

# SLP College Leeds

Dance and drama college



## Inspection dates

13–14 April 2016

## 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 have successfully raised the quality of provision by addressing the areas for development identified at the last inspection and strengthening the overall quality of provision across the college.
- Managers and teachers work well together to deliver a very high-quality, challenging and stimulating training programme that develops students' skills across all performance disciplines to a consistently high standard, providing students with the range and breadth of expertise required by employers.
- Staff foster a strong ethos across the college, which develops mutual respect, professionalism, high standards and expectations from students, who respond with enthusiasm and commitment to their training.
- The high standard of accommodation and resources across the college, and the significant breadth of staff expertise, help reinforce the very high quality of provision.
- A high proportion of students successfully progress into sustained employment.

## **Full report**

### **Information about the provider**

- SLP College Leeds is a private performing arts college located in Garforth, near Leeds, that trains students in preparation for work in the performing arts industry. The college runs its own one-year foundation course and also a three-year training course in dance and musical theatre. On successful completion of the three-year course, students achieve a level 6 national diploma awarded by Trinity College, London.
- At the time of inspection there were a total of 91 students on the course, of whom 74 were in receipt of specialist dance and drama award (DaDA) funding from the Education Funding Agency.

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

- Fully establish the new employer advisory panel, ensuring members have the breadth of skills and experience to provide suitable support to senior leaders; in particular to help shape the college's longer-term succession plan and strategic priorities, and to continue strengthening links with industry.
- Strengthen the consistency and quality of appraisals and lesson observations so that managers can provide the best direction and support to staff.
- Sustain the focus on strategies to minimise student drop-out, following recent significant improvements in this area.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Senior leaders have established an ambitious vision for the college, encouraging students to develop as positive, versatile, communicative performers, supporting them to reach their full potential and to progress into successful careers in dance and musical theatre. Leaders are particularly keen to ensure they can continue to provide high-quality professional training in the north of England, as so many of the specialist colleges tend to be based in, and around, London.
- Managers have designed the curriculum very well to ensure it meets the developmental needs of the students, as well as providing for the range and breadth of expertise required by employers. Leaders and heads of department plan very carefully together, producing excellent opportunities for students to develop their technique in lessons, and to improve their wider skills, through regular public performances. Students produce an excellent standard of performance work, with a particularly broad and balanced range of skills across the disciplines of voice, acting, singing and dance.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement processes are highly effective. Leaders have a firm grasp of the strengths and areas for development within the college. They have successfully and comprehensively addressed virtually all the areas for development identified at the last inspection, while continuing to maintain and improve the high quality of provision. For example, since the last inspection, leaders and managers have significantly improved retention rates, raised the quality and standard of speech and singing, enhanced students' ability to review and critique each other's work, and ensured that teachers make good use of assessment to set targets and monitor students' progress.
- Managers have suitable processes in place to monitor the performance of individual members of staff and assure the quality of their teaching. They make particularly good use of ongoing professional dialogue with teachers, and generally make effective use of lesson observations and appraisals to identify and promote suitable opportunities for appropriate development and training of staff. In a small minority of lesson observations and appraisals the records do not contain sufficient detail.
- Teachers are well qualified, highly experienced and possess a rich insight into the performing arts industry. The quality of accommodation and resources around the college is excellent. All studios are well appointed and clean. Staff maintain the building to the highest standards; they ensure there is a wide variety of stimulating displays, promoting the values of the college, celebrating current and previous students' achievements and helping to foster a real excitement towards performance and theatre.
- Managers have considered carefully how they can reflect and promote British values as a core component of the college values. All staff create suitable opportunities to raise students' awareness of themes including British values, equality and diversity, as well as making students aware of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

### The governance of the provider

- Leaders are at the very early stages of setting up a small advisory panel. Initial planning indicates that the terms of reference for this group will be to take on a simple governance role for the college, to help promote and strengthen the college's links with industry and employers, and to consider the longer-term succession planning for the college.

### The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Students feel safe around the college. All students and staff receive suitable briefing as part of their induction, and ongoing training to ensure they are fully briefed on safeguarding procedures.
- Managers carry out suitable pre-employment checks on all new staff and follow safer recruitment practices. Leaders also maintain strong links with the local community police, who work with students to brief them on strategies to stay safe. Students also receive suitable briefing on diet and nutrition, as well as training on injury prevention and management.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teachers provide high-quality, challenging and stimulating training across all performance disciplines. As a result students are highly motivated and engaged in lessons and develop very well, both technically and artistically; they really enjoy their training and make excellent progress. For example, in a jazz dance class the teaching of a complex and demanding sequence helped engage and motivate students, while developing their stamina, and improving their technique and muscle memory.
- Teachers plan the curriculum very carefully to provide suitably sequential and developmental activities

that help build students' skills and confidence. Students are aware of the targets that staff have set for them; they are able to articulate the progress they are making and respond promptly and enthusiastically to direction and correction. For example, in a singing class, teachers used demonstration, experimentation and discussion well to develop a firm technical understanding among the students of how to make the transition from chest voice to head voice, thereby maintaining a rich sound, and helping to develop their full vocal range.

- Teachers use assessment and feedback very well to set suitably challenging targets for students, to provide detailed guidance on their development, to inform them of the progress they are making, and to advise them on areas for improvement. As a result, students are clear about how well they are progressing, and know what areas to focus on to improve further.
- Teachers have high expectations of all students within a safe and respectful environment. Students feel confident to ask questions and are not afraid to give and receive constructively critical feedback in front of their peers.
- Practical work is suitably challenging and complex, both in style and pace, in line with industry standards and expectations. For example, in an audition preparation lesson, students were taught a highly complex dance routine specially choreographed to challenge them both physically and mentally – helping to prepare them well for the demands of the industry.
- Staff make particularly good use of their current industry links to help prepare students for finding and securing work. For example, every Friday a visiting theatre professional such as a performer, director or theatrical agent, spends time with the second and third year students, sharing their knowledge and perspectives of the industry, and carrying out suitable tasks with the students, such as mock auditions, to help develop their knowledge further.
- Teachers use a good range of suitable strategies to help students maximise their potential, relative to their expertise on entry. For example, teachers support and coach students who make slower progress; also those more advanced students with particularly well-developed technique are invited to attend additional classes to challenge them further.

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

- Staff successfully create a strong community ethos and stimulating learning environment around the college. Students respond well; they are very well disciplined, confident, highly committed, articulate and enthusiastic towards their training.
- Staff encourage students to work hard and constantly provide suitable individual and group support. Students indicate that they feel able to discuss any problems with appropriate members of staff, and enjoy the friendly atmosphere across the college. They recognise that the mutual respect between students and staff, as well as strong support and friendship across different year groups, are a great asset within the college.
- The induction process for students is thorough, and helps them settle well and feel accepted into the community. As part of their induction, students receive a detailed and informative student handbook that contains a broad range of relevant information, both about the course and also about topics such as safeguarding and student welfare.
- Students demonstrate a professional approach to their training. Their attendance and punctuality are very good. They present themselves well for lessons; they always warm up for practical sessions and take suitably detailed and informative notes, which help to consolidate and enhance their learning.
- Staff promote students' insights into health and safety well, both in the college and in the local community. They also promote students' awareness of healthy eating, fitness, emotional well-being, and injury prevention and management.
- In the event of a student sustaining an injury, staff provide very good support and ensure that they can continue benefiting from the course, even if they are temporarily unable to train. Students also have ready access to additional treatment such as physiotherapy. Students maintain individual fitness plans which enhance their development and help prepare them well for the industry.
- Students take pride in their work, becoming increasingly self-assured and confident. Expectations around literacy are high and students' written work is of a very good standard, well presented and thoroughly researched where necessary. This helps prepare them well for the industry and enhances their employability.
- Students have the opportunity to take additional awards, for example in ballet, tap and modern dance. They are also able to acquire qualifications in health and safety, first aid, and dance teaching. These

qualifications are particularly valuable for those students who choose to pursue a teaching career in performing arts.

- Students receive a thorough insight into the performing arts industry, both from their highly experienced teachers and also from regular activities with visiting professionals. Staff ensure students generate an in-depth appreciation of the requirements and expectations of the industry; they provide them with a portfolio of skills, and expertise to help maximise their chances of successfully gaining high-quality and long-term employment.

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

- Staff select students for this course who are able to demonstrate aptitude, resilience, a keen insight into the performing arts industry and a strong desire to work as a professional performer. On entry, students have a wide range of prior experience and training; teachers are adept at managing this and place students in appropriate groups to enable them to make very good progress, irrespective of their prior skill level.
- A significant number of students, particularly in years 1 and 2, show strong natural ability and are developing a broad range of practical performance skills to a high level. For example, in a second year performance of the musical *Parade*, students demonstrated a confident and assured ensemble approach to performance, with examples of very strong individual characterisation, powerful solo and group singing and particularly confident and technically adept dance routines. This performance also helped demonstrate the exacting professional standards that staff require of all students throughout their training. Students respond very well to this challenge, and with the positive support and encouragement of the teachers they make excellent progress.
- Historically the number of students retained on the course has been low, due to a variety of reasons including financial pressures, injury and personal issues. Managers have worked hard to implement strategies to reduce significantly the drop-out rate from the course. In the most recent academic year the rate of students retained on programme has improved significantly and is now high. Virtually all those students who complete the course successfully achieve the Trinity diploma.
- On completion of their training, many students successfully gain representation from a theatrical agent, and secure high-quality professional performance work, for example on cruise ships, with international entertainment companies in the West End and with regional touring theatre productions. In addition, a small proportion of students progress on to higher education or teaching careers.

## 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>	99
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Sandra Reid
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.slpcollege.co.uk">www.slpcollege.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)							30	61
	<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
Fiona Cave	Ofsted Inspector
Judy Lye-Forster	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the vice-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, parents 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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