

Inspection dates 14–15 October 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

- Leaders and managers at all levels in the college have an unrelenting focus on improving students' chances of gaining employment in the performing arts industry.
- A very high proportion of students progress to appropriate jobs as a result of training, which focuses accurately on the skills required for employment.
- Highly skilled teachers, with current industry expertise, ensure that students enjoy their training and develop high levels of artistic and technical skills.
- Students produce work of a very high standard across the range of disciplines, which broadens their opportunities for employment.
- Teachers provide excellent feedback to students, which tells them clearly how to improve their work, and students respond well by persevering to raise the standard of their work.
- Visiting professionals provide an excellent programme of workshops and mock auditions, which contribute to students developing high levels of confidence about their ability to progress into the industry.
- Students develop their critical skills well. They use these effectively to evaluate their own, and each other's, work with great sensitivity and insight.
- Almost all students complete and achieve their qualification and a high proportion gain additional qualifications in teaching dance, which enhance their opportunities for employment.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Performers College is an independent further education college for performing arts based in Essex. The college is owned and governed by a small group of directors. It recruits students from across the United Kingdom, as well as a small number from overseas. The college offers three-year diploma courses in dance and musical theatre validated by Trinity College, London, and a one-year pre-vocational course accredited by the college.
- At the time of inspection, 196 students were enrolled at the college, of whom 75 were in receipt of government-funded Dance and Drama awards.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should develop a comprehensive strategic plan, linked to the college's vision and values, which expresses the aims of the college, how these aims will be achieved while maintaining the high quality of provision and how leaders will monitor the implementation and success of future developments.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all teachers master a range of teaching strategies so that they plan and deliver lessons containing activities that engage all students, including those who are injured.
- Teachers should encourage all students to take more detailed notes in lessons in order to record feedback and be able to reflect on the points being made in the lesson.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is outstanding

- Leaders and managers ensure that the training they provide for students prepares the students thoroughly for progression into employment in a wide range of jobs in the performance industry, and have established a comprehensive network of employers who value the skills of former students. As a result, a very high proportion of students progress into relevant employment.
- Senior leaders employ highly skilled and experienced practitioners to teach students. Most teachers work in the performance industry alongside their teaching commitments, with many securing prestigious performance or production contracts. Leaders encourage this practice and use their teachers' experiences, along with information from excellent links with casting agents, producers, directors, choreographers and former students, to review the curriculum regularly so that students develop the skills that employers demand.
- Leaders and managers monitor the quality of teaching well and provide appropriate professional development. A small number of teachers lack sufficient insight into the breadth of teaching strategies that they might consider using to enhance the quality of their work.
- Leaders and managers evaluate the quality of provision thoroughly and self-critically. They take swift action to tackle the minor weaknesses that arise, and have tackled the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report effectively. Leaders act upon feedback from students and former students well. Senior managers meet with students regularly and keep them informed of changes they make to provision following these meetings.
- Senior leaders have an ambitious vision which has led to many improvements in the college. They have, for example, improved the resources available to students successfully and these are now excellent; they include high-quality studios and a gymnasium for fitness and physical conditioning. The college's strategic plan does not set out clearly enough how the college's aims will be achieved and their success monitored. The plan identifies further proposed developments but does not sufficiently reflect the complexity and risks of a small number of these proposals.
- Managers monitor the progression of students into employment extremely well and take effective actions to increase the proportion of students who secure high-quality and continued employment. Managers ensure students are very well prepared for finding work. For example, all students in their final year take part in a weekly audition, usually with an external casting director or producer, and perform in commercial productions.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Although there are no formal governance arrangements, the non-executive directors take an active role in supporting the senior leaders and monitoring the quality of provision. The directors have all been employed in the performing arts industry and use their experience and insight well to maintain the college's strong focus on the skills students need for employment.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Staff have a very good understanding of individual students' physical limitations and potential, and take effective actions to minimise the risk of injury. Students receive a thorough induction into using equipment and resources in the gymnasium and studios and use them very safely.
 - Senior leaders ensure that all staff have appropriate pre-employment checks and are trained frequently on their responsibilities for safeguarding their students. This training now includes an appropriate introduction to the college's duty to prevent radicalisation and extremism. A small group of staff have dedicated responsibilities for safeguarding in the college; they maintain a very close oversight of students' safety and manage any incidents sensitively and quickly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is outstanding

- Teachers use their industry experience and expertise well to plan and deliver sessions that are highly appropriate to the students' level and ability. Teachers use their lesson plans well to note the skills that need further development in the next lesson and remind students frequently of the progress they have made from one lesson to the next. As a result, students make excellent progress in lessons and over time.
- Students achieve very high standards of work as a result of the challenges they are set by teachers. Teachers gain an understanding of their students' abilities and potential quickly, as a result of a thorough

assessment of students' skills when they start the course and through frequent reviews of their progress. Teachers use this information well to set a range of challenging activities that are appropriate to the abilities of different students. Teachers and support staff are particularly adept at providing additional guidance and support for students requiring extra help with their studies.

- All students undergo a comprehensive physical assessment, including an evaluation of their vocal capabilities. They are set appropriate strengthening and conditioning exercises as part of an excellent programme of injury prevention. Students receive excellent support from the college's own team of physiotherapists and other specialists in pilates and sports massage, who provide treatment and ad-hoc advice. Staff analyse trends in injuries well and use this information to influence activities. For example, staff noted an increase in incidents of shin pain in a group of students. On further analysis this was attributed to students rehearsing in footwear suitable for performance but not rehearsals. Students changed to rehearsing in trainers and the incidents of shin pain reduced.
- The techniques and skills taught are highly relevant to the students' aspirations, although a small number of teachers do not ensure all students make consistently rapid progress, particularly those who are not taking part in practical activities due to injury.
- Teachers have an excellent understanding of current industry expectations and use this knowledge extremely well to prepare students thoroughly for employment. For example, a teacher who was also a practising musical director, made good use of her experience of the distractions and challenges that face performers during auditions to help students develop their confidence and focus during auditions.
- Teachers' assessment of students' work is thorough and detailed. Their feedback gives students a very clear understanding of what they need to do in order to reach the standards expected of a professional performer. Students develop the skills of critical analysis well and use these to assess each other's work perceptively. They talk positively about the value of peer assessment, acknowledging that it opened their minds to other possibilities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

- Students develop the skills they need to prepare them for a career. They learn how to live independently, to manage their health and well-being, and to develop the resilience and resourcefulness required to be successful performers. A well-trained group of staff monitor the welfare and safety of students closely, and take appropriate actions to support those in need of guidance or support.
- Students develop excellent communication skills, both written and verbal, through the frequent discussions, debates, critical analyses and essays they are set. Students use their daily journals well to reflect on their progress; they are motivated partly in this by members of staff who demonstrate how they use reflective journals when rehearsing for their own performances. However, a small number of students do not always take notes in lessons when it would benefit them to do so.
- Students attend lessons regularly and punctually. Students find the long days challenging but recognise that these are teaching them how to cope with the long days and demanding schedules that will be expected of them when employed.
- Students use the technical language they will need when employed confidently. Students in a choreography lesson evaluated the choreographic devices used by their peers eloquently; and in a ballet lesson, students understood and followed unhesitatingly their teacher's instructions, which included complex technical references.
- Students understand the importance of remaining fit and healthy, and of having a sensible diet. They are very aware of their own physical limitations and develop a keen awareness of which activities would exacerbate an injury. They use the specialist therapists well to improve their knowledge of their own bodies and how best to look after them, but do not all receive sufficient guidance on how best to set their personal physical development targets in the gymnasium.
- Students demonstrate high levels of professionalism and take immense pride in their own work and the work of the ensembles to which they belong. They become increasingly confident and self-assured and are able to give and take honest, constructive criticism with great sensitivity. Teachers help them to develop a good understanding of the competitiveness in the performance industry and help students to develop the resilience they need to cope with this. In acting, students responded maturely to having to vote for which of their peers they would employ following a simulated audition.

Outcomes for learners

are outstanding

- Over many years, a very high proportion of students have completed and achieved their diplomas with marks that are well above the threshold for achievement set by the awarding body.
- A high proportion of students improve their opportunities for employment by studying an additional qualification in teaching dance. All the students who study this qualification successfully achieve it.
- Students progress well into relevant employment. Nearly all students gain employment in dance or musical theatre soon after completing their course, with an increasing number securing long term or continual employment. A small but increasing number progress to a relevant one-year top-up degree course successfully.
- Students from all ethnic backgrounds succeed equally well and progress into employment. Disabled students and those with learning difficulties are as successful as their peers.

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	196
Principal/CEO	Tracey Lee
Website address	www.performerscollege.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+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	21	54
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
	Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age							
	Number of traineeships							
Number of learners aged 14–16	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
	N/A							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Steven Tucker, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sylvia Farrier	Ofsted Inspector
Judy Lye-Forster	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the academic registrar/student support coordinator 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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