

Inspection of Performers College

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 February 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Education programmes for young people | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Outstanding |

Information about this provider

Performers College (Essex) is a specialist college that offers higher level training in the performing arts and is a part of BIMM University. The college specialises in training learners to enter the musical theatre and dance industries. The college offers the three-year, level 6 diplomas in professional musical theatre and professional dance, both of which are validated by Trinity College London.

At the time of the inspection there were 68 learners in receipt of Dance and Drama Award funding. Almost half were aged 16 to 18. The college has no learners in receipt of high needs funding and does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners benefit from highly welcoming, inclusive and supportive learning and training environments. Staff promote a positive culture of respect and care in lessons. They carefully balance the constructive feedback and positive praise they give. As a result, the rapport between teaching staff and learners is positive and nurturing, which helps learners to feel safe in taking risks and occasionally making mistakes.

Learners take great pride in their performance and wider work. They develop their sense of citizenship and community spirit by participating in projects that benefit the wider community. They demonstrate high levels of commitment to these, working as part of a team to devise performances that benefit others. For example, learners recently helped to plan and host a charity cabaret. They set up auditions, cast the performers and marketed the event, raising a substantial amount of money for a charity of their choice.

Learners thoroughly enjoy their time at the college. Staff set high expectations of them to be punctual, attend well and maintain commitment to their training. Learners in their final year demonstrate high levels of dedication as they diligently immerse themselves in their studies to get the very best from their education.

Learners are supported very well by tutors to develop resilience when attending auditions. In musical theatre lessons, tutors promote the importance of learners taking control, such as asking if they can repeat a sequence in an audition setting, so they can demonstrate powerful, secure performance skills. As a result, learners build their resilience and demonstrate a secure understanding of how to manage the stress associated with high-pressure scenarios that they will encounter in the arts industry.

Learners benefit from significant opportunities to engage with the world of work. Through the college's enrichment offer, learners take part in 'Workshop Wednesday's' where external representatives from industry provide masterclasses in singing, acting and dance. Guest lecturers give presentations on further work-related activities such as self-employment and union membership. In addition, learners in their final year benefit from 'Agency Days' which enable them to present their performance skills to representatives from a range of casting agencies, such as those in cruise, stage, commercial dance and musical theatre.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum that they provide. They are committed to the college providing equality of access to specialist performing arts training. They recruit learners from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and have removed potential barriers, for example by lifting the requirement to pay audition fees. The curriculum provides learners with the knowledge, skills and

behaviours that prepare them well for employment as versatile performers through the teaching of a broad base of technical and performance skills.

College leaders and managers have sufficient oversight of the quality of teaching and assessment. They carry out formal lesson observations of staff and discuss with them what works well and the areas in which they need to improve. Leaders and managers need to use information from observations more productively to identify and deliver continuous professional development that ensures all teachers use strategies that promote excellence.

Leaders ensure that all learners benefit from a highly effective age-appropriate personal development curriculum. This helps them to understand how to stay safe and keep physically and mentally healthy in their personal and working relationships. The wellbeing team provide significant support and guidance through an extensive range of resources available online that learners access easily and quickly. These resources include a strong focus on dance and performance wellbeing and sexual health. Through the online systems, learners also book appointments when needed with nutritionists and physiotherapists who support them in maintaining their physical health and stamina.

Leaders and managers recruit staff who are highly qualified and experienced in their performing arts subjects. This level of expertise ensures that learners benefit from teaching by subject experts, all of whom are professionals working in their related industries.

Managers and tutors ensure that the curriculum for dance and musical theatre is well sequenced. They interleave practical studies with contextual theory, building in time for learners to reflect on how they move on from foundation subjects to specialisms. For example, at the start of their dance programmes, learners acquire a good understanding of the foundations of contemporary technique in performance work. They then explore how to cross over and combine these techniques when applying them to devised work. As a result, towards the end of their programmes, learners demonstrate how they can use the different qualities of each dance genre authentically.

Learners benefit from effective teaching. In a few instances, teaching is of a very high quality and tutors successfully use a range of teaching strategies to help learners rapidly develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, in dance, tutors use repetition and drilling to help learners secure and fix movement in their long-term memory. They carefully deconstruct and break down movement sequences beat by beat and check learners' understanding by pausing to ensure they retain what they are taught. Most learners make at least expected progress and become more fluent in picking up choreography quickly.

Most tutors use group assessment effectively to help learners identify what they do well and what they need to improve. In practical singing and dance sessions, tutors correct general mistakes effectively for example by adjusting learners' posture or placement to improve the aesthetics of a performance. However, a few tutors do not

use the outcomes of individual assessment well-enough to plan individualised learning. They do not pay high enough attention to those who are more adept than their peers, nor do they tailor learning successfully to help a few learners who have skills gaps. As a result, while learners make at least expected progress and their standard of work is good, a few learners do not reach the standards they could.

Leaders enable staff to support learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They provide useful staff training that helps tutors to know how to use support plans, so they plan accessible lessons. As a result, most teaching staff have a suitable awareness of neurodiversity and support learners with SEND in their sessions by providing additional resources or planning additional time for reflection.

Senior staff ensure that learners receive high quality careers information, advice and guidance that helps them to make informed choices about their next steps. Careers staff support learners by discussing progression pathways in dance and musical theatre and help them apply for auditions. For learners who may wish to seek employment or higher-level learning in other performance fields, careers staff seek out further information and guidance, for example on moving into employment and training in costume design, stage and film make-up or other performing arts disciplines.

Managers are mindful of staff workload and wellbeing. They appreciate the demands on staff to manage full timetables and offer them support where possible. Where tutors struggle to plan their lessons because of teaching commitments, leaders change timetables during assessment and performance weeks, to ease pressures.

Those responsible for governance have a clear understanding of learners' progress. They use information from reports and curriculum meetings to assess how well learners achieve. However, they do not have as clear an understanding of the weaknesses of provision beyond attendance, recruitment, retention and achievement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Make sure that all learners benefit from teaching that is consistently ambitious, well-planned and well-implemented to fill any gaps in individual learners' knowledge and skills.
- Ensure that those responsible for governance offer sufficient scrutiny and challenge of the quality of provision to help leaders make improvements.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 50067 |
| Address | Southend Road Corringham Stanford-le-Hope Essex SS17 8JT |
| Contact number | 01375 672053 |
| Website | www.performerscollege.co.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Emma Rogers |
| Provider type | Dance and drama school |
| Date of previous inspection | 14–15 October 2015 |
| Main subcontractors | None |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of school, 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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