

Inspection of The Hammond

Inspection dates:

5 to 7 March 2024

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

The Hammond is an independent specialist performing arts school based in Chester, Cheshire. The school offers secondary, sixth form, further, and higher education.

The Hammond offers the three-year, level 6 diplomas in Professional Dance and Professional Musical Theatre, both validated by Trinity College, London. During the inspection, 91 learners were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award funding. Of these, 47 were studying the diploma in Professional Dance, and the remainder were studying the diploma in Professional Musical Theatre. The school does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners enjoy and value their time at The Hammond. They feel privileged to learn from highly experienced industry professionals and are dedicated to their studies. Consequently, attendance is very high. The high-quality training learners receive in lessons supports them very well to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful performers.

Through an extensive programme of personal development and contextual studies, learners become resilient, confident, and rounded professionals. They develop a comprehensive understanding of how to maintain their mental and physical health in the context of their professional aspirations. They develop a wide understanding of the audition techniques required when seeking contracts with companies or employers.

Staff support learners to become considerate, community-minded individuals, who recognise the importance of giving their time for the support of others. For example, through leaders' links with the local community, learners actively participate in community events, such as marathons, fundraising, public performances, and supporting the local Pride festival.

Learners have outstanding attitudes to learning. For example, they demonstrate high levels of discipline while warming up and are fully focused on ensuring their bodies and minds are ready for a challenging day of learning. Through the high expectations placed on them by teachers, learners are highly professional in their behaviours towards staff and each other.

Learners feel safe. They train in a supportive and positive environment, where individuality is highly valued, respected, and celebrated. Their artistic personas are carefully nurtured by staff, who support them well to develop a powerful sense of self-belief and a sustained personal creative focus.

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

Leaders and managers have a clearly defined strategic rationale for the programmes they offer. In recent years, under a new principal and with a restructured leadership team, leaders have redeveloped the curriculums and have focused on ensuring that the learners' experience, and preparation for their next steps, forms the core of the school culture and strategy.

Leaders clearly articulate the direct relationship between the intended destinations of the learners on the diploma courses and the design and content of the curriculum for both specialisms. Staff fully understand, through close relationships with industry experts and current industry practitioners, the skills, knowledge, and techniques learners need to demonstrate in order to be successful. The dance and musical theatre curriculums are highly focused on employability, preparing learners for the current demands of industry.

Leaders have planned and sequenced the courses with great thought and care to ensure that learners build their technical and artistic skills and knowledge securely and safely over time. For example, in dance, varied and tailored schedules provide learners with the skills to be highly versatile and adaptable dancers. The core curriculum, classical ballet, jazz, contemporary and tap dance, runs throughout the diploma. This supports learners to securely develop their underpinning dance skills and build up high levels of expertise and technical skill. As a result, they make excellent progress and produce work of a very high standard.

Teachers are highly skilled practitioners and demonstrate high levels of knowledge, and skill when teaching. Teachers maintain strong links to the performing arts industry, including very recent professional credits and working careers. Teachers include directors from the National Theatre and musical directors from London's West End shows, as well as dancers, dance captains and choreographers who have worked around the world at the highest level. They draw on their extensive industry experience and strong teaching skills to support all learners, including those with additional needs, to make rapid progress.

Teachers use highly effective teaching strategies to support learners to develop new knowledge and skills and to retain these in their long-term memory. For example, they use imagery, vocal prompts, practise, modelling, repetition, and make effective use of individual and group feedback. As a result, learners can draw on their prior learning and the guidance they have had to inform their work, leading to improved performance.

In musical theatre, staff contribute well to the curriculum by collaborating on setting joint projects. For example, acting teachers provide a curriculum that considers physicality in movement. They have strengthened the work in 'acting through song', supporting learners to explore the narrative of each song, and ensuring that the curriculum extends to the singing actor, or the acting dancer. As a result, learners are able to link their learning across disciplines and combine their skills to create rounded, professional performances.

Staff encourage learners to take responsibility for, and ownership of, their development and progress. Learners use their journals and logs to record areas for development, areas that they are improving or guidance and feedback received. They find this extremely helpful and, as a result, they can review and understand their progress.

Teachers make very effective use of observation and demonstration to check that learners understand key elements of practice. Teachers check learners' accuracy of execution, and make sure that learners can explain what they are doing and why. They check that any bad habits or misconceptions learners have about physical or vocal technique are removed and the correct technique applied. As a result, learners develop fluency in their discipline and establish secure and safe practice.

Senior staff have highly effective arrangements in place for external scrutiny. They have appointed a board of qualified and experienced professionals with significant experience in education, finance, and industry who are active and highly visible in their support of learners. A number of governance subcommittees focus on supporting leaders, and driving improvement across all areas of the school's work.

Through the effective use of formative and summative assessments, teachers ensure that learners' progress is clearly mapped across their programmes. Each aspect of learners' development is evaluated and assessed, and they receive detailed feedback. As a result, staff and learners know what learners are doing well and what they need to improve.

Learners benefit from detailed careers advice and guidance as they prepare to work in the industry. Staff draw on their extensive, current understanding of industry demands and provide rich advice. The standard of learners' work is consistently high, and their achievement is exceptional. Almost all learners graduate into employment in the dance, musical theatre and performing arts industries and the very large majority secure agency representation. Learners who do not move into employment, move on to further education or training in a related field.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54859
Address	Hoole Bank House Mannings Lane Hoole Bank Hoole Village Chester CH2 4ES
Contact number	01244 305350
Website	www.thehammond.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jennifer Roscoe
Provider type	Dance and drama college
Date of previous inspection	25 to 26 November 2015
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Vice Principal (Vocational), 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

Stuart Collett, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Christina Christou	Ofsted Inspector
Judy Lye-Forster	His Majesty's Inspector

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