



# Millennium Dance 2000 Theatre



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Inspection Report

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## Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Millennium Dance 2000 Theatre School
Type of school:	Dance and musical theatre school
Directors:	Ikky Maas, Donald McLennan, Jacki Mitchell
Address of school:	Hampstead Town Hall Centre 213 Haverstock Hill London NW3 4QP
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Name of reporting inspector:	David Hornbrook HMI
Date of inspection:	11-14 October 2004 and 16 November 2005

## Part A: Summary

### Information about the school

Millennium Dance 2000 Theatre School is a performing arts school in Belsize Park, north London. It offers a three year, full-time, course in dance and musical theatre leading to an internal diploma in performance and national diplomas in dance or musical theatre.

The school has expanded substantially since its foundation in 1997. It moved to its present location in the Interchange arts complex in the old Hampstead Town Hall in 2000. The school shares its accommodation with a range of other arts organisations.

At the time of the inspection in October 2004 there were 112 students enrolled on the course, a substantial increase since the last inspection. Twenty-five students out of 53 in the first year of the course, 20 out of 33 in the second year and 21 out of 26 in the third year were in receipt of Department for Education and Skills (DfES) dance and drama awards.

The school is jointly run by its three directors and there is a full-time executive administrator. All the 26 teachers are part-time. In addition there are eight accompanists and a range of guest teachers who visit the school from time to time. The Millennium Dance 2000 Theatre School is a limited company.

In its mission statement, the school aims to 'provide an outstanding opportunity for young dancers of the millennium' by placing a strong emphasis on the creativity, inspiration and discipline of its staff and the provision of a 'progressive environment'.

The course was previously inspected by Ofsted in May 2002 and was graded 2 for achievement and standards and the quality of education and training, and 2 for leadership and management. Following the inspection in October 2004, the leadership and management of the college was reinspected in November 2005 to assess the progress made on a number of management issues since the original inspection. This report, therefore, reflects the quality of provision as it was when inspectors visited in 2004 and the quality of leadership and management following the reinspection in 2005.

### How effective is the school?

#### *Key strengths*

- good and very good teaching
  - excellent links with performing arts industry
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- the strong professional ethos
  - high standards in Matt Mattox-based jazz technique
  - the school's clear vision and sense of purpose
  - strong and effective leadership
  - the loyalty and commitment of staff.

*What should be improved*

- levels of attainment in classes

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the section on the performance course in the full report.

Students' view of the school

Students' views of the school were taken into account and are summarised below.

*What students like about the school*

- their teachers' strong links with the performing arts industry
- the breadth and diversity of the course
- the opportunities offered by the timetable to work with students from different year groups
- the school's friendly and supportive atmosphere
- their access to the new library and its information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

*What they feel could be improved*

- the number of long gaps between classes
- their access to accommodation in the evenings.

## Part B: The three-year performance course

Inspectors judged the provision to be good (grade 2)

### Strengths

- teaching in most classes good or very good
- excellent links with performing arts industry
- the strong professional ethos
- high standards in Matt Mattox jazz-based technique
- students' strong sense of rhythm and dance musicality.

### Weaknesses

- insufficiently rigorous monitoring of students' progress
- levels of attainment in classes which do not reflect the quality of teaching
- the lack of an institutional development plan.

### Scope of provision

1. The three-year course aims to prepare students for careers in dance and musical theatre by providing them with opportunities to develop an appropriate range of performance techniques. Each of the three directors leads on a particular discipline and the five core subjects are ballet, Matt Mattox-based jazz, contemporary dance, singing and acting. Additional lectures and workshops are provided on subjects such as fitness, health and safety, the history of dance and musical theatre and aspects of production. Most students in receipt of dance and drama awards opt to be entered for the national diploma in musical theatre.

2. There are suitable opportunities for students to perform in front of an audience. The school mounts an in-house Christmas cabaret and the best of their assessment pieces are performed to invited audiences at the school. Outside the school, students participate in two annual productions in London theatres which are attended by agents and potential employers. A small number take part in professional productions while at the school.

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## Achievements and standards

3. Students are achieving satisfactory standards of performance in classes although these do not always reflect the high quality of teaching. Standards in Matt Mattox-based jazz, a particular strength of the school, and tap, are high; standards of singing and drama have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. In classes students are well focused, enthusiastic, energetic and highly motivated. Over the three years, students develop a strong sense of rhythm and dance musicality although a small number exhibit poor muscle tone and flexibility, despite the provision of Pilates and the regular use of a gymnasium. The quality of the reflection in students' journals varies considerably.

4. Most students leaving the course quickly gain related employment. Contact with guest choreographers and directors during workshops at the school sometimes lead to offers of contracts before graduation. Students graduating in 2003 have jobs in cabaret, film and television and touring theatre. Every year, one or two graduating students are employed in West End shows.

## Quality of education and training

5. Nearly all the teaching is good, or very good; none is unsatisfactory. Teachers demand much of their students, often pushing them to their physical and mental limits, classes are often vibrant and productive. Teachers succeed in establishing a strong professional ethos and classes are well-structured with an appropriate balance of activities. In a drama class preparing students for auditions; for example, all students were guided to make constructive notes on each other's performance pieces in order to inform subsequent critical discussion. In a singing class the teacher gradually introduced, and then systematically employed, essential technical vocabulary to reinforce students' practical learning. Teachers are encouraging and sensitive to students' needs; teaching is carefully targeted so as not to strain students who are struggling. For example, in a pointe class, the teacher recognised students' sore feet by setting a travelling exercise off pointe; in a tap class a struggling student was helped to master difficult steps by being encouraged to clap a complicated rhythm before attempting to dance it. In each subject, students are grouped according to their ability. This arrangement works well and successfully takes account of students' individual needs by helping them to work to their capacity and make good progress.

6. Most teachers have extensive professional experience and are highly committed to the schools and its aims. The school has excellent links with the performing arts industry and most teachers also undertake professional work; when regular teachers are away, adequate cover is provided. Contacts with the industry enable the school to invite as guest teachers active performers, directors and choreographers. The school uses its eight accompanists in an effective and imaginative way. Accommodation and teaching resources are generally satisfactory and some studio spaces are of a high standard. Dance studios are generally well

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appointed with pianos, mirrors, barres and sprung floors, although some have heating problems; the main hall is a good, internal performance space. Some studios are only just big enough for classes; the new 'armoury' studio has two internal pillars which restrict students' movements. The school has a comprehensive collection of musical scores and a growing collection of other learning resources. A new library has been created and at the time of the inspection was being equipped with computers.

7. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. There are formal assessments in the autumn and spring terms which cover the core subjects and which are internally and externally marked; journals are also assessed. Students receive written reports and oral feedback. Although teachers keep an informal eye on students' subsequent development, the process whereby their progress is monitored is not sufficiently rigorous.

8. The content of the course is well-tailored to the mission of the school and the curriculum is sufficiently flexible to take account of the diverse ability of the intake. Dance, singing and acting are covered in sufficient depth for students aiming for a career as all round performers. A key focus of the curriculum is the Matt Mattox based jazz technique which continues to be a strength unique to the school. All students take part in the weekly workshops with visiting guest teachers, choreographers, directors and lecturers which add to their experience and understanding of the industry. Pilates body conditioning is taught and individual remedial treatment is made available. All students are required to keep journals, but although there are guidelines for this exercise, there remains, at all levels, a lack of clarity about their aim and purpose.

9. The audition process is largely effective and fair, but criteria for acceptance are not documented in sufficient detail. Candidates take part in classes in ballet, contemporary dance and jazz and are required to sing and perform a monologue. They are interviewed by the directors and may also be referred for orthopaedic assessment. The induction week is well-planned and helps students become familiar with the course and the school.

10. Teachers support students well at all stages of their journey through the school. The executive administrator is responsible for student welfare and the three directors make themselves available for informal support and guidance. A limited tutorial system has recently been introduced but it is too soon to assess its effectiveness. The school handbook contains some useful information and is given to staff. However, because students do not receive copies they are sometimes unsure about key aspects of the course. Instead, they rely on informal guidance, often from other students, about assessment and other school procedures. Arrangements for the care of dancers with injuries are good. The first point of contact for injury is the executive administrator who advises students, carefully monitors their progress and informs the relevant teachers. Physiotherapy and massage are available on the premises.

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11. Students are well prepared for entry into employment. Some classes are run on the lines of professional auditions and students are asked to prepare a song or monologue as if auditioning for a particular production. Although there are no special agency arrangements, students again benefit from the close links their teachers have with the professional world.

## Part C: Leadership and management

Inspectors judged leadership and management to be good (grade 2).

### Strengths

- a clear vision and sense of purpose
- strong and effective leadership
- the loyalty and commitment of staff
- efforts made to recruit from minority ethnic groups
- effective operational management and administration.

### Weaknesses

- the lack of an institutional development plan.

12. The school has a clear vision and sense of purpose. The three directors own and run the school and are the only shareholders. They are experienced professional dancers and collectively they provide the school with strong and effective leadership which successfully inspires in staff and students a passion for, and loyalty to, the school and its aims. Staff and students understand that all lines of accountability lead back to the directors who know staff and students well, share a readily accessible office and function, in effect, as a senior-management team. They are assisted by a small advisory group of well-known performers who are on hand to give advice and to help with assessments. In addition there are part-time heads of acting and singing and a full-time executive administrator who has a wide range of responsibilities.

13. The small size and compact location of the school enables the directors to communicate easily with teaching and administrative staff. The operational management and administration of the course are good. The directors meet formally with the staff group once a term; meetings at all levels are minuted and actions identified and followed up. Directors keep conscientious records of all their meetings with individual members of staff.

14. An effective and accepted system of appraisal incorporating class observation has recently been sensitively introduced. A pre-observation questionnaire, which encourages teachers to reflect on their practice and their aspirations, establishes the idea of appraisal as a 'conversation'. Notes on observations are supportive but critical where necessary. It is too early for the outcomes of this process to reveal trends or to inform staff development planning.

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15. The school's health and safety procedures are satisfactory and set out within the context of those for the Interchange arts complex as a whole. The school has an adequate policy for equality of opportunity which is printed in the school's handbook. The school monitors the ethnicity of its students — at present seven per cent of United Kingdom students are from minority ethnic backgrounds — and a high proportion of teachers is drawn from minority ethnic groups. The school continues to make efforts to attract more students from minority ethnic groups by performing and running workshops in inner London schools. All the school's facilities are fully accessible to people with disabilities.

16. Quality assurance arrangements have much improved. The self-assessment report is a comprehensive account of the school's strengths and areas for development which is not afraid to be self-critical. A draft goes to staff for their comments. Feedback from a student questionnaire is systematically collected in June. Outcomes are discussed by the directors and improvements have been made as a result. For example, access to the library has improved and one studio is now available for student use after hours. The self-assessment report is not yet used to inform an institutional development plan.

17. Action has been taken to address issues raised in the last report. For example, some facilities have been developed, provision in drama has been re-vitalised and a consultant has conducted a one day review of the school's leadership and management systems. Weaknesses in the tutorial and audition processes have been addressed. Individual student tutorials are now systematically held with five designated tutors on a termly basis and students are set targets for improvement which are regularly reviewed. Audition criteria are published in the prospectus. Overall, management systems are now in place which should serve the school effectively in the future.

18. The school continues to track students' employment. A new in-house agency is already improving the gathering of data on students' employment destinations. In 2005, all leavers signed up with the agency and, as a result, the list of destinations for this cohort is complete. The agency also receives feedback on Millennium graduates from company managers. It is too early for all this information to reveal much about trends, but the school is now well-placed to do this analysis in the future.

19. The school manages its resources efficiently. Financial and student records are properly maintained. Financial matters are monitored carefully by the directors who receive monthly financial statements from their accountant. All financial decisions are made jointly by the three directors. Budgets are set for productions and the directors approve requests for teaching resources. The school continues to take appropriate steps to secure value for money when purchasing consumables and small equipment.

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