

# The Hammond

Dance and Drama School


**Inspection dates**

25–26 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

## Summary of key findings

### This is an outstanding provider

- Senior leaders and all staff work with a strong and unified purpose to give students the best opportunities to flourish as performers and individuals.
- Almost all students achieve the Trinity diploma, and all achieve A levels or other useful additional vocational qualifications.
- Leaders ensure that learning and other resources are very high quality. Students benefit from industry-standard performance and rehearsal spaces.
- Leaders and staff manage and deliver a rich and varied curriculum that meets students' needs and prepares them very well for entry into the performing arts industry.
- Senior leaders promote high standards in teaching and learning, care and support, and these are shared enthusiastically by staff at all levels.
- Students develop a very strong range of vocational and personal skills which equip them well for employment in the industry.
- Managers ensure that the school provides a safe, secure and peaceful environment in which students can flourish.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Students and tutors enjoy vibrant, challenging lessons in which progress is rapid and sustained.
- Tutors are very well-qualified expert practitioners. Staff benefit from very good opportunities to maintain and develop their skills.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- The Hammond is an independent performing arts school that trains students for employment in the musical theatre and dance industries. The school runs three-year courses in musical theatre and in dance, leading to the diploma in professional dance or musical theatre, awarded by Trinity College, London. The school is accredited by the Council for Dance Education and Training.
- The Hammond is based on a single site in Hoole Bank, Chester, and the campus includes dance and drama studios, teaching spaces and a theatre. The school has boarding-house accommodation in the city of Chester. The school enrolls students from across the country and a small number of international students. Of the 80 students currently enrolled on diploma courses, 69 are in receipt of dance and drama (DaDA) awards funded by the Education Funding Agency.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the school library to include a wider range of professional journals and texts, and to provide diploma students with a suitable space for independent study and research.
- Enhance the capacity of the board of directors to support the school by increasing the number of directors, and by recruiting directors more closely linked to the performance industry.
- Ensure that students in all classes make appropriate use of personal journals and notebooks to record corrections and feedback from tutors.
- Increase the frequency and range of homework given to students, so that they develop further their independent learning skills.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The Principal and senior leaders provide exceptionally strong and effective leadership, promoting a clear and constructive ethos across the school. Staff understand the school's mission and enthusiastically and energetically apply themselves to maximising opportunities for students to grow and flourish.
- Leaders and tutors plan and deliver an exceptionally broad, generous and relevant curriculum that meets students' needs, engages them fully, and prepares them very well for entry into the industry. In addition to the core diploma programmes, students benefit from thoughtfully timetabled A-level provision in a good range of subjects, and from industry-relevant and employment-focused dance and movement instructor qualifications.
- Leaders and staff are reflective and engage strongly in professional self-improvement; quality improvement is relentless. Managers have refined and strengthened quality improvement measures since the previous inspection. Staff understand the quality systems and share the strong school-wide focus on providing a fulfilling, engaging and relevant learning experience for the students. All the recommendations made at the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully.
- Managers use the findings from teaching and learning observations and from their frequent appraisals of individual staff performance very effectively, to ensure quality and to provide a rich and vocationally focused staff and professional development programme. Tutors and other staff receive very good encouragement and financial support to undertake courses and other development activities.
- During teaching and learning observations, observers focus well on students' learning and progress; the resultant reports provide tutors with clear, thoughtful and constructive comment about strengths and areas for development in their practice. Tutors welcome observations and energetically embrace the recommendations from observers. Tutors also engage in a good range of informal peer observation with their colleagues, as well as professional discussion about artistic and pedagogic practice.
- Senior managers and curriculum staff make very good use of performance data to review the effectiveness of the curriculum and to ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable. Monitoring of students' progress, targets, practical skills development and destinations have all improved markedly since the previous inspection.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - Directors work exceptionally hard for the school and give generously of their time to attend shows, rehearsals, showcase and awards events in addition to the time they spend on governance matters.
  - The board currently has insufficient members to ensure a reasonable and even distribution of work, to challenge managers fully and effectively and to support the work of the Principal and senior leaders.
  - The current make-up of the board is insufficiently representative of the concerns and interests of the performance industry. Board members lack direct industry experience and are unable to help the school make further productive links with practitioners.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - The school provides a secure, safe and peaceful place for students to learn. Students feel safe and secure there. They have a very good understanding of ways to maintain their health, fitness and well-being now and when working professionally in the future.
  - Managers ensure that appropriate background and employment checks are carried out on all staff, directors and, where practicable, visiting practitioners. All staff recognise and vigorously promote the importance of safeguarding, health, safety and well-being. Training for staff and directors in safeguarding, recognising and countering extremism, and in vocationally relevant health and well-being matters is frequent and informative.
  - Through a comprehensive induction programme and weekly tutorial meetings, students receive very thorough training about maintaining safety online, about sexual health, drug and alcohol awareness, fire and road safety, British values and ways to recognise and avoid sexual exploitation and extremism. Students also benefit from the services of a full-time student welfare officer and a full-time student counsellor, a nutritionist and a health and fitness coordinator and injury coordinator.
  - Managers put in place appropriate measures to ensure the safety of students under 18 years of age, including inspection of boarding and lodging accommodation and background checks on landlords/landladies.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Innovative teaching and learning methods support strong practical skills development and understanding for students. Tutors utilise unseen or silent challenges, vocalised rhythms, imagery, anecdotes and other triggers that help students to understand and retain concepts. Tutors are adept at varying tempo to support progress, and at helping students explore complex vocal qualities, engage in dynamic deconstructing, marking out, and attainment of good movement and vocal work. Classes help students develop confidence to explore ranges and build sensitivities and nuances around characters.
- Tutors successfully encourage peer collaboration, which is a feature of many lessons. Students confidently engage in supportive peer observation and feedback on presentation and performance. As a result, they develop strong professional practice and good collaborative skills. Tutors are skilled at initiating and supporting students to engage in high-quality and productive open discussions.
- Students work exceptionally hard to meet the high standards and expectations of tutors. The levels of challenge and demand in classes enable students to extend their range, exceed their own expectations and produce much fine work, for example mastering vocal qualities and applying these to performance materials, resulting in strong, expressive singing.
- Tutors work skilfully to set up plentiful tasks where students can connect their technical and theory work to their practical skills to promote improvement. These tasks bring about real changes in students' vocal and dance performance standards, and enhance their abilities to work with a complex repertoire, for example of contemporary musical theatre songs and a challenging vocabulary of movement.
- Managers and tutors put in place strong and effective arrangements to support a wide range of learning styles for individual students. Tutors adapt and tailor tasks for individual learners; for example, they use vocal work adapted to core needs, and barre or floor work designed for small groups and individuals. Learning support staff share statements of individual students' support needs with teaching staff, and the educational needs coordinator provides tutors with a good range of practical strategies to support students in class.
- Accommodation and resources are excellent and help support the very high-quality teaching and learning. Students benefit from very good access to high-quality, up-to-date learning and vocational technologies, from access to master classes from visiting practitioners, and from other forms of external enrichment. However, the school library requires updating and refreshment to ensure it fully meets the needs of diploma students; the journal, book and reference stock require replenishment.
- Students and staff appreciate and make very full and imaginative use of well-appointed professional spaces and equipment to create engaging and challenging work that enriches students' vocational understanding and supports their preparation for working in industry-standard venues and spaces. Professional musicians and technical staff provide very high levels of support during performances, and further enrich students' experience of professional working conditions.
- Assessment of learning has been strengthened and revised to make each assessment more relevant to performing arts learners on either strand of the diploma. Students enjoy a rich range of assessment activity, including observation, film, discussion, scoring and banding. Tutors provide close analysis of assessment outcomes to give clear technical and artistic feedback that learners can understand clearly. However, a minority of tutors make insufficiently frequent and explicit reference to learners' targets during lessons, and a minority give insufficient homework to ensure that students reflect on and refine their practice between classes.
- Tutors provide clear, frequent and highly personalised feedback on practical skills development. Assessment of learning within classes is thorough, timely, reflective and supports students to apply changes to both technical and artistic work, rapidly improving technique, posture, vocal quality, movement vocabulary and overall confidence as performers. Tutors' reiteration and recap of technical training points, applied swiftly following accurate and individual pinpointed feedback, ensure that progress is rapid and sustained. In a very small minority of lessons tutors do not fully recap and explore what learning has taken place to ensure students can recall key learning points and engage in independent study or practice after the class.
- Tutors encourage, challenge and coach students throughout the course, ensuring that they make progress across the curriculum. Advice and guidance are well informed, highly specialised and industry-relevant. Students benefit from a coherent and strong support network to which all school staff contribute; such support enables almost all students to become the performers they aspire to be.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**are outstanding**

- Students' cooperative work skills are impressive and these prepare them very well for employment. Classes are characterised by students' excellent effort, determination, participation and enjoyment of learning. Students rise to the high expectations of staff and maintain excellent standards of professional behaviour, attendance and punctuality. All students demonstrate very good standards of conduct, behaviour and respect, especially in transitional moments in tasks, sustaining flow and concentration. Students are very proud of their school and appreciate the excellent levels of care and support they enjoy.
- Throughout the diploma course, students gain highly relevant practical, technical and artistic skills, with many making rapid and sustained progress from their starting points. Students benefit from an increasing range of very well-planned and suitably challenging public performances and classes with visiting directors, choreographers and performers.
- In addition to their very high levels of achievement on the main qualifications, students gain additional vocationally-specific instructor qualifications in Pilates and zumba. These have a positive impact on students' bodily and health awareness, and significantly increase their employment and economic prospects.
- Students respond very positively to instruction from tutors, rapidly applying technical adjustment; seeing, feeling and hearing positive change; and connecting theory to performance skills. They demonstrate very good awareness of how to avoid injury and how to establish and maintain regimes to keep fit and healthy, especially by means of the non-performative courses such as Pilates and body conditioning. Vocal health is given a high priority during classes and students are mature in their application of techniques to sustain vocal health.
- Students develop a thorough knowledge of industry expectations and requirements, including presentational conventions, awareness of contracts and choice of realistic career pathways. They understand how to manage their behaviour as they seek work, and understand fully how to present themselves at auditions and at agents' meetings. They also gain strong levels of confidence in dealing with potential employers and agents and know how to look for work and manage their affairs as self-employed artists.
- Staff provide good support for students' written and wider academic skills. Students are supported well if they decide to pursue their studies further through specialist degrees.
- In a minority of classes, students engage in little or no note-taking, so they do not consistently record rich and vital feedback from tutors, and do not mark up scores or scripts to support independent learning and self-rehearsal.

## **Outcomes for learners**

**are outstanding**

- Students develop an impressive array of industry-relevant dance and musical theatre skills, in addition to strong personal and inter-personal skills that make them strong performers and cooperative, hard-working company members.
- Pass rates for the diploma course have been running at 100% since before the previous inspection. Retention on both courses has been excellent for a number of years, with nearly all students completing their three-year programme.
- Managers and staff have worked successfully to increase rapidly contacts and relationships with professional agencies, casting directors and directors. As a result, a very high proportion of graduating students during 2014/15 gained agency representation before leaving the school.
- Through careful negotiation with the diploma awarding body, managers and staff make flexible arrangements that permit students to take up employment offers once they have completed their assessed work in the final term of year three.
- Arrangements to monitor progression into employment, and students' employment destinations, are very effective. Employment rates among graduates are high and improving. The vast majority of students gain sustained and fulfilling contracts in musical theatre, theatre or dance fields.

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Dance and Drama College
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	87
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Maggie Evans
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.thehammondschool.co.uk">www.thehammondschool.co.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
							53	27
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
<b>Number of learners aged 14–16</b>								
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency							

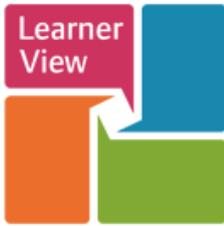
## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Richard Beynon, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christina Christou	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Collier	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the vice-principal/director of music, 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 students 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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