

# Performers College

Inspection of colleges participating in the in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

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**Unique reference number:** 50067  
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**Last day of inspection:** 13 October 2011

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## Information about the college

1. Performers College is an independent further education college for performing arts. It trains students aged 16 to 18 for employment in the performing arts industry. The college runs a three year course in dance and musical theatre leading to the national diploma in either professional dance or in musical theatre, awarded by Trinity College, London.
2. The college is based in a purpose-built performing arts centre and enrolls many students from across the United Kingdom and internationally. Currently 159 students are enrolled at the college, of whom 57 are in receipt of Dance and Drama awards (DaDa) funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA).

## 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. Performers College offers its students a good and improving standard of education and training. Students attain above average standards and make good progress. Students are passionate about their art and speak authoritatively about their work. Most students complete the course successfully. Over the past three years the large majority of students have secured employment as professional dancers or as musical theatre performers.
4. The reason students make good progress is because of the consistently good teaching they receive. Teachers pay great attention to detail and this enables students to be sure their work is of a good technical standard. Lessons are designed to meet the needs of most students. In lessons teachers do not always plan to meet the needs of individual students. Consequently, the progress of the most and least able, in these lessons, is not as fast as other students.
5. A significant strength of the college lies in the outstanding care, guidance and support it offers. Students speak warmly about the relationships they have with each other and with all the staff. Consequently, the atmosphere in the college is one of tolerance and harmony. Students say they feel extremely safe and they are outstandingly well-supported in coping with independent living. The on-site physiotherapy support provides an excellent service in supporting students' health and fitness. Students' motivation is high because of the excellent support and guidance and this supports the good progress they make.

6. The college is led and managed well by a determined and energetic Principal. The Principal and the senior team have a clear vision of the improvements they want to make. For example, they have been markedly successful in improving the number of students who enter good quality performance careers within six months of graduating. Staff are committed and enthusiastic and those with posts of responsibility contribute to evaluating the work of the college. Some do this very well but this is not consistent. Leaders diligently gather a wealth of information about the college's work, however, this is not always used effectively to accelerate improvements.

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

#### **What learners like:**

- the excellent care, guidance and support they get from all staff
- the diversity of staff expertise and the way they use their knowledge of the industry to enrich their teaching and help students prepare for their future careers
- the excellent care and guidance they receive about injury treatment and prevention
- the warm and supportive atmosphere in the college
- the excellent facilities
- the variety of the curriculum which help them to develop a rounded body of professional knowledge and skills
- the disciplined learning environment which nurtures an excellent work ethos.

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

- the availability of more drinking water points.

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

#### **What employers like:**

- the professional readiness of students
- students' very good work ethic
- students' ability to tackle a wide range of genre.

#### **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 produces good and sometimes exemplary musical and dance performers and this is improving rapidly. The college has developed its own successful agency. This is having a significant impact on increasing the number of graduates who gain employment in the industry when they leave. This has improved since 2009 so that last year most graduates secured appropriate employment. Employers are very satisfied with the standards students reach and appreciate the range of their skills. The college can point to some striking examples of ex-students' progression to high profile positions within the industry. However, the college's monitoring of students' destinations over time is not fully developed and this limits the ability of leaders to respond to emerging patterns in employment.
8. Students make good progress because teaching is consistently good. Students are challenged and inspired by expert teachers. The Principal and other leaders ensure that individual students' progress is evaluated regularly. Leaders and staff have an excellent knowledge of individual students and their progress but the routine evaluation of students' outcomes by gender, ethnicity and by special educational needs and/or disabilities is underdeveloped.
9. Student and staff views are gathered regularly on an informal basis and suggestions considered and acted upon by the college. Students have representatives who meet regularly with college leaders to discuss the views of students. Communication in the college is very good and consequently staff are well-informed about day-to-day issues and morale is high.

## **Outcomes for learners**

**Grade 2**

10. Student achievement is good and sometimes outstanding. This is improving quickly and securely. They work extremely hard and enjoy the challenge teachers provide in lessons. Students respond very well to the college's high expectations of them. The reports produced by Trinity College, London over the last three years demonstrate the quality of performance has been consistently good and improving rapidly so that some of the most recent performances, particularly in ballet, were outstanding. Students achieve proficiency and skill in singing, acting and dance. This high level of 'triple threat' performance skills produces all round performers with a good degree of flexibility. Recent Year 2 'jazz' work was judged to be 'energetic and dynamic'. Inspectors found that most students were working at a good level in their lessons with a clear sense of the professional standards to which they aspire. The quality of students' work in singing has improved recently and this is now of a good quality.
11. The college works hard to ensure the selection procedures are fair and rigorous. Most students complete their courses. The college is successful in instilling a good work ethic and consequently attendance is good. Students feel extremely safe because of the excellent safe practices adopted throughout the college. The excellent guidance students have about keeping themselves safe in matters

of personal safety is highly appreciated. Students' welfare is paramount and each individual is valued. Students' health and well-being is carefully monitored and they have an excellent understanding of how to manage their diet to respond to the rigours of training. Care of the voice is a particularly strong aspect of their knowledge and this has had a clear impact on the quality of their singing.

12. Almost all students who enrol on the course are successful in gaining the Trinity Diploma in musical theatre or dance and most students successfully gain appropriate employment within six months of graduating. This has increased rapidly and of the 38 students graduating in July 2011 only four had yet to secure performance-related employment at the time of the inspection. Of those students in receipt of dance and drama awards, almost all gain related employment. Typical employment includes cruise ship contracts, commercial dance work and musical theatre productions.
13. The excellent work done to help students develop their knowledge of the industry and preparation for employment has been instrumental in improving the numbers of students who gain employment in the industry within the first six months of leaving the college. Students speak articulately about the importance of developing not only their technical knowledge and skills, but also of the importance of good personal and social skills. As a result they are developing into flexible performers with emotional stamina and a realistic view of professional life.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 2**

14. Teaching and learning are good because teachers pay careful attention to detail and this enables most students to make good progress. The relationships students have with their teachers are warm and trusting. Teachers have established clear boundaries so that lessons are purposeful and students enjoy their learning. In many lessons students respond quickly to corrections demonstrating their professional approach to constructive criticisms. For example in a good ballet lesson, females in their final year of training responded very well to the teacher's corrections. Subsequently, they were able to execute a pirouette with the leg in second position. Students respond very well when they are given the opportunity to assess each other; they are mutually supportive and helpful. However, these opportunities are not consistently offered.
15. Teachers have high expectations and the work they set for students is challenging. Students enjoy this challenge and they relish achieving new skills. In many lessons teachers are passionate and energetic and this inspires students' thirst for learning. Teachers use questions well to check students' understanding. This results in students learning how to use technical language accurately and to understand the key components of a new skill. For example in a vocal class, the teacher expertly questioned male students about muscle management and helped students to apply their theoretical knowledge of the

anatomy of voice to a practical exercise. The pace of learning is generally brisk but occasionally this slows especially when teachers talk too much.

16. Assessments are regular and fair. External assessors confirm students' work is marked accurately. Staff apply assessment criteria appropriately and this is supported through a well-established system of double marking assessments. Feedback to students is regular and helpful. There are some examples of excellent written feedback in which teachers identify the precise steps students should take to improve their work. This is not consistent and most comments are too general to help students speed up their progress. Information about students' progress is shared regularly but this is not always used effectively to plan lessons to address individual students' academic needs.
17. The course is a good blend of several disciplines. Students are selected to follow the musical theatre or dance theatre course in the second year according to their particular strengths. Regardless of which course they follow, the curriculum is designed to ensure that students develop a balance of skills to support them in developing as an all round performer. The progression within each discipline is planned well and students are clear about what they are learning and how it builds on their existing knowledge and skills. The college is at the early stage of linking students' learning across the disciplines. Currently opportunities to exploit links between different genres and key practitioners are missed. Recent improvements to vocal training has strengthened students' singing, providing students with a wider range of skills for musical theatre auditions. All students benefit from body conditioning and pilates classes to complement their learning in dance. Contextual studies help support students in developing their reflective and research skills. However, the quality of work here is more variable and while a few students make excellent use of their reflective journal, many lack the detail and precision to enable them to accelerate their progress.
18. Students develop an excellent understanding of the industry through the effective use the college makes of partnerships. Employers visit the college regularly and talk to students about practical aspects of life as a performer and preparation for employment. As a result, students have a high degree of understanding about the shifting patterns of work within the sector and the changing demands of employers.
19. The care, support and guidance for students are outstanding. Staff have in-depth knowledge of individual students and ensure their personal and professional needs are met. Injury support is excellent. The in-house physiotherapy team regularly visit lessons to support students who are recovering from injury and also work with teachers to ensure the needs of individuals are met. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are offered additional support so that they make the same good progress as their peers. Students feel confident that there is close personal support on hand should they need it.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 2**

20. The Principal along with other leaders are making significant improvements to the college. This can be seen clearly in the increasing number of students gaining performance-related employment and in the rapidly improving achievements of students. All staff and students hold the Principal in high esteem. There are many informal opportunities for staff and students to share ideas and the communication in the college is very good.
21. The observations of lessons are regular and have helped many teachers to improve their practice. However, the college's system for the observation of teaching and learning lacks coherence. Observation records indicate that in a number of instances, feedback focuses too much on teaching without specific reference to its impact on students' learning and their progress. Written feedback to teachers on the quality of their lessons often lacks sufficient detail and the areas for improvement are too general. Individual action plans are not always followed up routinely. A few teachers have gained recognised teaching qualifications and this supports them in reflecting on how students learn and how they can make better progress.
22. Leaders of each discipline complete course reviews and many do this very well, drawing on secure evidence to provide an accurate evaluation of performance. However, this is not consistent and a few course reviews are insufficiently rigorous. On the whole, the college's self-assessment is purposeful and action plans arising from this are appropriate although the impact on students outcomes is not evaluated sufficiently.
23. The professional development of teachers is given high priority and leaders encourage the sharing of good practice through peer observations and paired assessment. Teachers use their impressive industry links to contribute to staff development and ensure subject knowledge is thorough and up to date.
24. The college is outstanding in its promotion of equality and diversity. The college attracts a good proportion of international students and is relentless in its pursuit of attracting students from minority ethnic backgrounds. It has been successful in encouraging an increasing number of candidates from diverse backgrounds to apply for places on the course. The college visits areas where the proportion of low income families is high and it is successful in motivating students from under-represented groups to pursue performing arts. Staff and students are treated fairly and students report that auditioning processes for internal events are fair. The college is rigorous in ensuring systems to safeguard students are robust and staff knowledge and practice is consistently excellent.

## **What does Performers College need to do to improve further?**

- Use information more systematically to inform self-assessment process. Develop the skills of course leaders to ensure greater consistency in course review and evaluation of the college's work.

- Ensure that lesson observations focus more on the impact of teaching on students' learning and how lessons are meeting individual student needs. Provide more detailed feedback on the outcome of individual lesson observations and use this to inform action plans that will help to secure further improvements in teaching and learning.
- Continue to improve the monitoring of students' destinations over time and use the information to inform further improvements to the curriculum and preparation for employment for different groups of students.
- Further develop the evaluative skills of course leaders to support effective quality assurance
- Share existing good practice more widely to ensure written feedback to students identifies precisely the next steps they should take to improve their work.



## **Information about the inspection**

25. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), assisted by the college's nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, reports by the qualification awarding body, Trinity, London, the previous inspection report, and data about students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They also observed lessons.

Record of main findings			
<b>Provider name</b>	<b>Performers College</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>	<b>376308</b>
<b>Learning types:16-18 learner responsive:</b> FE full-time and part-time courses			

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection</b>	159
Full-time learners	0
Part-time learners	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>2</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2
How well do learners progress?	2
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1
How safe do learners feel?	1
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	
<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?	2
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners 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?	2
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1
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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