

# Inspection of Stella Mann College

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 May 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Stella Mann College (SMC) is a private college that trains students for employment in the musical theatre and dance industries. The college is based in Bedford and attracts students from across the country.

SMC runs a level 6 diploma in professional dance and professional musical theatre, awarded by Trinity College. The course is three years in duration. There are 30 students studying the Trinity College level 6 diploma course who are in receipt of dance and drama awards (DaDA) funding. There are six students in Year 1, 12 students in Year 2 and 12 students in Year 3. There are approximately 11 students aged 16 to 18.

The college also offers a range of higher education courses in partnership with Bedford College and the University of Northampton; however, these courses are not in scope for inspection. The college has no students in receipt of high needs funding and no subcontracted provision.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Students enjoy college life, feeling proud to be a student at SMC. There is a calm, respectful and professional environment in all classes, as well as in communal areas.

Students appreciate the small group sizes which enable them to receive and learn from individualised feedback. In dance, students pick up routines quickly. Their performance skills are of a good standard. Students are confident to ask questions to clarify technical points.

The college provides good-quality studios which are light, airy and inspire students to work hard. Students' attendance is good and they arrive at lessons on time and ready to learn. They have a very positive attitude to their learning and work hard to improve. Students say that they feel like they are part of something special at SMC and that they are important and appreciated by everyone.

Students are safe, very aware of their physical health and aware of the importance of injury prevention. While fitness sessions are available, students do not have access to core strength classes, such as Pilates. Most dance classes commence with a warm-up, which prepares students' bodies for the work they will be doing. However, teachers do not pay the same attention to cool-down at the end of classes or the end of the day.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have created an effective curriculum that develops students' dance, singing and acting skills. Leaders know the background of their students and know what types of careers they are ambitious for. Through their training, students are ready for, and know how to apply successfully for, jobs in performing arts, including television and film.

Teachers develop students' skills and knowledge very effectively. Teachers continue to revisit the foundation technical skills, such as pirouettes and pliés. They give helpful points and clearly explain corrections. Students are very receptive to this guidance. As a result, students can perform more complex routines successfully. In ballet, students perform double pirouettes confidently after securing their core technique.

Teachers give excellent demonstrations of exercises and routines to students. They use questioning skilfully to check students' understanding of correct technique and posture. They encourage students to self-correct and discover solutions themselves through practical application and analysis. In contemporary partner classes, students could recall 'negative space'. They use this knowledge to choreograph a set of movements effectively.

Teachers do not always enforce the highest professional standards to prepare students for industry. While students are attentive to the feedback they receive from

their teachers, few make notes in class or during rehearsals. They have not assimilated the professional skill of making notes, for example on scripts or scores. Teachers do not enforce a suitable dress code in dance and acting lessons.

Teachers provide detailed and helpful feedback to students on their work. Teachers clearly identify what students have done well. They provide students with clear guidance to develop their knowledge further. In nutrition, students learn how to make their diet healthier. Teachers encourage students to apply learning to their own experience and their performance. For example, in anatomy, students consider dance-specific injuries. They research treatment and preventative exercises for these injuries. They use personal reflections or experiences to extend their learning.

Leaders have not developed an effective strategy to support students' continued English and mathematical skills development. Teachers correct English errors on students' written work. They teach students practical mathematics applications when preparing them for self-employment. However, students do not have the opportunity to develop these skills further to support their long-term career progression.

Leaders have developed a highly effective professional skills curriculum. Teachers support and guide students to ensure that they are well prepared for employment in the industry. Students appreciate the broad range of guest teachers with different sector expertise. The guest teachers provide students with valuable industry insights. Students learn challenging routines in a tight time frame, replicating audition practice. As a result, students feel well prepared for auditions. They produce show reels and headshots for their professional profiles. Guest teachers train students in a broad range of dance and performance skills, such as heels and commercial dance. Students enthuse about the performance skills and careers guidance they gain from guest teachers.

Leaders do not support teachers to continue to develop their teaching practice effectively. Teachers take responsibility for maintaining and developing their own subject expertise. Teachers receive helpful appraisals of their performance from leaders. Leaders acknowledge that staff development is an area for improvement, but at the time of the inspection there was no planned programme in place.

Leaders have not yet established effective arrangements for external oversight of their provision. They have started an advisory board that operates as a critical friend. However, board members do not have the breadth and currency of expertise in performing arts or post-16 education. As a result, leaders are not currently held to account on their quality management and improvement planning of education and industry standards.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have implemented a clear culture of safeguarding. Students feel safe and they enjoy the small and friendly community of learning. Teachers know all their students well.

Students know whom to contact should they have any concerns. They would be happy to talk to any of the staff, and particularly the designated safeguarding officer, about any concerns they had. They are confident that if they made contact at any time, they would get an immediate response to support them.

Students work together and support each other well. They value and respect each other's skills and abilities. Students enjoy learning about and performing choreography based on women's rights, freedom of speech and democracy.

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

- Leaders must support teachers to continue to develop their teaching practice effectively, while also enhancing their performing arts expertise.
- Leaders need to strengthen the breadth and experience of their advisory board to challenge leaders to improve educational and industry standards further.
- Leaders need to ensure that students continue to develop their English and mathematical skills.
- Teachers must demand the highest professional standards of students in preparation for their careers. Teachers must enforce a suitable dress code in dance and acting lessons. They must support students to develop their annotations of scripts and scores.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	54611
<b>Address</b>	10 Linden Road Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 2DA
<b>Contact number</b>	01234 213331
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stellamanncollege.co.uk">www.stellamanncollege.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Ms Mary Breen
<b>Provider type</b>	Dance and drama college
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	20 and 21 June 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	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. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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