

Inspection of The Oxford School of Drama

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 May 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

The Oxford School of Drama is a performing arts college located in Wootton, near Woodstock, Oxfordshire. The school trains learners in preparation for work as actors. Learners train in a purpose-built performance arts facility that includes rehearsal spaces, dance studios and a theatre. The college offers a three-year level 6 diploma in professional acting and a one-year level 5 diploma in professional acting, which are validated by Trinity College, London. At the time of the inspection, there were 61 learners in receipt of Dance and Drama Award funding and/or adult learner loans. All learners are over 18 years of age.

The school does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners benefit from demanding actor training in an exciting and dynamic learning environment. Tutors and external directors set high expectations of them to continually refine and rework their performance craft during their time at the school.

Learners attend lessons with enthusiasm and apply themselves to learning their acting craft fully. They arrive punctually or early to sessions, dress professionally and are equipped with the resources they need to maximise training opportunities. Learners are well-prepared for future castings, auditions and employment.

Learners appreciate the inclusive culture at the school. Staff nurture and celebrate learners' successes in the classroom and during their performances. Learners respond very positively to constructive critique of their practice. They feel safe to take risks using feedback to improve their work as a member of the ensemble or as an individual artiste.

Learners actively participate in the 'Open Wednesday' programme that engages them with the wider world of work. They benefit from visiting companies and guest speakers who deliver masterclasses in acting and performance. Learners are excited for their next steps, including being introduced to agents, casting directors and industry practitioners and performing in the 'London Season'.

Learners are very well-prepared for life in modern Britain. They are introduced to a variety of topics, including the risks of radical and extremist behaviours. Learners articulate an elevated understanding of how risks may affect them in life and work.

Learners develop a firm understanding of the importance of keeping themselves mentally and physically healthy. Tutors are trained in mental health awareness and provide learners with a wide range of advice and guidance such as living a healthy lifestyle, managing stress and anxiety, and being resilient.

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

Leaders have a well-thought through vision for the school to create industry-ready acting professionals who can work in a broad range of areas. As a result, they have adapted the curriculum to focus on preparing learners for a variety of professional opportunities including theatre in education, touring theatre, television, film and streaming broadcasting.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have maintained a clear focus on ensuring that they provide equal opportunity for learners to access training. They use funding very effectively to support learners who would struggle to access specialist actor tuition to study at the school. As a result, the learner population represents an inclusive and diverse mix of learners from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Leaders and tutors ensure that the curriculum is purposefully integrated across different acting disciplines. Learners benefit from cross-collaborative partnerships that creatively blend movement, vocal work, acting technique and styles very successfully together through rehearsal and performance work. As a result of the creative collaborative practice between teaching staff, learners become versatile creative individuals. For example, voice and movement tutors work closely together to design training to help learners improve their use of breath. This helps learners to prepare for character work in plays such as William Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing,' where learners showcase their vocal control through the form and structure of language to find the deeper layers of character.

Staff expertly teach the curriculum so that learners strengthen and refine their performance skills. They successfully use contemporary teaching strategies to help learners make connections between the foundations of acting technique and new learning. For example, tutors use spaced repetition very effectively so that learners revisit their previous learning before refining, exploring further and developing their craft as an actor.

Acting tutors are highly qualified and experienced in their respective fields of voice, acting, movement, song and theatre. Visiting lecturers are specialists in directing and well-known in the artistic community and field of dramaturgy. As a result, learners benefit from training by subject experts who have experience and who use their professional knowledge and skills to inform teaching and directorial practice.

Tutors challenge learners to develop a strong sense of autonomy and independence so that they have the professional ability to identify and deal with their strengths and weaknesses. For example, in voice classes, where learners have tension in their voice which affects vocal range, tutors carefully direct learners to identify the cause of this. As a result, learners know how to correct their posture or use relaxation exercises to reduce vocal tension.

Tutors use assessment well in classes. Learners receive very specific feedback from tutors and their peers that helps them to make swift progress with their development as an actor. In acting through song sessions, tutors constructively critique learners and give them targeted feedback about how to use their acting skills to connect with song lyrics. This helps learners to understand how to draw in the audience, so they emotionally engage with the performance.

Tutors carefully assist neurodiverse learners or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to submit their written work for assessment in accessible ways. In their reflective journal work, learners use annotations and drawings to explain how they are developing their craft. Others submit their journals in film or audio format. This helps such learners to discuss their progress with tutors and be assessed in ways that are accessible and inclusive.

Leaders ensure that learners receive information about the potential career opportunities available to them. By having frequent opportunities to work with a wide variety of industry professionals, and hearing from guest speakers, learners

develop a rich understanding of the options open to them in addition to being an actor.

As a result of their training, learners are very well prepared for their next steps. Graduates progress into high profile, positive destinations and many are offered roles in well regarded productions. Recent graduates have performed in acting roles and have either been nominated for, or have won, the Stage's Best West End Debut Award, Olivier nominations and the Fringe First Award for Best New Writing. Learners highly value their training and know that they acquire the attributes to be a versatile actor.

Leaders have extremely high expectations of themselves and staff, to deliver a very high-quality training experience for learners. Heads of department know each learner very well and work closely with teaching staff to ensure that all learners make progress in line with their aspirations. As a result, learners benefit from closely managed training that helps them excel in their craft.

Leaders have developed and implemented a continuous cycle of improvement that ensures they have a clear understanding and oversight of the quality of teaching and learning. This process includes developing and strengthening teaching practice through peer observation and constructive critique of best practice. As a result, leaders strive to ensure that learners benefit from exceptional training that makes them employable and sought after by agents and employers.

Leaders appreciate the support and challenge they receive from a board of trustees who have a wealth of industry, financial and educational knowledge. Trustees have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for further development of the school. They use information from sub-committees and direct reports from the principal and executive director to help leaders to realise the school's vision in providing outstanding tuition and training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53771
Address	Sansoms Farm Studios Wootton Woodstock OX20 1ER
Contact number	01993 812883
Website	www.oxforddrama.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Edward Hicks
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 executive director, 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

Chloe Rendall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stuart Collett

His Majesty's Inspector

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