

Elmhurst School for Dance

Dance and drama school



Inspection dates 18–19 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Teachers train learners to a high standard; the majority go on to employment in respected dance companies.
- The proportion of learners who successfully complete their qualifications is high.
- The school has a strong association with Birmingham Royal Ballet; senior leaders use this to excellent effect to raise the standard of teaching and to provide learners with the skills necessary for employment.
- Teachers have very high aspirations for, and expectations of, their learners and set them challenging targets to ensure they make rapid progress in their learning.
- Teachers make outstanding use of practising dancers and choreographers to help learners attain a professional standard of performance.
- Teachers expertly link one aspect of learning to another so that learners understand how to develop their skills incrementally.
- Teachers focus exceptionally well on developing learners' independence and their courage to take risks.
- Governors and senior leaders have consulted widely with staff to develop the excellent culture and ethos of the school, and all staff work diligently to raise learners' aspirations.
- Governors and senior leaders have successfully implemented improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is now outstanding.
- Senior leaders make outstanding use of feedback from industry experts to ensure that the dance curriculum meets employers' needs.
- Learners have a very positive attitude to their learning and they commit themselves thoroughly to their studies.
- Staff provide outstanding guidance to learners to develop their understanding of social and ethical issues.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Elmhurst School for Dance is a private residential and day school in Birmingham for learners aged 11 to 19. The school recruits learners from across the country and from overseas. In 2002, the school became an associate school of Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB). The focus of this inspection was on the sixth-form dance course, which is taught over two years for the National Certificate in Professional Dance, and three years for the National Diploma in Professional Dance. Qualifications are awarded by Trinity College, London.
- At the time of the inspection there were 188 learners enrolled at the school, of which 162 were boarders. There were 65 learners on the National Diploma in Professional Dance, of which 39 were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) funding.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders should provide governors with more detailed information about the quality of teaching and learning and learners' progress so that governors have a better overview of the further developments being made and their impact on learners' experiences.
- Teachers should develop further the training for female learners in working *en pointe* to ensure all learners' work is of an equally high standard.
- Staff should ensure that all learners are able to experience rehearsing and working in a professional setting so that they understand fully the inter-relationships between performers and production staff.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Governors and senior leaders have consulted widely with staff to develop the school's mission and ethos. Consequently, all staff feel closely involved in, and fully support, the school's aim to provide high-class dance training to learners, and to develop their social and moral outlook. Through their excellent leadership and management, senior leaders have successfully raised standards of teaching and learning and improved learners' outcomes, both of which are outstanding.
- Managers use the formal association with BRB to excellent effect to enhance learners' experiences at the school. They consult frequently with BRB leaders on the dance curriculum and learners are prepared extremely well for employment through work placements and professional workshops.
- Governors and senior leaders continually review and develop the curriculum and the approach taken to teaching dance. Their honest, self-critical approach lies at the heart of the significant progress they have made in raising standards.
- Senior leaders make outstanding use of feedback from a wide range of dance-industry experts to shape the curriculum. They have introduced more training in musicality, gymnastics, aerobic activity and stagecraft in order to prepare learners better for the demands of employment. Senior leaders have widened the employment options for learners by increasing their training in contemporary dance.
- Managers' assessment of their provision is thorough and accurate, and in the school development plan they identify well the actions needed to bring about continuous improvement. Managers make very good use of frequent feedback from learners to raise standards.
- Managers assess the quality of teaching, learning and assessment accurately and link the process of observing lessons closely to their appraisal of staff. They identify well with teachers the improvement required and provide them with very good support through extensive staff development.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governors have a wide range of expertise that is well matched to the needs of the school. The Chair of the Governing Body reviews the skills needs of the school and the skill sets of governors on a frequent basis, and ensures that these are matched through careful recruitment.
 - Governors provide excellent support to managers to ensure the continued improvement of the resources available, such as the new boarding house for sixth-form learners. They have an excellent overview of safeguarding arrangements. A strong culture of accountability exists and governors scrutinise closely the performance of senior leaders.
 - Governors receive detailed reports from senior leaders about the performance of most aspects of the school. However, they do not have a sufficiently detailed overview of the quality of teaching and learning or of learners' progress on the diploma programme.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.**
 - Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive for all aspects of the school's provision. Staff training for safeguarding is frequent and up to date. Staff and learners are well informed about the school's policies and procedures, and governors oversee the updating of these on an annual basis. In drafting their policies, managers make good reference to all relevant legislation, as well as to local authority priorities.
 - Managers ensure that learners have very good access to medical assistance if they need it, and make effective use of external agencies when required.
 - Managers have taken suitable action with regard to their obligations under the Prevent duty. They have a well-considered implementation plan, which includes training for all staff by the end of the calendar year.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Since the previous inspection, teachers and managers have worked exceptionally well to improve teaching, learning and assessment. They have evaluated carefully the training needs of the learners through all stages of their learning. Through highly effective staff development they have shared and improved their practice so that it is of a consistently high standard.
- Teachers have very high aspirations for, and expectations of, their learners. Learners are set precise and challenging targets throughout their training, and staff monitor and support them closely to achieve these. Consequently, learners make excellent progress.

- Teachers encourage learners at all times to challenge themselves, to take risks and to develop a sense of fearlessness, which they respond to well. For example, learners were encouraged to fall out of an *écarté* position to discover exactly how far they could challenge themselves with regard to the point of balance and give the movement extra dynamics.
- Teachers use questions skilfully to test learners' knowledge and to increase the depth of their understanding. Teachers use a range of strategies highly successfully, such as encouraging learners to use peer- and self-assessment, in order to develop their independent learning. For example, learners worked in pairs and groups to appraise each other's performance of a *pirouette* exercise and gave feedback to improve each other's ability to leap from a good fifth position.
- Teachers provide learners with detailed written feedback following assessment which shows them precisely what they need to do to improve. Teachers mark learners' written work accurately and pay good attention to their use of correct spelling and grammar. During lessons, teachers give verbal feedback in a sensitive and constructive way, which helps learners to develop their skills well and builds their confidence.
- Teachers make excellent use of industry experts during learners' final assessed performances to ensure that learners are evaluated against the standards expected of dance professionals.
- Teachers expertly link one aspect of learning to another so that learners understand how to develop their skills incrementally. For example, a teacher asked the learners to reflect on their prior learning to consider how and when they had previously used specific muscles that they needed to use to execute a *batterie* exercise successfully.
- Staff assess carefully the skills and abilities of all learners before the start of the course. Staff provide effective support for learners who need extra help to achieve, and liaise closely with teachers to ensure they make the progress expected of them.
- For the few learners who are unable to participate in class due to injury, most teachers plan activities to ensure they are still involved in learning. Teachers develop in learners a strong self-awareness so that they are able to continue with practical exercises within the limits imposed by their injuries.
- In a small minority of cases, teachers do not ensure that female learners are sufficiently proficient *en pointe*, resulting in weaknesses in the work of a few learners.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

- Learners have a very positive attitude to their learning; their attendance is excellent, they arrive on time to lessons and commit themselves thoroughly to their studies. Over the three years of the programme, they develop increased autonomy, and in the third year demonstrate a professional ethos as a company to create all aspects of their final production.
- Staff provide outstanding guidance to learners to develop their understanding of current social and ethical issues. They make frequent use of current affairs topics such as the refugees in Europe and the bombings in Paris to discuss themes such as tolerance, democracy and community responsibility. Consequently, learners have a very mature outlook on society.
- Staff make excellent use of partnerships with local schools, hospitals and other organisations for which learners create performances and workshops. Learners gain valuable experience of dance in a range of settings and have a comprehensive understanding of other people's circumstances relative to their own.
- Teachers make outstanding use of the association with BRB during rehearsals. BRB choreographers and its artistic director coach learners to attain a professional standard in the final stages of preparing for performance. Staff invite a wide range of industry experts to talk to learners in order to ensure that they have a detailed awareness of their employment opportunities.
- Almost all learners gain a thorough understanding of the challenges and demands of professional performance through work placements or the school's own public performances. A minority of learners have outstanding work experience when they are recruited to perform in BRB productions. A few learners do not have sufficient exposure to professional work to appreciate fully the inter-relationship between performers and production staff.
- Learners take part in a range of activities that broaden their interests, including yoga, debating, swimming and fitness. Learners also achieve useful additional qualifications, such as in Cecchetti and Royal Academy of Dance classical ballet, which give them further skills to help them secure employment.
- Learners receive comprehensive guidance regarding injury prevention and management, nutrition, and health. School and medical staff provide excellent instruction to ensure learners have a strong awareness of their own health and are able to manage this.

- Staff pay good attention to developing learners' English and mathematical skills. They ensure that learners are able to present themselves confidently in person, and accurately in writing, when applying for work. Learners are able to use mathematics to manage financial matters and understand topics such as personal taxation. Through managing their own productions, third-year learners have the skills necessary to manage the budget for a production.

Outcomes for learners

are outstanding

- Over the past three years, the vast majority of learners have completed the diploma programme and all learners who stay to the end achieve the qualification. The standard of their work almost always exceeds the qualification requirements.
- A very high proportion of learners quickly find paid employment in respected dance companies in Britain and overseas.
- Learners enjoy their learning, are passionate about their courses and highly committed to achieving excellence in their work.
- Staff have exceptionally high expectations for their learners and make very good use of competitions, both at school and externally, to motivate them to achieve and to improve their level of skill to a high standard.
- Staff ensure that learners who have not achieved a GCSE grade C or above in English and mathematics when they start the course attend lessons in these subjects. Almost all of these learners achieve a grade C by the end of the first year of the course.
- Learners' work is of a high standard, and around a third of learners have the skills required to work in the BRB company during their time at the school. Learners' final-year production shows their excellent ability and readiness for employment.

Provider details

Type of provider	Dance and drama college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	37
Principal/CEO	Mrs Jessica Wheeler
Website address	www.elmhurstdance.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	5
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16	n/a							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Rieks Drijver, lead inspector

Fiona Cave

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the acting Principal, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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