

Inspection of Elmhurst Ballet School

Inspection dates:

10 to 12 October 2023

Overall effectiveness**Outstanding**

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Education programmes for young people

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Information about this provider

Elmhurst Ballet School is an independent residential and day school in Birmingham for students aged 11 to 19. The school recruits students from across the country and from overseas. In 2004, the school became an associate school of Birmingham Royal Ballet. Currently, 63 students are in the upper school (for students aged 16 to 19) studying a three-year level 6 Diploma in Professional Dance, validated by Trinity College London. Students specialise in classical ballet with contemporary dance, jazz dance and choreography as subsidiary subjects. Students also study a bespoke combination of A levels, a diploma in personal development and employability, an extended project qualification and Royal Academy of Dance qualifications. Twenty-five students are in receipt of Dance and Drama Award funding.

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

Students receive the high-quality training they need to become professional ballet dancers. The vast majority progress into professional ballet companies, such as Birmingham Royal Ballet and Northern Ballet, or join their graduate or apprenticeship programmes. Many secure a place with ballet companies across the world.

Students enjoy their time at Elmhurst Ballet School because they are taught very well, provided with excellent support and live, dance and learn in exceptional facilities.

Students become more resilient as a result of the excellent awareness they gain of the ballet world and the insightful knowledge they develop about their own strengths, vulnerabilities and attitudes. They are well aware of the competitive nature of employment in ballet and learn how to deal with the setbacks they are likely to experience.

Students develop outstanding attitudes, resilience and professional standards because they have extensive contact with excellent role models. These include the school staff and an extensive range of highly respected choreographers, dancers and industry professionals. Through these practitioners, students learn about the careers open to them and the challenges they will face during these. They know how demanding the life of a ballet dancer is and are well equipped to rise to the challenges. Students feel safe.

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

Leaders recruit students with integrity. All students who enter the upper school have the ability and potential to become professional classical dancers. Leaders provide a broad curriculum that ensures students become highly proficient dancers while also developing their academic skills and knowledge.

The specialist vocational ballet curriculum is very well planned. Over time, students develop the skills, knowledge and professional behaviours they need to be successful. Initially, students refine their competence in basic principles of classical technique and learn to manage the increasingly long periods of time they spend dancing, in particular working on pointe. The curriculum has been skilfully planned to introduce students to pas de deux and repertoire as they develop their fitness, strength and stamina, particularly in these initial stages. As students move on, the expectations and intensity of training increase. Repertoire and choreography become more challenging and complex and greater levels of artistry are added and expected. In the final year, the intensity of the physical work increases significantly with more exposure to pas de deux, pointe work for women and upper body strength training for men. At all stages, students respond well to the challenges and staff use their extensive experience and skills to support students through their development. As a result, students are very well prepared for the pace, challenge

and pressure of auditioning for professional work in ballet companies around the world.

Teachers carefully observe students' technique and provide high-quality, frequent feedback and corrections. Teachers develop students' technique, confidence, trust and stamina by expertly using recap, repetition and practice, for example in pas de deux. Students learn complex enchainment, then practise them before moving on to perform them with musical accompaniment. Following feedback, students repeat the enchainment to apply the focused instructions for improvement provided by their teacher. Students quickly adjust or correct their movement or position to improve their technique and successfully commit corrections to their muscle memory through practice and repetition. As a result, they incrementally improve their technique, precision, musicality and expression and can then apply their skills with fluency and consistency.

Leaders provide an excellent range of specialist staff and facilities to support students' mental and physical health and their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers, therapists and support staff teach students how to care for themselves. Staff responsible for strength, conditioning and rehabilitation carefully screen all new students to identify potential weak areas that might result in injury once the students start more intense dance training. This proactive approach significantly helps to prevent injuries from occurring or becoming long-term problems. Students also undertake a specialist injury prevention training programme during their time at Elmhurst to further reduce the risk and severity of injuries. Staff check students' physical development frequently and give advice on how to maintain a healthy weight. They are acutely aware of the risk young people face from eating disorders and take extensive and effective actions to educate students and help them maintain a healthy diet.

All students achieve their level 6 Trinity diploma in professional dance and a very large majority of students pass their A levels. However, not all students apply themselves to their academic studies with the same uncompromising commitment they show in their dance studies. As a result, a small number do not gain the grades of which they are capable. Despite this, the academic curriculum is valuable for all students. It develops the academic rigour they need for their professional dance studies, increases the opportunities for progression to higher education in the future and, for a few, provides a career outside professional dance. However, a recently introduced course in personal development and employability skills adds little to an already ambitious curriculum.

Staff at all levels are highly skilled and knowledgeable. All contribute to the inclusive, respectful and ambitious culture that permeates the school. Teachers are expert, highly experienced professionals. Senior staff continually seek to make improvements and take students' views into account when making decisions. They take prompt actions to make improvements and, when necessary, to keep students safe. Governors have the skills needed to support senior leaders. In recent months, they have successfully strengthened the board's expertise in safeguarding.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50032
Address	249 Bristol Road Edgbaston Birmingham West Midlands B5 7UH
Contact number	01214 152825
Website	www.elmhurstballetschool.org
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jessica Ward
Provider type	Dance and Drama
Date of previous inspection	18 and 19 November 2015

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, 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

Steven Tucker, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Judy Lye-Forster

His Majesty's Inspector

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