who begin their third year remain and complete their training. The college is very flexible in allowing students who face financial hardship or personal problems to defer their training for a year or more, but few of these return.

11. In the last three years, all students who have completed the course have passed the diploma in professional musical theatre. They work very hard at all they do, and strive to reach the high expectations that the college has of them. Recent reports produced by Trinity College, London show that the standard of performance is good in dance, with excellent discipline and focus in performance, good all-round musicianship, and effective emotional characterisation. Singing and speech are less secure, with examples of poor vocal support and control of resonance leading to some loss of articulation and occasional fragility in the upper register. The quality of work produced by students in their integrated professional studies has improved considerably and is now often good. In lessons, inspectors found that most students were working at a high level, with a clear sense of the professional standards to which they aspire. However, a minority of students are slow to develop the habit of ambitious self-criticism: they lack the technical language and personal confidence to reflect on the standards of their work and how to improve them, and consequently do not reach the levels of which they might be capable.
12. Students are selected on the basis of competitive auditions and most make very good progress from this starting point. The college knows this because it operates a well-documented assessment system that clearly shows where and by how much students are making progress. Rates of attendance and punctuality are excellent. Very safe practices are learned and applied in studios and performance spaces and students feel entirely safe in the college and the local surroundings. The training is supported at all levels by a comprehensive fitness regime that minimises the risk of injury or illness. Students' overall well-being, both physical and emotional, is assiduously nurtured during their time at the college by highly dedicated teachers and support staff.
13. The college plays an important part in the local community and this includes the involvement of students in a number of activities with schools, community groups and social enterprises. They learn to offer and exploit their talents for the benefit of others. They also learn how vital the arts are in contributing to social cohesion. Students play an active role, through year representatives, in determining how their own college community is run.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 2**

14. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers establish excellent rapport with students and learning is characterised by shared energy, commitment and clear common purpose. The best lessons are taught with passion. This is infectious, so that students are hungry to learn and their expectations of what they might achieve are extended. Technical skills are well taught, and teachers

provide particular clarity to students in the way they explain and explore what constitutes good technique across all the disciplines. They make frequent and apposite references to anatomy, to the importance of core strength, posture and alignment in dance, and breathing and vocal support in singing, and they break down choreographic and musical phrases in a detailed, accessible way. Teachers also refer regularly to the integration of the separate disciplines in the musical theatre repertoire, emphasising their professional application. Students benefit over time from teachers' balanced emphasis on physical conditioning, the art and aesthetics of performance, and the demands of employers in the industry.

15. Learning is, however, hampered by the underdeveloped habit in students of self- and peer-criticism. Students do not acquire sufficiently early or securely the capacity to ask pertinent questions, make notes or comment constructively on how well they or their peers are doing. Many rely too heavily and for too long on the instruction of their teachers, who in turn do too little to wean them off this dependence. Teachers do engage students in regular dialogue in lessons, but questioning is often not targeted in a deliberate way and so not all students are required to contribute. Teachers do not always know if or when an individual student has grasped a concept or understood a technical point. A minority of students are too slow to adopt and apply the corrective feedback that teachers give them, which hinders their progress.
16. Assessment is regular, fair and largely helpful. The college has devised a useful and well-understood grading system that enables both teachers and students to monitor the latter's progress through their course. The rate and extent of students' individual progress is a prominent part of the evaluative discussion that teachers have with each other. Students have a clear sense of how well they are doing and they know what broad areas of their work they need to develop to improve further. However, not all teachers use the assessment criteria regularly or explicitly enough to convey to students the more precise technical features of their work that need to be developed. This setting and refinement of students' personal targets remains too vague, nor is it fully coordinated across the teaching team.
17. The course is an excellent blend of the several disciplines required for professional training in musical theatre. The balance of the time allotted to different work is continuously reviewed in the light of the changing demands of employers and the pattern of the industry at large. Students are fully engaged in discussion about the changing balance of the curriculum, and much is done to accommodate their individual strengths and aspirations in the design of their personal timetables. They appreciate the increased emphasis that has been placed recently on singing and acting, including acting through song. In music, a common grounding in Estill theory has led to improved musicianship for many students, and a few students with particular musical ability are able to extend their skills further through additional lessons. A strong and consistent physical fitness regime underpins the training of all students.
18. The college plays a significant role in the local community and has developed good links with local schools and a wide range of other agencies. One particular

relationship with an outstanding local school has led to a much sharper awareness in the college of what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the performing arts. The college has also worked hard and with some success to increase its profile in the industry, and now presents regular showcases of work in London and Manchester. This exposure is leading to improved opportunities for students to be seen by professional agents, which in turn is raising students' ambitions for their own employment prospects. The full benefits of some of this work have still to be realised in the actual jobs achieved by some students.

19. Support and guidance, both personal and professional, are outstanding. Students feel able to discuss any issue or concern in an environment of confidential trust, and those who face personal or financial difficulties which might threaten their continuation on the course are supported in sensitive, flexible ways to try and ensure that they remain and succeed. Students have very good access to specialist physical support and advice. Injuries are recorded and managed with scrupulous care. Students with additional literacy or other learning needs are identified early and receive close personal tuition by a trained senior teacher. Their potential to succeed is very well realised by such skilled and dedicated attention to their particular learning needs.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 2**

20. Leadership and management are good. The college has very high ambitions for an ever-improving profile in the sector and its plans to realise these aspirations since the last inspection have been pursued with vigour and considerable success. It attracts and retains teachers of high calibre, plays a significant role in the region and exploits better opportunities for students to show their work to prospective employers. Responsibility for leading the development of each discipline has been properly devolved to heads of department, who under the strong guidance of two senior leaders and the Principal have engaged their teachers in a thorough examination of how students learn and make progress. Several teachers have embarked on substantial teacher training courses, and close links with a local school have led to a renewed emphasis in the college on what constitutes the best practice in teaching performing arts disciplines.
21. Following critical comments made at the last inspection, the college evaluates its teachers' lessons with a clear intention to improve and share studio practice. This system is thorough and reliable, although there is still a lack of incisive analysis of the essential characteristics of different types of lessons. The outcomes of lesson observations play a prominent part in the annual appraisal of teachers. New teachers are observed more often and given clear and helpful support. Inspectors found that they agreed with most observed features of the lessons that they watched accompanied by an observer from the college, and thus endorse the accuracy and rigour of this process.
22. Communications throughout the college are very good, and teachers and tutors have excellent opportunities to share ideas and discuss their work and the work of their students with colleagues. Teachers bring a wealth of professional

experience to their teaching and make good use of this to the benefit of students. There is a strong and effective teamwork ethic, which students notice and comment upon. The professional development of teachers is given high priority, and the college has created an environment in which all staff are keen to share the best practices and learn from each other.

23. Arrangements to keep students safe and secure are good. The college is a very friendly community in which students work very hard but cooperatively with each other. Students learn to be tolerant and empathetic towards one another. Students play a full role in the life of their college, and are consulted on all aspects of their course. Their voice is listened to and articulated very well by their elected representatives, and teachers and tutors are very open and approachable on all matters. Equality and diversity are promoted well, and the college has shown initiative in trying to attract students from under-represented groups. The college analyses the achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds and finds that all students achieve equally well, although the number of non-White British students is small.
24. The college has excellent resources which it uses well. It provides good value for money.

### **What does SLP college need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the proportion of students who remain on the course and complete their training successfully by applying more stringent risk assessments at recruitment. Identify earlier those students who become at risk of leaving the course before its end, and explore yet further ways of supporting them to stay.
- Improve the vocal skills of students in both speech and singing by teaching them how to support their voices better, control their breath and resonance more completely and improve their articulation.
- Develop more specific and deliberate techniques for questioning students and checking their learning, so that they all contribute orally to lessons and grasp with more confidence what is taught. Help students consolidate their learning by developing in them the habit of making more regular reflective notes.
- Help students to learn more from each other and become more critically reflective by creating opportunities and expectations for them to be constructively evaluative of their own work and that of their peers. Teach them to make more explicit use of the technical language of their art so that they can articulate what they hear, see and think with more confidence and precision.
- Use assessment criteria more regularly and explicitly to help students understand more precisely what they need to work on to improve. Make clearer links between these assessment criteria and the personal learning targets that are set for students, which must be both more precise and better coordinated across the teaching team.

### **Information about the inspection**



25. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the college's assistant to the Principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the qualification awarding body, the previous inspection report, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors observed lessons. They used group and individual interviews and emails to gain the views of students and employers. They considered questionnaires students had recently completed for the college.

Record of main findings			
<b>Provider name</b>	<b>SLP College</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>	<b>50070</b>
<b>Learning types:16-18 learner responsive:</b> FE full-time courses			

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall
<b>Approximate number of enrolled students at the time of inspection</b> Full-time students	111
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2
<b>Outcomes for students</b>	<b>2</b>
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
How well do students attain their learning goals?	2
How well do students progress?	2
How well do students improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2
How safe do students feel?	1
<i>Are students able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1
<i>How well do students make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1
How well partnerships with schools, colleges, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for students?	2
How effective are the care, guidance and support students receive in helping them to achieve?	1
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	-
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of students?	2
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for students?	2
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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