

Elmhurst School for Dance

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

Unique reference number: 50032
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Information about the school

1. Elmhurst School for Dance is a private dance school training students for employment in the dance industry. The school runs a three-year course in dance, with a core specialism in classical ballet, and students study for the national diploma in professional dance, awarded by Trinity College, London. The school is accredited by the Council for Dance Education and Training. Elmhurst works in association with Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB).
2. Elmhurst is based in purpose-built studios and accommodation in Birmingham, having relocated from South East England in 2004. Students attend Elmhurst from all over the United Kingdom and the school attracts many international students, both for the sixth form and for the lower school provision in Years 7 to 11. There are currently 60 students studying the diploma course, of whom 47 students (78%) 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

Capacity to improve

Grade 2

Overall effectiveness

3. Elmhurst School for Dance is a good school and leaders show good capacity to sustain further improvement. Students choose to study at Elmhurst because of the specialism in classical ballet, the reputation of the school and destinations of students whose careers span the ballet and wider dance industry. The expansive building and onsite accommodation, very good quality of studios, physiotherapy suite and bright open spaces attract many students. Most students make good progress as a result of the combination of high expectations, good levels of challenge from good teaching, outstanding care and support, especially for injury prevention and treatment, and small class sizes which allow for personalised feedback.
4. Students work with great commitment and passion to reach or exceed their potential, acutely aware that the dance industry is very competitive and that careers of dancers are often short lived. The balance of the curriculum at Elmhurst is good and successfully meets most students' needs and interests. Classical ballet training is complemented by other dance genres and styles and students acquire good versatility ready for the profession. While most teachers challenge students to build their performance ability in daily classes, accelerating students' progress over time through robust formative assessment is lacking.

5. The new Principal, appointed in September 2010, has begun to make positive changes at the school, establishing a new ethos called the 'The Elmhurst Way'. This new vision for the school, jointly created with staff, now permeates the school's work placing good relationships, transparency and student achievement at the heart of daily decision making and working practices. This is much appreciated by students. The longer-term impact of structural changes in leadership and the review of processes to assure quality in teaching, raise achievement and use outcomes-led action planning are still emerging.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- expert physiotherapy and medical care to support all aspects of dance training
- very good guidance for injury prevention and treatment with excellent communication amongst staff in supporting injured students
- good and occasionally outstanding teaching which stretches students ability
- detailed feedback in lessons with good attention to technique and interpretation
- the good curriculum with a clear priority for training to a high standard in classical ballet
- the new atmosphere at the school encouraging openness, respect, valuing difference and listening to student ideas.

What students would like to see improved:

- more inclusion of taught sessions about diet and nutrition along with greater variety and more healthy options in the bistro
- an overarching course plan or comprehensive handbook outlining the schemes of work, assessment and assessment criteria for the diploma course
- more regular and detailed information about their progress
- much detailed guidance for career development and how to diversify and secure work, with more intensive work included from year two onwards
- the opportunity to perform end of year shows in a professional theatre.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- good attitudes of students and understanding of professional conduct when working in professional contexts
- good standards achieved in classical ballet.

What employers would like to see improved:

- there were no recommendations for improvement from employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

6. Outcomes for students are good and leaders demonstrate good capacity to lead further improvements at Elmhurst. Leaders have maintained good achievement for most students and secured improvements in retention. The review of the entire leadership structure since September 2010 has been insightful and is quickly building better capacity at middle leadership level. Four new middle leader roles working with the Principal and artistic director are establishing greater accountability for planning and teaching and helping all staff understand the strategic priorities for the school.
7. Through the inspirational leadership of the new Principal staff are increasingly using quality assurance processes to assess their own work and that of other colleagues, and seeing scope to expand community and outreach work for all students. The strategic audits of the quality of teaching in each faculty, a new meetings framework, and inclusion of bespoke development training about leadership styles are helping all staff to work as a team in judging how to continually improve the learning experiences of all students. Not all staff have a firm understanding of assessing and accelerating student progress which means that the cycle of evaluation and action planning is not consistently driven by improving outcomes for all students.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Over the last three years most students secured employment within six months of graduation, although destinations data for 2010 dipped to 73% compared with a high of 92% in 2008. Leaders acknowledge that quickly identifying students who are struggling to secure employment needs investment in time and staff resource to continually advise students about their career options. Even so the quick action to remedy the lack of career guidance in the integrated professional studies programme is having a good impact and 47% of the current third-year students have secured offers of employment so far. The profile of graduate destinations for the last three years show that over 60% of students secure their first contracts with ballet companies and the remainder often secure dance work in the commercial sector or in smaller scale local or touring companies. Students repeatedly gain work with particular ballet and dance companies such as Vanemuine Theatre in Estonia, Panov Ballet Theatre of Israel, Munich Ballet, Ballet Ireland, and Zurich Ballet. Additionally, several students secure work with Northern Ballet in Leeds and English National Ballet based in London. Typical work also includes performing in Disneyland Paris and Tokyo and working with contemporary dance companies such as Adventures in Motion Pictures. The diverse profile of student destinations is testament to the good versatility of dancers graduating from Elmhurst, also recognised by the

industry. One or two students in most years successfully graduate into Birmingham Royal Ballet.

9. Most students complete their training and attain their diploma qualification in professional dance. Leaders have successfully met the area for improvement from the last inspection and retention has risen, averaging 86% over three years and 80% for those in receipt of dance and drama awards. Elmhurst sets high expectations for attendance, working well in teams and upholding the new professional code of conduct. Students confirm that the discipline expected in class is rigorous and well established through respectful yet warm relationships with staff. Most students feel they are encouraged to ask questions and are pleased that they are given time in lessons to rehearse corrections. Third-year students comment that relationships with staff are much improved, with criticism and feedback given constructively rather than in a negative manner. Rarely are students asked to leave the course and staff go that extra mile to try and mitigate any personal or financial circumstances that may affect students' opportunity to stay on the course.
10. Students attain a good standard of work by the end of their training and a few students reach an outstanding level, often in their ballet performance work. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, speak English as an additional language and students from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as others and are well integrated into the school. Recent reports produced by Trinity College, London describe many features of good competency in both technical skills and artistry; impressive musicality, good technical control, and responsive partnering in pas de deux work with strong male virtuosity. In dancing repertoire from a ballet called Elite Syncopations some more-able students danced with sinuous quality and good use of the port de bras, fully understanding the stylistic features of this ballet. Students' ability to dance demanding partner work in pas de deux is good, with male students receiving good guidance for building stamina and strength for lifting work. Reports about achievement in contemporary dance are less assured but in jazz dance most achieve very well. Leaders recognise that stretching students' ability in the second choice discipline for the diploma course requires improvement to match the more accomplished skill in classical ballet.
11. Achievement in the integrated professional studies course was disappointing in 2010 and four students did not secure portfolio work to a pass standard. The rapid turnaround of the delivery and therefore outcomes for this year show significant improvement. Student portfolios include comprehensive knowledge of dance history, sound knowledge of key choreographers and master works and good ability to review live performances. Work shows a good grounding in developing students' preparedness for their future careers.
12. Students receive excellent guidance about staying safe in their sixth form accommodation and they appreciate guidance from police about safety in the local area. Students are confident that security on site at Elmhurst is tight. Students' training is well supported by regular body-conditioning classes and the sequencing of lessons during the day gives dancers good opportunity to eat well at lunchtime and rest their bodies from strenuous work. Students think that

intervals between lessons are the right length but some students need more rapid aerobic warm activity when switching from different types of class. Overall students take good responsibility for warming up and cooling down as the day progresses and they are well informed about why the care of their bodies in training is fundamental to the rest of their career. Students are unanimous about the need for more regular and programmed guidance about diet and nutrition and the need to improve the range and quality of food in the bistro.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. Students characterise good teaching at Elmhurst by describing energetic teaching that pushes their skills, helpful corrections with detail about executions of steps as well as interpretation, good use of the teachers' performing experiences to enhance discussion of repertoire, and a good understanding of the needs of students who are recovering from injury. Inspectors observed all of these features in lessons and the quality of teaching and learning is good. In good and occasionally outstanding lessons questioning techniques help students analyse the technical details of ballet steps and how the quality of sequences and enchainments change with different tempo. Through good questioning and some engaging discussion most students acquire the essential skill of becoming highly reflective practitioners and most can link contextual studies to their understanding of genres and styles embodied in their studio work. There is more scope for embedding the reference to contextual studies across schemes of work for all disciplines to give students a much clearer understanding of how the whole three-year course hangs together. Most students do not have a sense of the progression in disciplines over three years.
14. Teachers know students well and small class sizes greatly benefit students through regular use of personalised feedback. In outstanding lessons teachers use greater dialogue with students to facilitate working together to appraise each others work and self-assess their achievement. Such instances however are not commonplace. There are missed opportunities to help students learn independently and use questioning to deepen their critical thinking to enhance their progress. Furthermore, very few students use notebooks or reflective journals in lessons to capture many useful corrections. Some teaching is well planned with different outcomes for learners and good awareness of the needs of students who speak English as an additional language and those with medical or learning difficulties. The content of lessons is often challenging and well pitched for years one to three but rigour in planning is inconsistent across teaching staff. Lesson planning does not always use the detail available in individual education plans of students with learning needs nor those who are gifted and talented students.
15. Studio-based teaching reinforces the safe practices learnt in body-conditioning classes. In most classes use of imagery helps students begin to make links between biomechanics and the intention behind movement phrases. Physical correction uses appropriate physical contact combined with oral guidance to help students know the purpose of the correction. Teaching staff work well with

the onsite physiotherapists to monitor students. The shared vision for, and emphasis upon, more collaborative work in dance classes is leading to review of preventative injury work through research into different teaching methods.

16. Summative assessment of students from enrolment to final graduate performance is inclusive of twice-yearly formal assessments, students' own self-assessments in jazz and contemporary, and a filmed assessment with a panel of assessors. Assessment at entry is not used sufficiently to set progressive targets from identification of a student's potential. External assessors confirm that marking for practical dance assessments is fair and accurate and benefits from internal moderation across faculty staff. The majority of students find individual tutorials after assessments useful to review their achievements and set their development targets. However the complexity of a grading scale from grade A to grade U, coupled with a numerical mark scheme on a one to five scale without specific level criteria, means that students do not have a firm grasp of how well they are doing against levels expected per year, nor within and across disciplines. The marking scales, while understood by staff, are much less transparent for students, partly because there is no single course handbook or outline to bring together course content or assessments. Tracking of progress over time through a formative assessment model requires improvement. Target setting by staff is not systematically monitored and how teachers use students' targets to inform their lesson planning is variable. The capacity to use target setting and staff meetings to systemically check student progress and raise overall achievement is not used well enough to help students meet their potential.
17. There is good breadth and balance in the curriculum, rooted in the study of classical ballet and complemented by other dance genres. Jazz and tap classes include styles relevant to the commercial sector and acting and mime classes support character-based work needed in some repertoire. The inclusion of Cunningham and Graham techniques in the contemporary dance strand help students learn how to move in very different ways to ballet, through floor-based work in Graham classes and asymmetrical use of the body and off-centre work in Cunningham. First-year students wish for more equitable teaching of both these styles for male and female dancers. Leaders listen to ideas from the industry and from students to evaluate the curriculum and make certain it is fit for purpose. For example, increased time is being devoted to teaching students to dance on pointe and the inclusion of pas de deux work earlier in the lower school curriculum is helping teachers increase the demands in partner work in the sixth form.
18. Elmhurst has successfully nurtured its partnership with Birmingham Royal Ballet, and many dancers from there frequently teach at the school. They bring an up to the minute knowledge of company repertoire, helping students hear first hand about the versatility needed to work with the demands of choreographers. Opportunities to dance alongside the company are relished by students and this is a key strength in partnership work. Elmhurst students have danced in over 100 performances with the company since March 2010 and at the time of the inspection six diploma students were dancing on tour with the company in Japan. Students also get the chance to dance at gala events, fundraising events

and end of year shows. Despite these opportunities the large majority of students wish for many more performance events which can showcase the talents of all students, not just those who are hand picked for certain events.

19. Many teaching staff at Elmhurst enrich their teaching of repertoire with examples from their own performances in key roles. Staff have maintained their industry contacts and provide key messages from artistic directors and choreographers about trends emerging at audition. Students find this very helpful in keeping abreast of what is changing in the industry and most students are acutely aware that versatility in different dance genres is of paramount importance when jobs are scarce.
20. Outstanding care and welfare support has helped staff raise retention of students by quickly identifying and resolving issues. The high investment in care means that students receive expert support to face challenges of highly demanding and competitive dance training. The extensive review of the onsite physiotherapy, now available five days a week, helps leaders track types of injury but also focus more emphasis upon injury prevention. The weekly multi-panel 'health review' meetings ensure the physical needs of students are shared amongst staff and new work with a dance psychology consultant from Birmingham University gives mental health support on an individual basis. Resources for supporting the health and well-being of students are efficiently managed. The learning support for students who speak English as an additional language and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well led across the school and students make comparable progress to their peers.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

21. Leadership and management are good and the new 'Elmhurst Way' philosophy has invigorated staff and students. The atmosphere at Elmhurst is tinged with excitement and is very much forward looking. Students comment that the new Principal has a high presence around the school and they feel the student voice is being heard more readily. The Principal has the 'buy-in' of staff for the changes being made. Leaders and staff teams are ambitious for students and recent wholeschool staff development days with cross faculty roundtable discussions have led to much improved communication and a deeper understanding of roles across the school. As a result retention is increasing, students receive outstanding care and support and there is more focused discussion about continually improving the quality of teaching. The governing body, with representatives from the industry, provides good support for shaping the vision for Elmhurst and keeping the leaders up-to-date with dance industry trends. The impact of the governing body in reviewing the quality of provision against outcomes for students in destinations data and overall achievement is emergent.
22. The school's self-assessment is broadly accurate, incisive in exploring the early impact of recent changes in leadership, and provides a good overview of the recent audit of lessons in arriving at the good judgement for the quality of teaching. The self-assessment report has less evaluative commentary about

outcomes for students measured by the three-year trend data for destinations, retention and the impact of any curriculum changes on overall achievement. The cycle of evaluation and action planning is good and increasingly secure because the Principal and senior leaders are carefully reviewing how quality assurance processes help staff see the relationship between outcomes from formal lesson observations, staff appraisal targets and student achievement. A regular series of formal lesson observations by senior leaders helps staff set their improvement targets, but a composite picture of the strengths and areas for development in teaching across the school is not formally collated. Building greater capacity of all middle leaders to undertake lesson observations and judge the quality of learning in lessons is rightly identified as a priority for leadership development.

23. Elmhurst ensures students are safe and well cared for with good attention to individual needs. Safeguarding policy and practice is good and staff receive regular training updates to refresh their knowledge of current legislation. Elmhurst actively promotes recruitment from under-represented groups and the new widening participation and community agenda led by the Principal and middle leaders is starting to review how to extend links into the local community. Currently the school has students enrolled from eight different countries although the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is lower than elsewhere in the sector. Destinations data by different categories of student are not yet analysed nor inform action planning.
24. Value for money is good. Well-resourced teaching rooms and studios provide good spaces for learning and recent investment to upgrade information and communication technology (ICT) is supporting better achievement in integrated performance studies. Student portfolios show a greater use of ICT for research and evidence of teaching staff using electronic resources well to support learning. Investment in bespoke leadership training is having a good impact in building better capacity at all leadership levels, and the Principal is disseminating whole school training in educational software to help data collation.

What does Elmhurst School for Dance need to do to improve further?

- Establish more regular taught classes about diet and nutrition so that students have a good understanding of the critical relationship between their health and their performance capacity.
- Develop middle leaders' capacity to use data more rigorously to analyse trends in student achievement and devise action plans focused upon maximising outcomes for all students.
- Develop a more a systematic way of formatively assessing students so that students and staff have a deeper understanding of progress and targets throughout the course. Ensure all students have a clear view of their levels of achievement both during term time and as they move through their three years of training.

- Increase the percentage of teaching that is consistently outstanding both in planning and delivery so that all students have differentiated work that both supports and challenges their learning needs.
- Enable all teachers to develop teaching methods that encourage independent learning and develop students' ability to work together to critique each others work and help each other make better progress.

Information about the inspection

25. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the school's artistic director as the school nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of Elmhurst's updated self-assessment report, a self-supported review led by the Principal, reports by the qualification awarding body, the previous inspection report, and data on students' achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors observed lessons, some of which were jointly conducted with the Principal and the artistic director. Inspectors used group interviews with students and staff and considered feedback from employers.

Record of main findings			
Provider name	Elmhurst School for Dance	Inspection number	367205
Learning types: 16-18 learner responsive: FE full-time.			

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall
Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection Full-time learners.	60
Overall effectiveness	2
Capacity to improve	2
Outcomes for learners	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	2 2
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2
How safe do learners feel?	1
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	NA
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, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners 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>	2
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	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?	2
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	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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