

Laine Theatre Arts Ltd

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

Unique reference number: 50012
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Last day of inspection: 3 November 2010

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Information about the college

1. Laine Theatre Arts is a private performing arts college that trains students for employment in the musical theatre and dance industries. It runs one three-year course in musical theatre and dance, and students elect to take one of two national diplomas awarded by Trinity College, London: the national diploma in professional musical theatre or the national diploma in professional dance. The college is accredited by the National Council for Dance Education and Training.
2. The college is based on two sites in Epsom, Surrey, but attracts students from across the country and abroad. There are currently 212 students enrolled at the college, of whom 103 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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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Overall effectiveness

3. Laine Theatre Arts is a good college, with good capacity to improve. A very large majority of students successfully complete their course and gain their professional diploma. A high proportion secures professional work within six months of completing their training. Students thoroughly enjoy what they do and thrive in a vibrant, caring and safe student community.
4. Students are taught well. Most lessons are dynamic and well structured, and the excellent rapport between teachers and students creates an environment in which students develop their technical skills rapidly and to a very high standard. They grow into outstandingly confident, expressive performers. There is a very strong emphasis on current professional practice and expectations. However, teachers do not always help students develop or use the particular technical language whereby they might describe and analyse their own creative work. Students' capacity for articulate self-criticism remains underdeveloped, and they do not record what they learn often enough. Too many written reviews and learning targets are vague and do not reinforce precisely enough what students need to work on to improve.
5. The curriculum is effectively balanced and fully equips students to gain work in their chosen fields. The rationale for exactly why they do what they do is not always fully clear to students, however, and leads to frustration for a few. In every other respect, however, students feel fully consulted on how their college

is run and communications between students, teachers and the college's leaders are very open and effective.

6. The college is well led and managed. Students achieve outstanding outcomes and the college maintains its high ambition and reputation in the profession. However, not all leaders reflect sufficiently critically or consistently on how well teaching and assessment help students make progress. Departmental reviews are inconsistent in their focus and insight.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the professionalism of teachers, in whom they can place their full trust and respect
- the way that teachers bring out the individual in them
- the way they are pushed hard to succeed at the highest levels
- the continuous focus on preparing them for working in the industry
- learning how to become independent and to manage their wider professional lives and careers
- the wide range of opportunities for performing and preparing for auditions
- the willingness of the college to listen to what students have to say and to try and act on it if it is practical.

What students would like to see improved:

- the limited amount of time spent on learning how to sing and dance at the same time
- the lack of explicit and regular focus on nutrition and how to maintain a healthy diet
- the inconsistency and seeming randomness with which some parts of the curriculum are run, so that a student might spend more time on one style or technique than another but for no apparent reason
- the relatively limited time spent on singing, and the lack of individual singing tuition
- the fact that during rehearsal for productions, non-performers or those with minor roles are left with little to do.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very high standards of technical skills displayed by students
- the excellent preparedness of students to work in the industry.

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 continues to produce outstanding musical theatre performers, a large majority of whom gain employment in the industry when they leave. Employers are fully satisfied with the very high standards students reach. Teaching and learning are good, as are leadership and management. Communications across the college are excellent. The college's analysis of the nature and quality of teaching and of the progress made by students towards their personal goals and learning targets are underdeveloped. This currently hinders the value and impact of self-assessment and the personal progress of a small minority of students.

Outcomes for students

Grade 1

8. Students reach an outstanding level of work by the end of their course. Over the last three years to 2010, around 85% have completed their training successfully. Almost all students who finish the course attain the Trinity diploma in professional musical theatre or dance. They work very hard at all they do, and thoroughly enjoy the demands put upon them and the high expectations that the college has of them. Recent reports produced by Trinity College, London show that the standard of performance is outstanding in both musical theatre and dance. The quality of students' work in contextual studies has improved recently and is now good. Students dance and sing with high degrees of technical accomplishment, interpreting and expressing work with strong corporate discipline but exciting individual flair. Their control of their technique is such that they can perform with both dynamic power and lyrical subtlety. Their portrayal of character and narrative is very secure, and they convey emotion and thought with conviction and truth. Inspectors found that most students were working at a very high level in their lessons, with a clear sense of the professional standards to which they aspire. However, what they are doing in class and how well they are doing it is not always fully explored or articulated, and so students' growing capacity to be critically reflective on the standards of their own work is, for a minority, underdeveloped.
9. Students are selected on the basis of very competitive auditions and most make outstanding progress from this starting point, although the college does not measure their progress in a systematic way. The professional work ethic instilled in students is very effective at ensuring that 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. Their all-round welfare is of paramount importance, and they speak appreciatively of how well their teachers and tutors nurture in them many personal and social skills for life, over and above their training as performers. Teachers prepare students excellently for the physical and mental demands of their future careers. Students do, however, lack the depth of understanding of nutrition that practitioners in this industry need.

10. A large majority of students gain related employment within six months of completing their training. Over the last three years, more than three quarters of each completing cohort has secured professional performance work within this timescale. Although high, this proportion has declined slightly since the last inspection. Of those who left in 2010, 76% secured their first professional contract within just three months. Amongst those students in receipt of dance and drama awards, some 90% gain related employment each year. Typical jobs include international touring shows, cruise ship ensemble and cabaret contracts, commercial dance work and musical productions in London's West End.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

11. Teaching and learning are good. Students benefit from a good blend of taught technique and the opportunity to express their individual creativity. Rigorous discipline and personal panache are both stressed consistently in lessons. Teachers have excellent rapport with students, who respond very positively to most of their lessons and engage fully in all that they do. A high degree of trust and professional respect pervades almost all lessons. Teachers refer constantly to professional practices and standards, so that students have an excellent understanding of what is expected in professional audition and rehearsal. Regular and perceptive verbal feedback in dance lessons leads to rapid and continuous improvement in students' posture and alignment.
12. The more considered and systematic recording of learning points is, however, weak, by both teachers and students. Too much is left to chance when it comes to teachers checking learning through questioning or observation, so a proportion of what might be grasped in a lesson is not adequately reinforced. Students rarely mark or note scores or scripts, nor do they make their own freehand notes at convenient points in lessons to consolidate their own learning. Peer criticism is used inconsistently, and teachers do not use the technical vocabulary of the three core disciplines often or well enough to reinforce its use by students.
13. Assessment is fair and helpful, and the grading system used at the formal review points gives students a very clear sense of their technical standard and their personal levels of application. The personal learning goals or targets that derive from these assessments are, however, too variable in precision and value. Many fail to record, for students' longer-term benefit and for teachers' future reference, the specific technical strengths and weaknesses identified at assessment. The college's assessment criteria are used to arrive at grades but are rarely referred to in detail to compose the assessment critique. Consequently, in most disciplines the outcome of assessment does not securely help students focus on what precisely they need to work on in the next phase of their training.
14. The course is a good blend of the several disciplines required for professional training in musical theatre. The process by which students choose one of two pathways, musical theatre or dance, at the end of their second year is well

managed. The college is very responsive to shifting patterns of demand from employers and the changing emphasis that the industry puts on particular skills. Students are also engaged regularly in discussions about the balance of disciplines in the curriculum, and the college has recently responded to their request to have more commercial and street jazz. They continue to want more time devoted to singing. Students' experience of a few parts of the curriculum, however, is inconsistent, with the result that the amount of time they might spend on a particular style or technique is more a matter of chance than considered planning. Students are not provided with a full structure of the curriculum and its rationale.

15. Support and guidance, both personal and professional, are outstanding. Weekly group tutorials enable students to discuss any current issue or concern. Students have very good access to a range of relevant specialist support services, such as Pilates and physiotherapy. Injuries are recorded and managed with scrupulous care. Students with additional literacy needs are identified early on and given close personal support, although neither the diagnosis nor the subsequent support is carried out by trained literacy teachers. Those who declare a specific learning difficulty and/or disability, or who arrive at the college with a statement of such need, are offered additional professional support to help them overcome any barriers to their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

16. Leadership and management are good. The college is highly ambitious for the professional success of its students and has a very sharp focus on training and preparing them for the performing arts industry. This is rightly the priority of the college's leaders. However, their scrutiny of how students learn and of the educational principles that operate in a training studio are less incisive. Almost all teachers are formally observed teaching a lesson and the results of this observation inform their personal appraisal. However, in most cases these observations do not evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning sufficiently critically. Too many observations offer little more than indiscriminate praise for what has taken place in a lesson, with very little analysis of the nature or extent of what or how students have learned. Some departments are more effective at this work than others, but the college leadership does not do enough to assure the consistent high quality of the work of all its teachers. Annual reviews by each discipline are too variable in structure and insight to enable the college's leaders to write a cogent, incisive self-assessment report, and there is no development or improvement plan to address aspects that need to be improved.
17. Personal communications throughout the college are very good, and teachers and tutors feel that their work is valued and that they have ample opportunity to share ideas and approaches with colleagues. Teachers bring a wealth of professional experience to their teaching. Few hold a recognised teaching qualification other than those relating to their specific discipline, but the college gives very good support to those who wish to undertake such training and several are currently so engaged. The professional development of teachers is a

high priority. Much good practice is shared informally, and teachers are fully committed to learning from each other and working for the all-round benefit of students.

18. Arrangements to keep students safe and secure are good. The college thrives as a harmonious community of students working intensely but cooperatively with each other. Tolerance and empathy are successfully nurtured. Equality and diversity are promoted well, although the college's initiatives to attract more students from under-represented ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, such as free audition days for targeted groups, have had little impact on its population. The achievement of students is not reported on by their gender, ethnic or class background.
19. The college has good resources which it uses well. It provides good value for money.

What does Laine Theatre Arts need to do to improve further?

- Increase the capacity of the college leadership team to evaluate the educational experience of students in lessons and assessments, in order to improve how well students' progress is scrutinised and systematically measured. Bring more critical rigour and consistency to the formal observation of lessons so that all teachers have a full understanding of what constitutes the best teaching in musical theatre and dance.
- Develop better and more regular techniques for questioning students and checking their learning, so that they grasp all that is taught. Help students consolidate their learning by developing in them the habit of making reflective notes. Ensure that their learning targets are technically detailed so that they receive clear, precise guidance on what they need to work on to improve.
- Help students to develop more articulate ways of being self-critical and taking increasing responsibility for their own development by giving them more structured opportunities to comment on their own work and that of their peers. Reinforce technical vocabulary more deliberately and regularly across all the disciplines, so that students develop more confidence in the use of the language of their art.
- Ensure that annual departmental reviews are written to a consistent shape and purpose, the better to inform a more detailed and evaluative self-assessment report for the whole college in which all have a stake. Write a development plan that stems from the self-assessment report and monitor its implementation methodically.
- Provide students with a full structure of the curriculum and its rationale, so that they can see why the time is devoted to each discipline and each style/technique within that discipline. Ensure that the experience of students in respect of what style/technique they are taught is always the result of planning, not happenstance nor the personal preference of individual teachers.

Information about the inspection

20. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the college's vice-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.

21. 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			
Provider name	Laine Theatre Arts Ltd.	Inspection number	364499
Learning types:16-18 learner responsive: FE full-time courses			

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall
Approximate number of enrolled students at the time of inspection Full-time students	212
Overall effectiveness	2
Capacity to improve	2
Outcomes for students	1
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
How well do students attain their learning goals?	1
How well do students progress?	1
How well do students improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1
How safe do students feel?	1
<i>Are students able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2
<i>How well do students make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	-
Quality of provision	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2
How well partnerships with schools, colleges, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for students?	1
How effective are the care, guidance and support students receive in helping them to achieve?	1
Leadership and management	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2
<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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