

Inspection of Northern Ballet School

Inspection dates:

6 to 8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness**Good**

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Education programmes for young people

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Information about this provider

Northern Ballet School (NBS) has been part of BIMM University's school of performing arts since 2020. It is located in central Manchester. At the time of the previous inspection, in 2015, it was a small independent dance school. The school recruits students from across the United Kingdom to study the three-year level 6 diploma in professional dance, validated by Trinity College London. First year students follow a broad curriculum that includes classical and jazz techniques. Second year students choose to focus on either classical or jazz dance. Seventy-two of the 86 current students are in receipt of a Dance and Drama Award. Around three quarters specialise in jazz dance. Students are taught mostly at The Dancehouse in central Manchester, with some lessons taking place in studios in Hazel Grove and Stockport.

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

Students' attitudes to their studies are excellent. They reflect the professional standards expected at this level of training and in the industry. Students work hard and are highly focused on their studies. They show respect for and appreciation of their teachers. They are courteous and polite and have the resilience needed to stay positive when their training is hard or they experience setbacks.

Students develop these attitudes because staff provide and maintain a calm and professional environment. Staff have high expectations for the standards of students' work, as well as for their attendance and punctuality. Staff know their learners well and use this information to provide them with the teaching and guidance they need to succeed.

Students are taught techniques and genres that are sought after by employers and agents. This is because teachers keep themselves up to date with developments in dance through their strong connections with the dance industry. For example, they have responded well to the increased opportunities for students to take their first steps into employment by working on cruise ships and in musical theatre by increasing the focus on skills demanded by this employment.

Learners feel safe because staff take great care to get to know them and quickly talk with them if they notice any problems. Students feel very confident that staff will help them if they seek help or advice.

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

Staff are highly experienced and are experts in their fields. They demonstrate high levels of technical ability and can make relevant and up-to-date reference to the industry because many continue to work as performers, directors and choreographers. They develop their knowledge of safeguarding through frequent, useful training. However, a small number of freelance teachers do not develop the wide range of teaching skills that would help them to improve their teaching further.

Staff have constructed a relevant and well-considered curriculum that has a clear rationale and purpose. The full weekly timetable means that students have the time to practise and secure the strength, conditioning and technical skills that they apply well in the broad range of dance genres they learn. Because students achieve high standards, a very high proportion gain employment in the dance industry.

Teachers check students' understanding by asking focused questions and by checking that students apply the correct technique. For example, they check whether students have retained key pieces of information by asking students to demonstrate the body position or placement needed to perform a dance sequence accurately and safely. As a result, students are able to build on this underpinning knowledge and move on to perform these techniques fluently, adding dynamics, character and style.

Teachers give careful and focused oral feedback to the students, which helps them to improve. Students work hard and focus fully on their learning. They listen carefully to the feedback they receive from the teacher and act on it immediately by applying the advice to their dancing. As a result, students understand what they need to do to improve and quickly make improvements to their work. These improvements are soon evident in subsequent performances of phrases, sequences or exercises.

Leaders foster students' personal development well. They do this by providing excellent careers advice and guidance, easily accessible support for students' well-being and mental health, weekly pilates classes, specialist nutritional advice and physiotherapy when needed. As a result, students develop the good habits needed for their career.

Since acquiring NBS in 2020, leaders at BIMM have increased the support available to students and staff in NBS. There is now a very high-quality range of support to keep students' healthy and prepare them for a career in dancing. This support is reinforced and supplemented by the excellent advice and support provided by teachers. For example, teachers and conditioning specialists introduce topics such as nutrition, injury prevention and independent living early in the course. They frequently revisit these to build students' knowledge over time.

BIMM provides effective governance through a range of committees and processes. Senior university staff scrutinise the work of NBS effectively and hold managers to account. They also ensure that the extensive resources across BIMM University are available to NBS students.

In too many aspects of the school's work, information is not shared in a way that enables teachers and managers to use it effectively when planning developments. Leaders rely too heavily on staff retaining information in their memory. For example, most records of safeguarding concerns are not shared with staff and managers in ways that make it possible to analyse trends, identify common concerns about an individual student or ensure that actions taken by staff are accurately recorded. Leaders do not have an overview of students' progress across their whole programme. This hinders their ability to make accurate assessment of whether students have made substantial and sustained progress over time or whether individuals are achieving across all areas of study.

Managers do not have an effective method of setting improvement targets or monitoring progress on making improvements. Improvement plans lack clear targets and regular monitoring. Leaders do not ensure that development plans adhere to the standards expected by the university. The university collects useful data about its students, but this is not consistently used to analyse the specific needs and experiences of learners at NBS. As a result, leaders do not have a clear understanding of why a quarter of students leave the course before completing it. While leaders recognise that they do not recruit enough students from Black or other ethnic minority backgrounds, they have not taken actions yet to resolve this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Produce, act on and closely monitor an improvement plan that clearly shows what improvements leaders want to make and how they will know when those improvements have been successfully implemented.
- Collect and record data and information about students in a way that allows leaders to analyse trends and make decisions about changes to the curriculum and to have a clear view of all aspects of students' progress.
- Increase the diversity of students attending NBS.
- Ensure all staff use the central system to record concerns about students and actions taken by staff, fully and accurately, so leaders can better identify patterns and trends.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53634
Address	10 Oxford Road Manchester M1 5QA
Contact number	0161 237 1406
Website	Northern Ballet School Institute for Contemporary Theatre (ictheatre.ac.uk)
Principal, CEO or equivalent	David Jones-Owen, CEO and Vice- Chancellor of BIMM University
Provider type	Dance and Drama
Dates of previous inspection	7 and 8 October 2015

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by BIMM’s head of school of performing arts, 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 learners’ work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider’s documentation and records.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

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His Majesty’s Inspector

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