

# Arts Educational School London

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

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**Unique reference number:** 50527

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**Last day of inspection:** 12 January 2012

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## Information about the school

1. The Arts Educational School is a private performing arts school training students for employment in the musical theatre and acting industries. The school runs a three-year course in musical theatre, leading to the Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre, and two acting courses: a three-year Diploma in Professional Acting and a one-year Certificate in Professional Acting, all awarded by Trinity College, London. The school is accredited by the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) and the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT).
2. The school is based in Chiswick, West London and enrolls students from across the country and internationally. Applications are rising each year as result of the school's high profile reputation in the musical theatre and acting industries. Currently there are 274 students enrolled on the three courses of whom 153 (56%) are in receipt of dance and drama awards (DaDA) funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The school is about to undergo extensive redesign and refurbishment as a result of £3,544,200 funding from the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation.

## Summary report – musical theatre course

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
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## Overall effectiveness

3. Arts Educational School is an outstanding school with outstanding capacity to sustain further improvement. Since the last inspection the Principal has succeeded in securing and further enhancing the highly regarded reputation of the school as producing some of the most successful musical theatre performers in recent years. The Principal's ambitious mission and high expectations for the school, clearly and openly communicated with staff and students, has sustained the commitment of all staff through recent significant changes. Staff are committed to supporting the Principal's vision and most importantly place partnership work with the industry right at the heart of the training.
4. The support for all staff to retain and further develop their industry links undoubtedly enriches the students' experience of current practice and awareness of key trends, preparing them for successful auditions. Many

staff continue working externally from the school and use this professional experience effectively with students and in staff development sessions. Students confirm that a key reason why they choose to study at Arts Educational School is the contact they have with a wealth of very high profile practitioners.

5. Most students complete their course and are awarded the Trinity diploma. The overwhelming majority of students secure employment within six months of graduating as 'triple threat' musical theatre performers. Graduate destinations are impressive and a high proportion of graduates gain roles in the West End, increasingly securing lead roles very quickly. Graduates build up a portfolio of contracts with leading agents and casting directors, reflecting improved standards and highly versatile graduates. Students benefit from early exposure to industry experts because many come into the school to direct projects and sit on many mock audition panels. Experts see their talents and potential before they graduate and all of last year's graduates secured agent representation during their third year.
6. Almost all students make outstanding progress as a result of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. Inspectors observed some inspirational teaching in musical theatre, particularly in vocal work, pushing students to attain very high standards of performance. The curriculum provides outstanding training because the three disciplines of dance, acting and singing are fully integrated. The strand called 'project rehearsals' sets high expectations of students to independently research the period and style of work being used by the guest dancer, choreographer or musical director employed for the project. Students judge project rehearsals as one of the most critical aspects of their training, learning how to respond to the different working methods of guest artists and in developing their contextual understanding.

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

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

- the outstanding musical theatre curriculum giving mastery of the 'triple threat' training
- leaders' commitment to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to meet and work regularly with a plethora of industry personnel
- demanding lessons which expect students to continually push themselves to achieve high standards
- extensive personalised feedback that helps students know how to improve
- highly supportive and trusting relationships between staff and students
- outstanding preparation for employment

- the new information and communications technology (ICT) suite and extensive range of resources in the library
- outstanding levels of pastoral care.

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

- there were no recommendations from students. They were exceptionally pleased with leader's responses to their ideas over the last three years.

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

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

- the exceptionally high standard of students' work, equally strong in dance, signing and acting
- highly-talented students whose diverse achievements in musical theatre reflect how well their training matches the rapidly changing needs of the industry
- highly disciplined, creative and professional graduates who are courteous and polite
- excellent commitment from leaders to respond to feedback from employers through established partnership working.

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

- there were no recommendations from employers.

## **Main inspection report**

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

**Grade 1**

- Leadership and management of the musical theatre course are outstanding. Leaders have sustained and further improved outcomes for students since the last inspection when the course was also judged as outstanding. The restructuring of management roles has helped the Principal establish greater lines of accountability at senior and middle leadership level. Despite two distinct musical theatre and acting departments, the directors of each and their respective teams are working more collaboratively than before, sharing expertise and planning how new schemes of work bring together key skills for musical theatre and acting students.
- The two directors work very well with their heads of subjects. A regular cycle of department meetings helps all staff to contribute to the evaluation of students' progress and ideas for course improvement. Self-

assessment is good, largely accurate and continually improving, using feedback from employers, former graduates and current students. Leaders are improving the tracking of destinations and can point to striking examples of graduates who gain their first posts in high profile roles. A detailed scrutiny of trends over time, incorporating analysis of both quantitative data and qualitative data, is starting to improve, as is the evaluation of destinations as a measure of the impact of the training. Evaluation does not always link back to the impact on outcomes for students. An annual evaluation of the impact of lesson observations is not included in the self-assessment report, limiting a precise view of strengths and areas for development or what constitutes outstanding learning.

9. The inspection team received overwhelmingly positive responses from 47 employers and leading industry figures, testimony to the impact of the school's work developing leading edge performers who excel in the industry.

## **Outcomes for students**

## **Grade 1**

10. Students achieve outstanding levels of work by the time they graduate from the musical theatre course. The exceptionally high quality of performance work is evident in lessons, glowing feedback from employers, recent performance work on DVD and in reports by external assessors. The message is uncompromising; Arts Educational School trains students to be the very best musical theatre performers in the country. An employer states 'the calibre of musical theatre training offered at Arts Educational School is second to none. I am always confident when bringing in graduates that they will be equipped with the standards of skill and competence ready to take on whatever the creative team requires, often against performers with far more experience.'
11. An overwhelming majority of students secure employment within six months of graduation. They attain performing contracts that often show a rapid progression in the industry, especially in securing major roles in musical theatre and more recently in film and television. A very large majority quickly secure work in West End shows and sometimes on Broadway. The high percentage of graduates across the West End is impressive, performing in shows such as Wicked, Ghost, Shrek, Singing in the Rain, and in lead roles such as Donna in Mamma Mia and Amber Von Tussle in Hairspray. Graduates from the musical theatre course possess high quality acting skills leading to success in television roles, such as the achievement of a recent graduate who plays Scarlett in the BBC series Casualty.

12. Reports by Trinity College comment on how much the quality of training has been sustained, and improvements in voice work and styles of jazz give students an excellent range of dance and vocal skills. Female students' ability to work in heels is good and they can adapt to styles used in professional auditions. Inspectors were especially impressed with the richness and diversity of singing work permeating the school. The 100% pass rate is impressive and leaders have sustained retention above 90% on the musical theatre course over the last three years. Students are very pleased with the excellent pastoral care, which they say helps them with finding solutions to personal issues rather than having to leave the course. Although rare, any student who temporarily defers is carefully integrated back into the course and they make equally good progress as their peers.
13. Students thrive on high expectations for attendance, punctuality and they commit to much independent research to prepare for lessons. This excellent work ethic, consistently good and occasionally outstanding teaching and outstanding pastoral care means that the large majority make outstanding progress over time. Occasionally there are missed opportunities in lessons to really stretch the individual talents of students because of a lack of planning for different needs and limited differentiation in content, demand and pace. The streaming of students into levels in Year 1 means that class sizes are small and students receive a lot of personalised feedback. Students say that from induction their individuality and their talents are recognised and nurtured by all staff. One student commented that there is 'very fair teaching and every student gets similar time to both shine and learn'.
14. Students receive outstanding preparation for their future economic well-being through excellent professional preparation workshops and extensive performance opportunities. From Year 2 onwards students learn how to prepare high quality headshot photographs, appropriate curriculum vitae and covering letters successfully. Mock auditions with casting panels give students realistic experiences and they relish the feedback no matter how critical, helping them know what to improve. Students complete good professional development plans for after graduation, showing awareness of how to use transferable skills to secure employment.
15. Students feel outstandingly well cared for and safe. They receive excellent guidance about staying safe when travelling. Students frequently use the gym facility, complemented by good teaching of anatomy and physiology and Alexander technique. Students have a good understanding of safe practice in warm up and cool down, vocally and in movement work. Students' written work is not consistently detailed in analysing how they sustain and improve their fitness or how they refine their nutrition to optimise their performance.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 1

16. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. In an outstanding voice and speech lesson students asked highly knowledgeable questions showing significant evidence of prior learning. The tutor expertly guided students to explore resonance through use of complex vocal exercises and intense physical exercises with the whole body. In voice, speech and singing classes most students make outstanding progress because the pace of learning is challenging, constantly pushing up technical levels combined with an emphasis on students' understanding of characterisation. Students make outstanding progress in individual singing lessons as a result of detailed guidance drawing on the tutors' professional experience, and they quickly grasp the quality and intention of the repertoire. Students achieve excellent accuracy, complexity and flair in tap dance. In a rehearsal for Singing in the Rain students performed the demanding choreography with great stamina, excellent ensemble work and very good three-part harmony.
17. Good teaching uses much student demonstration, whole class discussion, good references to industry expectations, and demands energetic work to build singing and dancing stamina. In good and outstanding lessons teachers use targeted questioning to check students' learning and help them to take risks with interpretations. In a few lessons dominated by didactic teaching, the use of peer review is underdeveloped as is the encouragement of risk-taking to take students beyond their casting type and key strengths. On occasion students' progress is good rather than outstanding because teaching does not maximise independent learning and give time for students to consolidate learning and ask questions.
18. The assessment system is rigorous. Staff monitor students' progress closely in department meetings and through frequent meetings of the senior executive committee. Summative assessment is robust because of good standardisation through double marking. Genre-specific assessment criteria are excellent, helping students extract key strengths and targets for improvement for each discipline. A small minority of students' written work in reflective journals lacks depth and is overly descriptive.
19. The outstanding curriculum for musical theatre establishes connections across disciplines and reflects stylistic trends in musical theatre. The embedding of contextual knowledge about genre, style and the impact of leading historical and contemporary artists are well understood by students. Progression in the musical theatre course from Year 1 to Year 3 is impressive, structured through interlinked modules which give breadth and depth. For example, the dance curriculum, which covers five dance genres and includes complementary work such as tumbling work and pas de deux, gradually gives students high levels of technical

acquisition for use in the Year 3 showcase and productions. The complexity of acting techniques are equally demanding for each year group and leaders' decision to include acting for camera in Year 3 is a resounding success with students and employers. The frequency of onsite contact with industry professionals has increased significantly and for the past four years all students have secured agent interest before they graduate.

20. The school has exceptional relationships with agents, casting directors and industry experts who are critical friends as well as guest practitioners invited to direct many of the school's projects. Excellent links exist with local schools, theatres and community groups giving students' significant opportunity to work with many different people and be ready for the challenges of different performance venues.
21. Support and guidance for students are outstanding. Students say that 'pastoral care is excellent, every teacher feels approachable, an inspirational environment.' In this environment students flourish because care for fitness, diet, vocal care, personal issues and concern for helping each student discover their performer identity are tightly connected. For all courses, medical experts help students recover from injury and support staff in diagnosing complications with the voice. As a result retention remains high because diagnosis and treatment are rapid and effective.
22. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The head of learning support helps staff be aware of the learning, physical or medical needs of students. On occasion this information is not used well enough in lesson planning to adapt teaching strategies or content for specific learning needs. Any student who begins to experience difficulties is quickly identified and often offered additional individual coaching and academic support.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 1**

23. Leadership and management of the musical theatre course are outstanding. The Principal has established a culture of continuous improvement and quality assurance processes are increasingly robust. The cycle of course evaluation and improvement planning is tightly focused on raising standards and ensuring that the curriculum is responsive to the needs of the profession. The appointment of a new academic manager to work with external validators and assessors is successfully helping leaders to collate data and feedback to support course review. The pattern of formal lesson observations is firmly in place. Most feedback to staff is helpful with clear targets for improving practice, although some commentary focuses too much on teaching methods at the expense of students' progress. Standardisation of lesson



observations is not secure enough to show that leaders share a common understanding of criterion used to judge the quality of teaching. Leaders acknowledge that too few teachers have a formally recognised teaching qualification. Those who do are not sufficiently well used in modelling best practice. The potential benefit of vocational and academic staff from the lower and upper school working together to share pedagogical debate is underdeveloped.

24. The breadth of experience of the board of trustees coupled with the guidance from Andrew Lloyd Webber as president, Robert Powell as vice president and patronage work of Gillian Lynne and Robert Lindsay, guides leaders through the contemporary issues affecting the industry and therefore the school's training. Trustees have supported the Principal fully in restructuring management of the vocational courses. Trustees are rigorous in making certain that the financial and professional reputation of the school are continually developed.
25. Policy and practice in keeping students safe are good. The school upholds statutory guidance in vetting and recruitment of the school workforce. Policies in student handbooks give good guidance about student entitlement and for e-safety, and set clear expectations for treating each other with respect and recognising individual talents. Students say they are treated fairly when the staff make choices for productions and when students compete in auditions. One student comments that 'Arts Ed offers you the professional training needed to get you into this difficult business whilst also allowing you to be an individual and ultimately really enjoy your training.'
26. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Leaders continually review how to increase recruitment of students from under-represented groups and recognise that this as an area for continued focus as leaders and trustees. There is no differential in students' achievement by ethnicity, gender or by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but leaders are at the early stages of tracking destinations and outcomes for students by different groups. Students feel that their feedback about the courses both annually and through year group tutorials is listened to. Student representatives meet regularly with senior leaders but there is limited student representation on the board of trustees or course management committees.
27. The school has invested heavily over the last three years to improve the decor of the school, as well as providing new resources for students such as the new ICT suite. Leaders have not yet resolved problems with disabled access via a lift. The planned rebuild of the school as a result of the donation from the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation gives scope to improve access and facilities. Leaders offer additional scholarships to those who are in desperate need of support. The school offers outstanding value for money.

## **What does Arts Educational School need to do to improve its musical theatre course further?**

- Increase the robustness of joint observations of teaching so that all leaders have a shared understanding of what constitutes outstanding learning in musical theatre and acting.
- Enable all staff to take part in strategically planned observations of each others' practice to examine how best to plan learning that maximises students' potential and generates more rigorous pedagogical debate amongst all staff.
- Encourage a greater proportion of teaching staff to acquire formally recognised teaching qualifications.
- Enable all leaders to analyse trends in quantitative data to underpin course evaluation and action planning linked to outcomes for all students.
- Include as part of the self-assessment reporting a more evaluative commentary about graduates' progression in the industry as an indicator of the high quality of musical theatre and acting training.



Record of main findings			
<b>Provider name</b>	<b>Arts Educational School London</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>	<b>385316</b>
<b>Learning types: 18+ learners responsive: FE full-time courses.</b>			

### Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre

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> Full-time learners.	160
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	1
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>1</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1
How well do learners progress?	1
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>	2
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	NA*
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>1</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, 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>1</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>	1
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?	1
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?	1

\*where applicable to the type of provision

## Summary report – three-year acting course

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

28. The three-year acting course is outstanding and leaders demonstrate outstanding capacity to sustain further improvement. Since the last inspection the Principal has succeeded in securing and further enhancing the highly regarded reputation of the school. The Principal has appointed a highly effective director of the school of acting who, together with the head of acting, has redesigned the course to be much more relevant to the need to train actors for film and television as well as theatre.
29. The curriculum for acting is outstanding. The versatile actors who emerge from the training show how well staff and industry expertise are used to ensure outstanding outcomes for students. With tremendous accolades from film and television professionals who work with the school, leaders are rightly proud of graduates' achievements. With sponsorship by Coca-Cola, the showing of '16 Films' by third years took place at Soho House in West Hollywood, successfully securing American agents for several students. The impact of high quality training in acting for camera is evident in comments from leading casting directors who see students' work at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards (BAFTA). A chief executive who saw the screening of students' films at BAFTA in 2011 reported to inspectors how superb the films were both in acting and production value.
30. Inspectors observed some inspirational teaching in acting and teaching overall is solidly good. Almost all students make outstanding progress over their three years of training as a result of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. The curriculum provides outstanding training because the sequencing of modules and content gives students many different theoretical and practical experiences as an actor. Students agree that the intensity of work each year challenges them to develop high level of competency in film acting and live theatre work including stand up and physical theatre. Students feel that the valuable experiences gained in performance projects led by industry directors and producers are second to none.

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

**What students like:**

- the outstanding curriculum with intensive training in both acting and producing high quality work for film and television
- leaders' commitment to ensuring that all students have opportunity to meet and work regularly with a plethora of industry experts
- demanding lessons which expect students to continually to push themselves to achieve high standards
- highly supportive and trusting relationship between staff and students
- outstanding preparation for employment, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to know how to best promote themselves in the industry and develop the necessary versatility to ensure carer progression
- the new information and communications technology (ICT) suite and extensive resources available in the library
- outstanding levels of pastoral care.

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

- the only recommendation from students was to the need to upgrade facilities, but they recognise that the new building will lead to state of the art facilities.

**Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors****What employers like:**

- the high standards of performance work in acting and acting for film and television
- highly talented students whose diverse achievements in recent years exemplify the success in refocusing the 50% equal weighting for theatre and film and television in the third year
- highly disciplined, professional graduates who are skilled to take creative risks
- the excellent ambassadorial qualities of graduates, who apply themselves professionally, with high commitment and respect for industry experts
- excellent commitment from leaders to regularly respond to feedback from employers through established partnership working.

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

- there were no recommendations from employers.

## **Main inspection report**

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

**Grade 1**

31. Leadership and management of the three-year acting course is outstanding. Leaders have improved outcomes for students since the last inspection when the course was judged to be good. The decision to reduce numbers for the course is helping leaders to increase retention rates and the calibre of acting students is much improved. The school only selects those with the greatest potential to succeed and the audition process for this year now includes a screen acting test to assess potential for screen work as a key aspect of the training. The two directors work very well with their heads of subjects; a regular cycle of department meetings helps all staff to contribute to the evaluation of students' progress and ideas for course improvement.
32. The inspection team received overwhelmingly positive responses from 47 employers and leading industry figures, testimony to the impact of the school's work in developing leading-edge performers who excel in the industry.

### **Outcomes for students**

**Grade 1**

33. Students achieve outstandingly by the time they graduate from the course. Most students enrolling on the three-year acting diploma complete the course and are awarded the Trinity diploma. All of last year's graduates secured agent representation and the large majority of acting students over the last three years secured employment within six months of graduating. The breadth of acting destinations is also enhanced by excellent relationships with casting directors and producers, who see students work regularly by teaching the students, and seeing their work in live performance or screenings of their films. Graduates secure roles in leading television shows such as *Call the Midwife* and *Eastenders*, and one graduate has been cast as a new regular character in *Hollyoaks*.
34. Reports by Trinity College, London and NCDT comment on how much the quality of outcomes has improved. Students attain high standards with excellent performance energy, focus and responsiveness as a company on stage. Performances are described as entirely truthful with convincing characterisation. The inspection team concur with many comments from employers about the high quality of students leaving the course, especially for screen acting. As one employer said, 'my experience is that the students graduate from this particular course with

an extremely high level of knowledge and understanding of life on a film and television set and are very well grounded both artistically/creatively and practically. They understand what every role is on a working film set, and not just from an acting perspective. Arts Ed is an excellent place for actors wanting to work in film and television, in particular.' Students attain much success in producing professionally edited DVDs of their Year 3 films, using these in a shortened version on a loop as part of the Year 3 live showcase performance at the Criterion Theatre, London.

35. Students receive outstanding preparation for their future economic well-being through excellent professional preparation in screen tests, interview and audition techniques and extensive performance opportunities. From Year 2 onwards students successfully prepare appropriate curriculum vitae and covering letters, and produce their own show reels and films. Their performance in up to four short films in Year 3 necessitate high professional standards to meet the complexity of film making. Additionally, they take on crew roles when recording, often on location. Students complete good action plans to identify the areas of acting they wish to follow after graduation.
36. Students feel outstandingly well cared for and safe. They receive excellent guidance about staying safe when travelling, and they have a good understanding of safe practice in warm up and cool down, and in vocal and movement work. Students regularly take on technical roles with equally good guidance for safety with sound, lighting, filming equipment and stage management work.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 1**

37. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. In an outstanding lesson on received pronunciation, the expertise of the tutor was used brilliantly throughout the class to guide students in hearing and trying out American and Irish accents. With students divided into small groups and working with excellent pre-recorded material for each accent, the tutor cleverly switched between accents with each group. Students made outstanding progress and quickly understood phonetics. The tutor's use of praise and highly personalised, corrective feedback made certain that all students had the chance to ask questions and meet the lesson outcomes.
38. Students make outstanding progress over time because the depth of knowledge of the tutors is rooted in years of extensive industry experience which is drawn upon effectively in most lessons. In improvisation classes good trust between students and tutors helps risk taking, and exploration of the Meisner philosophy and methodology is effective. Most teachers use probing questioning well to check students' understanding and there is much good use of peer review in the acting course. On occasion students' progress is good rather than outstanding



because lesson planning does not always sufficiently match the content, demand or pace of the learning to the needs of each student.

39. The assessment system is rigorous. Staff monitor students' progress closely in department meetings and through frequent meetings of the senior executive committee. Summative assessment is robust because of good standardisation through double marking. Genre-specific assessment criteria are excellent, helping students to extract key strengths and targets for improvement. The smaller class sizes enable tutors to give more individual feedback to students in lessons and students feel tutorial guidance is very helpful.
40. The outstanding curriculum combines exemplary connections across live acting and acting for screen. The redesign of the curriculum, in consultation with staff and industry practitioners, led to the wise decision to introduce screen acting from Year 1 onwards. Current Year 1 students feel this is a key reason why they chose this course. In Year 2 and 3 the equal split between the study of theatre and film and television is improving achievement in screen acting. The impact of changes such as acting for camera from Year 1, removal of dance technique in favour of physical theatre and combat classes, a Year 1 stand-up project and greater depth in the Shakespeare project in Year 2 are maximising students' skills ready for many different employment options.
41. Progression through the acting course is expertly detailed in the course handbook, helping students to know what they are learning and why, and how modules interrelate. The complexity of acting techniques is demanding for each year group and leaders' decision to include acting for camera from Year 1 onwards is a resounding success with students and employers. The frequency of onsite contact with industry professionals has increased significantly. Students receive very good exposure and nearly all third-year students secure agent interest before they graduate.
42. The school has exceptional relationships with agents, casting directors and industry experts who are critical friends as well as guest practitioners invited to direct many of the school's projects. Excellent links exist with local schools, theatres and community groups, giving students' significant opportunity to work with many different people and be ready for the challenges of different performance venues.
43. Support and guidance for students are outstanding. One student commented that 'the teachers are fantastic and I felt completely at home and in a safe environment from the start'. Students flourish because all aspects of care and guidance are well managed to meet the students' needs. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The head of learning support helps staff be aware of the learning, physical or medical needs of the acting students. In some lessons this

information is not used well enough in lesson planning to adapt teaching strategies or content for specific learning needs, and lesson plans are too brief.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 1**

44. Leadership and management of the acting course are outstanding. The work of the new director of the school of acting over the last 18 months is having a demonstrable impact upon the quality of the curriculum and training for all students. Staff morale in the acting department has risen and developing prosperous relationships with industry personnel go from strength to strength.
45. The cycle of course evaluation and improvement planning is tightly focused on raising standards and ensuring that the curriculum is responsive to the needs of the profession. This why the acting course has moved on significantly since the last inspection. Self-assessment of the course overall is good, mostly accurate and continually improving, using feedback from employers, former graduates and current students. A detailed scrutiny of trends over time by evaluating quantitative data and qualitative data is starting to improve, as is the evaluation of destinations of the acting students as a measure of the impact of the training. An annual evaluation of the impact of lesson observations is not included in the self-assessment report, limiting a precise view of strengths and areas for development or what constitutes outstanding learning. The directors of the schools of acting and school of musical theatre are this year setting up a series of joint, cross-departmental observations to bring about greater standardisation of lesson observations.
46. Trustees have supported the Principal fully in restructuring management of the vocational courses. They ask challenging questions about proposed changes and the impact on outcomes for students. Trustees are rigorous in making certain that the financial and professional reputation of the school are continually developed. Trustees have not yet monitored how information from the cycle of lesson observations is used to quality assure teaching and learning and raise standards.
47. Policy and practice in keeping students safe are good. The school upholds statutory guidance in vetting and recruitment of the school workforce. Policies in student handbooks give good guidance about student entitlement and for e-safety, and set clear expectations for treating each other with respect and recognising individual talents.
48. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The use of the extensive outreach programme both locally and nationally through summer schools and workshops with community groups, enables the school to promote training to students from many diverse social, economic and cultural

contexts, steadily attracting more students from under-represented groups to apply for the acting course. The 'colour blind' casting policy promotes equality and diversity successfully. There is no differential in students' achievement by ethnicity, gender or by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but leaders are at the early stages of tracking outcomes for students by different groups. Students feel that their feedback about the courses both annually and through year group tutorials is listened to. They are confident that changes they recommend are carefully considered, such as the introduction of screen acting from Year 1 of the course.

49. The school has invested heavily over the last three years to improve the decor of the school as well as providing resources for students such as the new ICT suite and new equipment for film recording work. The school offers outstanding value for money.

### **What does Arts Educational School need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the robustness of joint observations of teaching so that all leaders have a shared understanding of what constitutes outstanding learning in musical theatre and acting.
- Enable all staff to take part in strategically planned observations of each others' practice to examine how best to plan learning that maximises students' potential and generates more rigorous pedagogical debate amongst all staff.
- Encourage a greater proportion of teaching staff to acquire formally recognised teaching qualifications.
- Enable all leaders to analyse trends in quantitative data to underpin course evaluation and action planning linked to outcomes for all students.
- Include as part of the self-assessment reporting a more evaluative commentary about graduates' progression in the industry as an indicator of the high quality of musical theatre and acting training.

Record of main findings			
<b>Provider name</b>	<b>Arts Educational School</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>	<b>385316</b>
<b>Learning types: 18+ plus learner responsive: FE Full time courses</b>			

### Diploma in Professional Acting

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> Full-time learners.	84
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	1
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>1</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1
How well do learners progress?	1
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>	2
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	NA*
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>1</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, 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>1</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>	1
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?	1
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?	1

\*where applicable to the type of provision

## Summary report – one year acting course

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

50. The one-year acting course is good and leaders in the school of acting demonstrate outstanding capacity for further improvement. At the time of the inspection 30 students were studying on the one-year course, of whom six (20%) were in receipt of Dance and Drama Awards. Since the last inspection the course has undergone considerable change and is securing good and improving outcomes for students. Leadership of the course is good and the new course leader, appointed in September 2011, is working well with the director of the school of acting to monitor new initiatives this year, responding to staff and student feedback. The extension of the course to 12 months is helping deepen and broaden the modules of the course with good attention to helping postgraduate students quickly acquire skills and knowledge as an actor for live and recorded work within a year. The inclusion of new London-based end of course showcases specifically for this course is insightful, making certain that these students, many of whom are career changers or who are returning to acting, have equally good exposure to casting directors, agents and producers.
51. Teaching, assessment and curriculum provision are good. Students are highly articulate about how the early stages of exploration in their vocal and movement journey through transformation classes are already developing their skills and challenging them as performers. Students feel pushed to refine their previous training and teaching probes creative decisions in each session.

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

#### What students like:

- a well-structured course giving good breadth and plenty of challenging opportunities to develop further what they themselves bring to the course
- leaders' commitment to ensuring that students have the opportunity to meet and work regularly with a plethora of industry personnel

- demanding lessons which expect students to continually push themselves to achieve high standards, and good use of peer feedback
- extensive personalised feedback that helps students know how to improve
- highly supportive and trusting relationships between staff and students
- the new information and communications technology (ICT) suite and extensive resources available in the library
- outstanding levels of pastoral care.

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

- there were no recommendations from students.

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

**What employers like:**

- the good standard of students' work
- highly disciplined and professional students
- excellent commitment from leaders to respond to feedback from employers through established partnership working.

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

- there were no recommendations from employers.

**Main inspection report**

**Capacity to make and sustain improvement**

**Grade 1**

52. The capacity demonstrated in the school of acting under the leadership of the Principal and the new director of the school of acting is outstanding. Much change is enabling the acting courses to improve outcomes for all acting students and the concerted, well-focused effort for the one-year course is helping leaders to eliminate variability in standards and continually improve outcomes. The cycle of evaluation and action planning for the acting courses is good. There is no separate course evaluation for each acting course but overall self-assessment is good and largely accurate. Leaders fully accept that the impact of some changes to the course, new this year, will emerge in outcomes for graduates in 2012 and in destinations data over the next few years. The new course leader is significantly increasing students' contact with

industry professionals by bringing in a very good range of experts to teach and direct the students.

## **Outcomes for students**

## **Grade 2**

53. Outcomes for students are good and continually improving. Over the last three years retention on the course has remained high and almost all students complete the course. In 2009 the percentage of graduates gaining employment dipped to 78% from 96% the previous year but rose again in 2010 to 96%. Leaders are tracking destinations carefully to ensure that any trends, albeit based on small student numbers, can be identified quickly. Students attain performing contracts in fringe theatre, touring theatre, and a small percentage in regional theatre. An increasing number of students are securing work in short films and in television programmes such as *My Worst Week* and *Night on the Town*.
54. Students achieve a good standard of work by the time they graduate and improving standards are reported by external assessors and employers. Recent reports comment favourably upon students' ability to sustain dramatic content, and develop good characterisation and strong individuality with persuasive physicality. There are instances of stunning work at a professional level and students' confidence is improving. By contrast some performance work still lacks depth and complexity in interpretation and the quality of accent work can be variable. Students are increasingly achieving high standards in screen acting and producing, a common strength in both acting courses.
55. Students enjoy using the fitness facilities and they receive good guidance about anatomy and physiology. Students have a good understanding of safe practice in warm up and cool down, and in vocal and movement work. They regularly take on technical roles during productions, with equally good guidance for safety with sound, lighting and filming equipment and stage management work.
56. Students enjoy the high expectations for attendance and punctuality and a commitment to independent research to inform their learning. A combination of a very committed approach to their studies, consistently good teaching and outstanding pastoral care means that the large majority make good progress over time.
57. Students receive good preparation for their future well-being through excellent professional preparation workshops, and students have extensive performance opportunities to refine their skills. The new modules for professional employment skills are detailed and give students the chance to hone their audition technique, screen tests and interview competency. Students say that tutors make much reference to how the day-to-day teaching links to the skills expected for auditions and

employment. The extensive resource collection in the library and the exceptional knowledge of the resources manager is rightly regarded by students as invaluable in resourcing their work.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 2**

58. Teaching and learning are good. Good teaching uses much student demonstration, highly energetic work to build stamina, whole class discussion and good references to industry expectations. In most lessons teachers use questioning to check students' learning. On occasion students' progress is good rather than outstanding because teaching misses the opportunity to allow students to independently consolidate learning and ask questions. Several students wish for the pace of lessons to be quicker.
59. The assessment system is rigorous. Staff monitor students' progress closely in department meetings and students feel that they receive really helpful formative feedback in lessons. Students feel that a strength of the course is the use of peer criticism to guide each other, and students quickly trust one another because as a small group they get to know each other particularly well. Group and individual tutorials help students to set realistic yet ambitious targets, and students feel that the assessment criteria are clearly laid out in the course handbook.
60. One-year students had limited exposure to the industry in the former course; but this is notably changing because of the work of the new course leader in quickly securing new relationships with agents and directors, who in the past had little direct work in the school with the one-year students. Students say they are benefiting from this by learning to work with the styles of different directors. This is helping them to appreciate how quickly they need to secure connections into the industry and present themselves as flexible artists, well attuned to responding to market place demands.
61. The good curriculum for the one-year acting course is ideally sequenced to equip students with a range of voice movement and exploratory skills and demanding technical skills that lead to good achievement by the end of the course. Leaders have thoughtfully revisited how the evidence from screen acting modules on the three-year course can be utilised well in the one-year course, with good technical training for film and television as well as the core use of Meisner repetition exercises for teaching acting technique. Students say they particularly feel that the course handbook gives them good insight about how the expected learning outcomes for each module are linked, and that the interplay between different modules is well taught.



62. Support and guidance for students are outstanding. One-year students comment that they feel well supported as individuals with varied life stories and experiences often as mature students. They feel tutors respect their individual talents, and that they can talk openly with them.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 2**

63. Leadership and management of the one-year acting course are good. The Principal has recently appointed a new course leader whose vision for the course is ensuring that issues identified at the last inspection are being tackled. The new course leader is well supported by the director of the school of acting. Together they have carefully revisited the overall structure and content of the course, so the intensity of the new twelve-month study period gives mature students the chance to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills as professional actors quickly. Leaders have established a clear rationale for the modules in the course with a high emphasis upon creative risk taking as an actor.
64. Self-assessment of the course overall is good, mostly accurate and continually improving. A detailed scrutiny of trends over time by evaluating quantitative data and qualitative data is starting to improve, as is the evaluation of destinations of the acting students as a measure of the impact of the training. Evaluation does not always link back to the impact on outcomes for students. An annual evaluation of the impact of lesson observations is not included in the self-assessment report, limiting a precise view of strengths and areas for development or what constitutes outstanding learning. The directors of the schools of acting and school of musical theatre are this year setting up a series of joint, cross-departmental observations to bring about greater standardisation of lesson observations.
65. Trustees have supported the Principal fully in restructuring management of the courses and they ask challenging questions about proposed changes and the impact on outcomes for students. Trustees gave good guidance to leaders in reviewing how best to improve the quality of the certificate in acting course and the decision to extend the course to twelve months was given careful financial consideration.
66. Policy and practice in keeping students safe are good. The school upholds statutory guidance in vetting and recruitment of the school workforce. Policies in student handbooks give good guidance about student entitlement and for e-safety, and set clear expectations for treating each other with respect and recognising individual talents.
67. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Leaders continually review how to increase recruitment of students from under-represented groups and recognise that this as an area for continued focus as leaders and trustees. The 'colour blind' casting policy promotes equality and

diversity successfully. There is no differential in students' achievement by ethnicity, gender or by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but leaders are at the early stages of tracking destinations and outcomes for students by different groups. Students feel that so far this year they have been really listened to and leaders are seeking their views of the new course on a regular basis.

68. The school has invested heavily over the last three years to improve the decor of the school, as well as providing new resources for students such as the new ICT suite. Leaders have not yet resolved problems with disabled access via a lift. The planned rebuild of the school, as a result of the donation from the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, gives scope to improve access and facilities. Leaders offer additional scholarships to those who are in desperate need of support. The school provides outstanding value for money.

### **What does Arts Educational School need to do to improve further?**

- Continually refine the training on the one-year acting course so that standards of achievement move from good to outstanding.
- Increase the robustness of joint observations of teaching so that all leaders have a shared understanding of what constitutes outstanding learning in musical theatre and acting.
- Enable all staff to take part in strategically planned observations of each others' practice to examine how best to plan learning that maximises students' potential and generates more rigorous pedagogical debate amongst all staff.
- Encourage a greater proportion of teaching staff to acquire formally recognised teaching qualifications.
- Enable all leaders to analyse trends in quantitative data to underpin course evaluation and action planning linked to outcomes for all students.
- Include as part of the self-assessment reporting a more evaluative commentary about graduates' progression in the industry as an indicator of the high quality of musical theatre and acting training.

Record of main findings			
<b>Provider name</b>	<b>Arts Educational School London</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>	<b>385316</b>
<b>Learning types: 18+ plus learner responsive: FE Full time courses</b>			

### Certificate in Professional Acting

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> Full-time learners.	30
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	1
<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?	2
How safe do learners feel?	2
<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
<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?	1
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	1
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?	1

\*where applicable to the type of provision

## **Information about the inspection**

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the directors of acting and musical theatre as nominees, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the school's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the qualification awarding body, Trinity College, London, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

Inspectors observed lessons including several joint observations spanning all three courses. The lead inspector met with groups of students from each year group to gain their views and also met with staff in leadership roles and a group of teachers. Inspectors considered the views of employers and views expressed in recent student feedback questionnaires.

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