

# Northern Ballet School

Dance and drama school



## Inspection dates

7–8 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

Outstanding

## Summary of key findings

### This is an outstanding provider

- Leaders, managers and staff actively promote a very strong culture of professionalism and commitment; as a result, students are dedicated, highly motivated and make excellent progress.
- Almost all students successfully achieve their diploma and many gain valuable additional qualifications as part of their course.
- Managers and staff deliver a high-quality curriculum through outstanding teaching, learning and assessment, which enables students to acquire a broad range of knowledge, skills and experience of performing arts.
- The staff team has a very good blend of highly relevant first-hand performance and vocational experience, as well as excellent teaching skills.
- Staff benefit from outstanding opportunities to maintain and develop their skills, through attending relevant training, team-teaching initiatives and from continuing to work professionally in the performing arts industry.
- The school maintains very strong and beneficial links with the industry, calling on a range of professionals who contribute to the work of the advisory panel, utilising the skills of current practitioners as teachers, and providing realistic work experience opportunities for students.
- At the end of their course, almost all students successfully progress into high-quality sustained employment in the performing arts industry.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Northern Ballet School is a private performing arts institution that prepares students for employment in the performing arts industry in specialist areas including classical dance, jazz theatre dance and musical theatre. On completion of their three-year course, students receive a level 6 diploma in professional dance, awarded by Trinity College, London.
- The school is based at the Dancehouse in Manchester and enrolls students from across the country and from abroad. At the time of the inspection there were 101 students at the school, of which 62 were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) funding from the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

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

- Managers should review methods of assessing students' work and providing them with feedback, sharing examples of best practice, to ensure all teachers consistently provide detailed feedback on written assignments. They should also consider creating more opportunities for students to reflect on, review and record their own progress.
- Managers should increase the opportunities for teachers to promote British Values to students, to raise their awareness of risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and to ensure they receive sufficient understanding of how to stay safe online.
- Managers should share best practice in how to involve injured students in practical lessons, so they gain maximum benefit when unable to take part in the physical elements of a lesson.
- As part of the longer-term succession planning process, leaders should consider introducing a governance structure, possibly extending the terms of reference of the current advisory board, to support the Principal and senior management team more closely, and to hold the senior team to account for maintaining the high quality of provision and financial stability of the school.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leaders, managers and teachers fully achieve the school's vision, producing graduates who achieve their full artistic, intellectual and technical potential. Staff deliver a curriculum that fully addresses the needs and interests of the learners, the awarding body and the industry, and generates very high rates of student progression to relevant and high-quality employment.
- Staff place a very strong emphasis on promoting a culture of professionalism, support and respect among students, who respond positively and thrive on the creativity and motivation created by such an approach.
- Quality assurance procedures are thorough and effective. Managers have successfully maintained the very high standards since the last inspection.
- Managers have highly effective systems in place to monitor the performance of staff. In particular, managers use the feedback and perceptions from students to help identify staff development priorities and to inform timetabling.
- Staff regularly benefit from outstanding opportunities to maintain and develop their skills and expertise. Leaders actively seek involvement from working professionals. They also enable teachers with more substantial teaching loads to undertake regular work in the performing arts industry. Staff have many other valuable developmental opportunities, including through the acquisition of relevant qualifications and teaching awards.
- Managers monitor and review thoroughly the progress and destinations of different groups of learners, to ensure equality of opportunity for all. Teachers also make good use of the international nature of the student cohort to raise students' awareness of, and to celebrate, cultural diversity.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - The school does not currently have a board of governors; the Principal and leadership team have access to an informal advisory panel which incorporates a cross-section of knowledgeable and experienced professionals who provide beneficial advice. This group does not, however, have a formal constitution.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Suitable security measures are in place in the school, which help ensure that students and staff feel safe around the building. Managers carry out pre-employment checks on all staff. Students receive comprehensive guidance on safe working practices, particularly how to prepare for hard physical dance training through thorough warm-ups, good nutrition and suitable hydration. The school provides useful information to parents on local student accommodation for those who will be living away from home while studying.
  - Managers have not been sufficiently proactive in promoting British Values to students, or in developing their approach to raising students' awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Staff establish very high expectations about the work ethic and level of engagement that they expect from students, who respond very well to this approach. The high-quality learning environment and the positive and insightful rapport between teachers and students allows for professional and constructive dialogue. Students work very hard in lessons and make excellent progress.
- Staff skilfully assess students' technical ability at the beginning of the course. They have thorough systems in place to ensure that each student can receive the appropriate level of challenge and encouragement to enable them to make very good progress relative to their starting points.
- Students receive excellent, detailed verbal feedback from teachers in lessons and rehearsals, which helps them to improve and develop. The quality of feedback on written work is less consistent; teachers give much outstanding, detailed and informative guidance, but a small minority of staff do not provide enough clarity on how students might make best progress.
- The staff team is highly experienced, with an excellent blend of performance expertise and teaching skills. Staff use these skills well to design and deliver a suitably challenging range of practical and theoretical activities which enable students to learn, and to make outstanding progress. The design of

the curriculum enables students to develop very high skills in those areas where they have greatest ability, as well as supporting them to develop valuable knowledge and skills in other areas where they might have less prior experience. This helps students develop as all-round performers, with a good cross-section of skills that will increase their chances of gaining high-quality employment.

- Where students are unable to participate in practical lessons owing to injury, teachers have highly effective protocols in place to protect and support the students. Staff ensure students continue to learn, for example by asking them to peer-review the work of others. However, teachers are not all equally skilled at supporting this process and in a small number of cases students gain only limited value from these lessons.
- Parents have good opportunities to see how well their children's skills are developing though attending regular performances and showcases. However, the school's systems for formal reporting to parents on progress are underdeveloped.
- Staff utilise the international nature of the student population to help them appreciate, promote and celebrate diversity across the school.

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

- Staff set very high expectations regarding punctuality, attendance, behaviour and tolerance of others. Students respond very positively to this, and all aspects of behaviour around the school, and attitudes to learning, are exemplary.
- Given the physical nature of dance, staff place a very strong emphasis on the importance of healthy living, good diet and nutrition, hydration and sleep. At an early stage of their course, students also learn about injury prevention and management. Where necessary, staff refer students to local medical practitioners, such as physiotherapists and podiatrists. This helps maximise their chances of staying fit during their course.
- Staff support those students whose first language is not English, and provide suitable opportunities for them to develop their verbal and written language skills.
- Students benefit from frequent instruction from current theatre practitioners and performers and regularly take part in public performances. In addition, they work on commercial projects, for example in local theatres, television and collaborative projects with university performing arts students.
- As well as gaining their main diploma, many students successfully achieve additional qualifications, often at a high level, for example in a variety of dance techniques and also in teaching dance. These form an invaluable addition to students' qualifications and help add to their longer-term employment prospects.
- During inspection, students spoke very positively about the support and encouragement they received from staff and managers on all aspects of their study, and about how the school fully meets their expectations.
- Students receive comprehensive careers advice and guidance, partly from their teachers who have a wealth of first-hand experience of the industry, and partly through ongoing support and guidance from senior staff at the school. Staff also provide invaluable support to students to prepare for and take part in auditions. In their third and final year, staff actively encourage students to attend regular auditions. This level of support plays a major part in ensuring that a high proportion of students secure high-quality and sustained employment on completion of their course.
- While staff provide much clear and valuable guidance to students about general safety and welfare, students receive comparatively limited information and guidance on how to stay safe online.

### **Outcomes for learners are outstanding**

- Students make excellent progress relative to their levels of skill on entry to the programme. They quickly develop a very strong work ethic, and actively strive to achieve their ambitious aspirations. Students develop very high levels of practical expertise, knowledge of the industry and the job-search skills they require to progress successfully into work.
- The proportion of students who have successfully completed their course has remained consistently high over many years, and all those students who completed the diploma course have gained the qualification. Most students gain high-quality and sustained employment in the theatre or related industries.
- Managers have thoughtfully designed the curriculum in the final term of the third year to provide the flexibility for students to move into employment as soon as they receive an offer of work.

- Managers carefully monitor the progression of students into employment, and use the information effectively to help all students succeed. Students who receive additional support, and those in receipt of a maintenance allowance, gain employment as successfully as all other students.

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Dance and drama school
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	100
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Patricia McDonald
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.northernballetschool.co.uk">www.northernballetschool.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)							39	23
	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Peter Nelson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gail Graves

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the deputy 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 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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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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