

Stella Mann College

Dance and drama school

Inspection dates

20–21 June 2019

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

- Senior leaders have established a respectful and tolerant environment in which students confidently make good progress.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have successfully improved the quality of the provision.
- Students effectively develop the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to work successfully in the performing arts industry.
- Students benefit from working with a wide range of industry specialists, guest teachers and advisers who bring and share a wealth of experience.
- Students gain a good understanding of the performing arts industry they aspire to work in. They understand the need to be self-disciplined and to work hard.
- Students are proud to attend Stella Mann College and their attendance and punctuality are excellent.
- The proportion of students who successfully secure employment in the performing arts industry when they graduate, or shortly after graduation, is high.
- Students work hard in lessons and make good progress. All students who remain to the end of the programme achieve their diploma.
- Students have a good understanding of the requirement to remain fit and healthy. They understand the impact that diet and exercise can have on their careers.
- There remains some variability in the quality of teaching. The skills of some teachers are underdeveloped.
- Teachers do not always use specific enough technical detail when commenting on students' written work.
- The curriculum is insufficiently broad to meet the evolving opportunities in the industry or to provide enough work experience.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Stella Mann College is a private college that trains students for employment in the musical theatre and dance industries. The college runs higher national certificate and diploma programmes in dance and musical theatre in partnership with Bedford College, and also runs a level 6 diploma in professional dance and professional musical theatre awarded by Trinity College. The college offers a range of higher education courses in partnership with Bedford College and the University of Northampton. The inspection focused on the students taking the Trinity College diploma course who were in receipt of dance and drama awards (DaDA) funding.
- The college is based in Bedford and attracts students from across the country and Europe. Currently, 30 students are enrolled on the diploma course, of whom 25 are in receipt of DaDA awards. The college is accredited by the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning, leaders should help teachers to develop their skills so that students participate fully in learning in every class.
- Teachers should provide more detailed technical feedback to students on their written work so that they know how to improve in the future.
- Leaders should expand the curriculum to increase the range of industry-specific skills students can develop, including, for example, aerial work and acrobatics.
- Leaders should find ways of increasing the opportunities students have to undertake work experience through, for example, being a member of a student touring company.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders have a clear mission for the work of the college. They seek to enable all students to gain the knowledge, expertise and confidence needed to achieve a successful career in the performing arts industry. Leaders are ambitious for their students and have established a respectful and tolerant environment in which students confidently make progress.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have shown tenacity and determination and have successfully improved the quality of the provision. Senior leaders know their provision well. They accurately evaluate performance and put in place appropriate actions to improve any weaknesses identified. They precisely monitor the effectiveness of the actions they have put in place and can identify the improvements made as a result.
- Senior leaders manage finances and resources to maximise students' learning opportunities. As a result, students benefit from working in fully equipped, high-quality, light and airy studio spaces. A newly refurbished gym and fitness studio provides an excellent space for students to improve their fitness, increase their strength and rehabilitate fully following injury.
- Staff are highly qualified and have extensive experience of working in the performing arts industry. Many members of staff are still working in the industry and so combine their teaching career with their other professional practitioner commitments. As a result, students benefit from staff who draw on their experiences to inform their teaching. Staff enjoy working at the college and feel well supported. Consequently, very few staff leave, and students benefit from this continuity.
- Leaders use the observation and monitoring of teaching and learning effectively to inform staff training and development. Staff benefit from a range of development opportunities, as a group and individually. Staff are encouraged to develop their teaching practice and reflect on their teaching to maintain high standards. They receive accurate individualised feedback on their teaching that supports their continued development.
- Leaders evaluate the work of staff effectively and help them plan actions to improve their teaching where necessary. Managers have accurately identified that a few teachers do not have good enough teaching skills to get the best out of students and stretch them in their learning.
- Leaders and members of staff have established good relationships with a wide range of industry specialists, guest teachers and advisers. Students gain invaluable experience from working with different external professionals every week. They gain knowledge and understanding of current industry expectations and standards. Students receive effective careers advice and guidance and are well prepared for the world of work. They are aware of the competitiveness of the industry and the high demands it makes on young professionals.
- Leaders have designed the learning programme to meet the requirements of the Trinity College diploma and to help most students gain the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to work in the performing arts industry. However, they have not yet achieved the full breadth of curriculum that would help students to take the increasing number of

new opportunities in the industry, for example for performers with skills in areas such as acrobatics or aerial work.

The governance of the provider

- No formal governance arrangements exist for the college, but senior leaders have recently started a small advisory group of external specialists. These advisers draw on their expertise from education, business and the performing arts industry, although the group's membership does not yet cover all relevant areas of expertise.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The two designated safeguarding officers and all staff are trained in safeguarding to an appropriate level for their level of responsibility. Staff are knowledgeable about the support available to them and know how to access it if they have any concerns about a student.
- Students feel safe at college and know how to keep themselves and their peers safe, including online. They know whom to speak to if they have any concerns. Students have a good awareness about the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Students know how to work safely in practical classes and how to avoid injury by undertaking appropriate warm-up and cool-down sequences.
- Staff recruitment processes are effective, with all staff being vetted before starting work at the college. Guest teachers and industry professionals are appropriately supervised when working with the students.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Students work hard in lessons and make good progress over time. They present themselves professionally, and are attentive and respond positively to whole-class and individual corrections in practical lessons. They make the required technical adjustments to gain and refine the technique they require to work in the performing arts industry. For example, in a jazz dance class, the teacher and students dissected a fouetté turn in attitude en l'air in great detail to understand how they could achieve the sharp and explosive dynamic required by the choreographer.
- Most teachers use their experience, skills and qualifications well. They use their vast industry experience to enthuse students and help them relate what they are learning to the expectations in professional performance. Students value what they can learn from the experiences that their teachers share.
- Teachers accurately assess students' initial skills at the beginning of their course and for each subject they are studying. They use this information well to individualise expectations and learning activities for students.
- Most teachers give students timely and detailed oral feedback in practical lessons and assessment activities. Students use this feedback to improve their work. As a result, most students can relate their theoretical and technical knowledge to the exercise or

performance they are exploring. Many students become independent and can self-correct their posture and technique.

- Guest teachers plan and conduct classes and choreographic projects that provide students with often challenging performance activities. Students gain a valuable insight into the world of work by undergoing a rigorous selection process to be part of these dance pieces. Masterclasses demand much of students and help them develop a good understanding of the expectations of the industry they aspire to work in. For example, in a commercial dance class, students polished sections of the choreography in great detail in order to meet the exacting and precise requirements of the guest choreographer.
- Students produce written work of a good standard. Students submit well-researched written work such as essays. They are reflective in their technical logs and accurately identify the techniques they need to practise and improve.
- A few teachers do not provide students with sufficiently detailed technical information and feedback on their written work. Their imprecise comments do not help students to improve their work or challenge those who are most able. Teachers accurately identify English spelling and grammar mistakes, but students are not given strategies for self-correction in the future.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students are proud to attend Stella Mann College and have a distinct sense of identity. They are caring, supportive and encouraging to their peers in and out of lessons. Students are very positive about their experience at college and can identify how the provision is improving.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are excellent. Students arrive to lessons dressed appropriately for their activities and are ready to learn. In all lessons, they display good professional practice, are on task and work hard.
- Students gain a good understanding of the performing arts industry they aspire to work in. They develop good personal, social and employability skills. They fully understand the importance of good timekeeping, working as part of a team, working with guest teachers, choreographers and agents, and managing their finances. Students understand what the industry requires and what they need to do to succeed.
- Students are fully prepared for their next steps. They benefit from simulated internal procedures involving the audition process that are fundamental to their learning. They understand and appreciate the importance of effective preparation for auditions and the impact that success and failure can have on them personally. They learn to be resilient and to remain focused despite disappointments. They quickly learn from each experience and apply that learning to the next opportunity.
- Students fully understand the importance of remaining fit and healthy and how diet and exercise can affect their health and well-being. They have good access to a well-equipped gym, and many use it before and after class to improve their fitness and strength.
- Students benefit from good support for their personal welfare. They have good access to staff if they have any concerns or difficulties. They can swiftly access physiotherapy should they sustain an injury. Students are well supported to recover from injury.

- Students develop good awareness of aspects of equality and diversity relevant to the industry. For example, equality of opportunity is highlighted by teachers when reflecting some of the gender-neutral casting initiatives current in the industry. Teachers expand students' awareness of different cultures in the choice of shows such as 'A Bronx Tale', which explores the impact that Italian immigration has had on the culture of the USA.
- Students respect each other and recognise the contribution that everyone makes in class or during performance. They work cooperatively and freely offer each other insightful peer support. They work together effectively to practise and refine routines. They recognise the importance of working as a team when performing an ensemble piece where no one performer should draw the eye of the audience.
- Students understand personal safety and know what they should do if they are concerned about any of their peers. Students know how to keep themselves safe online. They gain a good insight into the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism during their induction and take part in a session on British values. They learn about all aspects of health and safety relevant to their training. However, they do not have enough opportunities, throughout their training, to revisit these topics or explore them in more depth.
- Students have limited opportunities to undertake external work experience to expand their understanding of the world of work, for example by performing as part of a touring company. However, students do benefit from opportunities to put on public performances several times a year. They do this internally and externally, for example in the summer at a large professional theatre venue.
- Students do not have enough enrichment activities to help them to develop additional skills that might enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Most students make good progress on the diploma course. Students develop effectively the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to work successfully in the performing arts industry. Most students produce practical and written work of a good standard.
- The proportion of students who remain on the diploma course to the end has risen and is now high. All students who complete the course achieve the diploma. Senior leaders have a good understanding of why some students left the course early in the past. Senior leaders have put in place support for students to mitigate this risk. As a result, the number of students leaving before completion has reduced significantly.
- The proportion of students who successfully secure employment in the performing arts industry when they graduate or within six months of graduation is high. Most students gain employment contracts with national and international companies, touring productions, or television and film work, in addition to a few who gain contracts in London's West End or on prestigious tours.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54611
Type of provider	Dance and drama school
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	30
Principal	Mary Breen
Telephone number	01234 213331
Website	www.stellamanncollege.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15
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 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the course leader, as nominee. 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, staff 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.

Inspection team

Judy Lye-Forster, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christopher Young	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector

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