

# Liverpool Theatre School & College Limited

Dance and Drama School

## Inspection dates

13–14 January 2016

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

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

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- A very high proportion of learners pass their diploma and progress into employment in musical theatre because of the high-quality training they receive.
- Teachers ensure that learners achieve high standards through setting them challenging work in lessons and choosing demanding texts and music for performances.
- Learners develop their skills well through a carefully constructed curriculum that is tailored to meet individual learners' training needs.
- Learners look after themselves well as a result of the good training they receive on staying healthy and injury –prevention.
- Learners develop the attitudes and behaviours, including resilience, perseverance and confidence, which are required for a career in performance.
- Senior leaders manage their staff effectively by providing useful feedback to them on the quality of their lessons and through appraisals that focus closely on the extent to which teachers update their skills through professional development.
- The school meets the needs of local learners by recruiting a high proportion from Merseyside and Lancashire and by providing a foundation course that prepares learners well for progression into the diploma course.

### It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Senior leaders do not make sufficient use of external advisors to guide and review the school's strategy and curriculum.
- Learners receive too little guidance from industry professionals on all relevant aspects of the performance industry and do not receive sufficient preparation for employment in television and film.
- A small number of teachers do not provide sufficient, or precise enough, feedback to learners on the quality of their work and what they need to do to improve.
- Males are less likely to complete their course than females and the low number of males on the course restricts the range of material learners use.

# Full report

## Information about the provider

- Liverpool Theatre School and College Limited (LTS) is a private musical theatre school in Liverpool. The school recruits learners, aged 16 and above, from across the United Kingdom, with the majority coming from Merseyside and Lancashire. The school trains learners for employment, primarily in dance and musical theatre, through a three-year course leading to a diploma in professional musical theatre awarded by Trinity College. LTS is accredited by the Council for Dance Education and Training
- At the time of inspection, 46 learners were enrolled on the three-year diploma, of whom 41 were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award funding.

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

- Develop closer links with employers and other professionals in the industry to ensure that the Principal and senior leaders are supported in shaping the strategic direction of LTS, and the curriculum so that it better prepares learners for the highest quality employment.
- Review the curriculum, and teaching and learning, to ensure that they best meet the training needs of male learners and take steps to better promote the training and employment opportunities to potential male learners.
- Improve teachers' assessment of learners' work so that all teachers provide useful feedback to learners on the quality of their work and the steps they need to take to improve the quality of future work.
- Improve the training learners receive on acting and auditioning for television and film.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The Principal provides good strategic leadership that ensures that the school continues to meet the training needs of its learners and prepares them well for progression into employment in dance and musical theatre. The strategic plan for the school provides a clear vision and underpins improvements. For example, the Principal has secured a building for the school to move into in 2017, which will provide better performance and social spaces.
- The school retains strong links with the local community. A high proportion of learners are recruited from Merseyside and there are good opportunities for learners to perform, and gain employment, in local theatres. A foundation course is used well to provide the skills young learners need to progress into the diploma. As a result, nearly half the first-year diploma learners at the time of inspection had progressed from the foundation course.
- Senior leaders have carefully constructed a curriculum that ensures that a large majority of learners successfully achieve their diploma and progress into relevant employment. The school places a particularly strong emphasis on developing learners' dance skills, which is reflected in the high level of skills learners develop.
- Leaders have adapted the curriculum well following the previous inspection by incorporating more training that integrates the disciplines of dance, acting and singing. However, the ratio of female learners to males is too high, leading to restrictions on the range of material that is used with learners.
- Staff are well managed and receive useful feedback on the quality of their teaching. Appraisals are thorough and have an appropriate focus on the professional development staff need in order to stay in touch with current practice and trends.
- Staff arrange for learners to learn new skills from a range of visiting practitioners and make very good use of previous learners to provide talks that are highly valued by learners. However, learners do not have enough opportunities to learn about current practice in, for example, acting for television and film, or the use of digital media in auditioning.
- Leaders evaluate the content of the courses well to ensure that they are teaching the skills learners need to achieve their qualification. However, this evaluation does not take sufficient account of the current demands of the industry due to lack of involvement of current employers and industry practitioners.
- Learners appreciate the support they receive from staff and their opportunities to provide feedback to the Principal. The Principal has responded well by, for example, renewing equipment in the computer suite and allowing learners greater access to studios outside lesson time.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - The owner of the organisation is the Principal and there are no governance arrangements. Senior leaders recognise the value of introducing an advisory or governance board to provide oversight of leaders' work.
  - The school receives strong support from well-known celebrities but does not use influential professionals sufficiently to advise senior leaders on the latest trends and demands in the industry.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Managers carry out checks on all teachers and regular visiting speakers, and have appropriate procedures in place to assess any risks to learners. Managers have put in place effective arrangements to ensure that learners are safe. Staff assiduously monitor learners' injuries and ensure that learners rehearse and train safely. Staff receive regular briefings on their responsibilities for safeguarding but do not always complete training sufficiently frequently.
  - Leaders have taken appropriate steps to prevent learners from extremism and radicalisation. A senior manager has been trained in the 'Prevent' strategy and staff and learners have been given appropriate information.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Learners demonstrate excellent concentration and commitment in virtually all lessons; they work hard and learn how to cope with the long hours and physical demands of a career in performance. Learners maintain a constant focus on the learning objectives of each lesson, helped by teachers who refer to these repeatedly.
- Learners' practical performance work is of a high standard. Teachers and learners frequently choose ambitious material for performances that publicly tests the learners' self-confidence and professionalism.

Learners benefit from a culture in the school that encourages risk taking and learners recognise that staff are adept at helping them to reflect confidently on, and learn from, mistakes.

- Teachers evaluate their learners' skills and experience well and use this information to plan each stage of the course with activities that ensure that learners develop new skills at an appropriate time. For example, having learned a two-part harmony, learners moved on to adding a third part. Teachers develop learners' ability to take greater responsibility for creative decisions as they progress through the course.
- Teachers adjust their teaching and activities well to ensure that learners of all abilities are able to make good progress. Teachers of dance place an excellent emphasis on learners using their skills to express their art rather than being an end in themselves. As a result, learners' characterisation and fluency are strong. For example, when learning a short sequence from Swan Lake, male learners sensitively portray the growing impudence of cygnets as they mature into swans.
- The presence of a pianist in many dance lessons maintains the pace of the lesson well and helps learners build a close relationship with the music while they are dancing.
- Teachers demonstrate an excellent knowledge of their subject and craft. They use the skills they have developed as practitioners effectively to set high standards and to nurture confidence, persistence and resilience in their learners.
- Teachers' assessments of learners' work complies with the requirements of the awarding body and mostly provide useful feedback to learners. However, teachers allow a small number of learners to produce overly descriptive journals that lack evaluation. Occasionally, teachers do not correct misspellings of key vocational terms such as 'crescendo' and 'alignment'.
- Teachers provide useful verbal feedback to learners during their lessons. However, in a small number of cases, teachers make comments to the whole class on the improvements needed when some learners have mastered the skills and others would benefit from more targeted feedback. The quality of teachers' written feedback on major assignments varies too much; some is detailed and informative but too much is brief and does not give learners sufficient guidance on how to improve their work.

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

- Learners' attendance at lessons is very good. They arrive early and take great care to ensure that their personal appearance meets the rigorous standards set by staff. They take part in lessons with great enthusiasm and, as they approach the end of their course, they are prepared well for employment.
- Learners prepare well for their lessons. They make good use of the studios that are available to them outside lesson time. Most learners carry out thorough research when preparing characters but a small number do not always develop the depth of characterisation necessary.
- Learners develop a very good understanding of how to look after themselves and reduce the risk of injury. They respond positively to their teachers' and nutritionist's advice by eating well and not smoking. When injured, learners take appropriate steps to recover quickly and teachers ensure that they give learners meaningful work to complete if they are unable to participate fully in practical lessons.
- Staff skilfully create an ethos in the school that promotes respect between learners and ensures that they learn from, and support, each other. Learners mostly offer helpful and insightful comments when evaluating each other's work, although some teachers offer only limited opportunities during lessons for learners to practise giving feedback to their peers.
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on learners making carefully considered choices of how to present themselves at auditions. Learners understand well the competition inherent in the performance industry and work hard to gain the skills necessary to give themselves an advantage when applying for work.
- Learners mostly gain a good understanding of the opportunities for employment but do not have enough contact with industry professionals who can give them precise information about current employment opportunities and trends.

### **Outcomes for learners are good**

- Learners develop the skills necessary to progress into employment. They are particularly successful at developing skills in a good range of dance techniques and their singing is of a high standard.
- All the learners who completed in 2015 attended auditions towards the end of their course and a very high proportion moved quickly into employment, mainly into jobs in musical theatre. All but one secured representation by an agent. Once they have left LTS and started working in the entertainment industry, learners are mostly successful at staying in work, although relatively few progress into the more

prestigious shows. Each year a small number successfully progress into relevant degree programmes.

- For the past six years, all learners who complete the course have achieved their diploma. Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners who complete the course has been high. However, too many learners who were due to finish in 2016 and 2017 have already left the course. Over the last three years, a significantly higher proportion of males than females have left the course earlier than planned.

## 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	45
Principal/CEO	Miss M Ellis
Website address	<a href="http://www.liverpooltheatreschool.co.uk">www.liverpooltheatreschool.co.uk</a>

## 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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	28
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

Steven Tucker, lead inspector

Christopher Young

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the 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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