



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
The Hammond School

Date of inspection: 17-21 January 2005

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The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspects dance and drama colleges in receipt of awards allocated by the Department for Education and Skills.

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	The Hammond School
Type of school:	Dance School
Principal:	Mrs Polly Dangerfield
Address of school:	Hoole Bank Mannings Lane Chester CH2 4ES
Telephone number:	01244 305 350
Fax number:	01244 305 351
Name of reporting inspector:	Peter Nelson HMI
Date of inspection:	17-21 January 2005

Part A: Summary

Information about the school

Founded in 1917, The Hammond School is a small independent co-educational boarding school for pupils aged 11 to 18+ specialising in dance. The school moved to its present site in Hoole on the outskirts of Chester in 1968, where it occupies an elegant 19th century country house and additional accommodation built in its grounds. In its senior school, or sixth form, Hammond offers a three-year dance course, leading to the national diploma in professional dance. In addition, the school has a community dance co-ordinator who promotes partnerships through dance with other local schools and community groups.

At the time of the inspection in January 2005, there were 208 students of all ages, of whom 78 were enrolled on the three-year professional dance course. Twenty-four students out of 33 in the first year of the course, 23 students out of 29 in the second year and 16 out of 18 in the third year were in receipt of Department for Education and Skills (DfES) dance and drama awards. Ten students on the dance course are boarders at the school and the remainder live in lodgings nearby. About 14% of the senior school is made up of students graduating from the lower school.

There are 21 members of staff who teach regularly on the dance course including three 'senior teachers'. Additional guest teachers visit from time to time throughout the year. The Hammond School is a non-profit making charitable trust and a limited company.

How effective is the school?

Key strengths

- students' high level of performance skills
- very good teaching and learning
- an innovative programme of audition technique lessons
- very good learning resources
- the wide range of performance opportunities
- very good pastoral care and support for students
- strong, coherent leadership, management and business processes
- strong and beneficial community links.

What should be improved

- the size of groups in some lessons
- the emphasis placed on core training.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses 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

- the friendly and homely atmosphere
- the broad professional expertise of established and guest teachers
- the superb facilities
- the approachable and supportive staff.

What they feel could be improved

- the extent of provision for drama and singing
- access to professional auditions.

Part B: The Dance Course

Inspectors judged the provision to be good (**Grade 2**)

Strengths

- students' high level of performance skills
- very good teaching and learning
- an innovative programme of audition technique lessons
- very good learning resources
- the wide range of performance opportunities
- very good pastoral care and support for students.

Weaknesses

- students' lack of application in a few dance technique lessons
- excessively large group sizes in some lessons
- time-consuming study for additional qualifications.

Scope of provision

1. The diploma course is designed to train students for work as professional dancers. The school's mission states that 'the school aims to produce confident, highly trained students who have the imaginative and physical skills, cultural awareness, knowledge and understanding to succeed in their chosen field of dance'.

2. All students are entered for the national diploma in professional dance. Students can opt for one of three course strands: classical ballet, musical theatre, or a combination of the two. The core dance techniques on offer are classical ballet, jazz and tap. Additional subject options include contemporary dance, singing, acting, drama, anatomy, fitness training, pointe work, *pas de deux*, double work, and repertoire. Students also have the opportunity to take general certificate of education advanced and advanced subsidiary level (GCE A and AS level) examinations in dance and other subjects. They may also study for the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) teaching certificate, or the Imperial Society of Dance Teachers' (ISTD) associate teaching awards.

Achievements and standards

3. Over the past three years retention rates have been between 70% and 75%. All

students who complete the course achieve the diploma qualification. Most students then gain employment in dance-related fields. Destinations include West End productions, European ballet companies, musical theatre tours, cruise ships and teaching.

4. In the core dance subjects of ballet, tap and jazz, students are placed in classes at four levels according to their ability. Progression between levels is determined through rigorous ongoing assessments. Students' techniques in jazz and musical theatre are of a high standard. For example, in a third year jazz class, students worked to their physical limits, learning complicated sequences and applying and maintaining detailed movement corrections. In a few lessons, students' work lacks fluidity because they pay insufficient attention to combining style with technical competence. Most third year students approach their work in a highly professional manner. For example, before classes began, small groups of students were observed responsibly practising routines, clarifying musical counts and arm positions. Subsequently when asked in rehearsals to clarify positions and counts, students responded articulately and confidently. In the rehearsal of a newly choreographed routine, they confidently demonstrated the sophisticated nuances of style required by the choreographer. Performances by students are slick and of a very high quality. They produce particularly high standards in jazz, tap, musical theatre, classical *corps de ballet*, double work, ensemble and singing. Overall, students exhibit flair, a broad range of dynamic qualities and good rhythm.

Quality of education and training

5. Teaching is very good. All teachers have detailed lesson plans. In almost all lessons the work is stimulating and appropriately challenging for the students. In a male ballet repertoire class 'Elite Syncopations' was the chosen work. This suited the dancers because it was technically challenging in the athletic nature of the choreography but required light-hearted and suitably masculine characterisation. Teachers demand high standards and a professional approach from students. In a third year rehearsal, the 'Dance Captain', was required to notate the choreography, and to direct clarity of counts and physical details in the rehearsal. Teachers frequently use creative imagery to inform quality and dynamic. In a West African dance workshop the teacher helped the students to achieve quite subtle dynamics by urging them 'down to the earth' and to engage 'with mother nature'. In a dynamic senior jazz lesson, students were encouraged to 'drive Ferraris not Reliant Robins' in a travelling sequence across the studio. Many teachers instruct across a broad range of disciplines. This provides an excellent example to students who are studying a broad range of dance styles.

6. The school has very good learning resources. Teachers are suitably qualified and many maintain valuable professional links. Guest workshops are arranged regularly. Information and communications technology resources are satisfactory. The library has a broad range of dance periodicals, books and videos. There is a good range of resources for music, including access to a recording studio. Most accommodation is well-maintained and fit for purpose, although students have to travel some distance exposed to the elements, between buildings used for teaching. In a few instances group sizes are too big for the size of classroom available and the number of teachers. This impacts on the ability of students to

learn and work effectively in groups.

7. The assessment of students is rigorous and effective. Formal assessment takes place twice a year. The first assessment focuses on the core subjects of ballet, tap, jazz, contemporary dance, Spanish dance and singing and the second on performance during the annual performance season in the summer. Students receive detailed and constructive written and verbal feedback on their progress. Assessment criteria are clear and meet the requirements of the awarding body.

8. The school offers a broad range of dance techniques as part of the core diploma course. It also places a strong emphasis on health and fitness, with individually devised fitness regimes, including body pump classes, weights programmes and Pilates. Students draw up individual timetables to accommodate their chosen preferences, which may include GCEs and dance teaching qualifications. However, the strong emphasis placed on the breadth of additional subjects can interfere with the progress of students on their main studies. A very well-designed and valuable programme for audition preparation for students in their final year consists of weekly mock auditions throughout the final six months of their course. Students have very good opportunities to perform at a broad range of venues. They all participate in the annual spring and summer performances. Students also take part in community-based workshops, performances, open days and parents' events. In the third year, students tour extensively in the United Kingdom and Europe with the school company – Taudevin.

9. Students receive very good academic and pastoral support from teachers, tutors, subject heads, and house parents. Those who require accommodation get valuable help. Students are provided with clear and informative guidance on healthy eating and body conditioning. Medical and physiotherapy support for the prevention and treatment of dance injuries is outstanding. For example, students who are injured get dedicated rehabilitation through one-to-one remedial exercise sessions. Additional learning support is readily available for those students who need it. The audition and pre-entry process is very thorough. As part of the induction programme, most students attend a very useful outdoor pursuits team-building weekend. This helps them to develop a strong team ethos both with fellow students and also with staff. In their third year students are shown how to prepare their *curriculum vitae* and how to use the internet to find information about auditions. A comprehensive range of careers information and contacts is available to students. Dance agencies and casting directors visit the school to hold auditions for European musicals and cruise liners.

Part C: Leadership and Management

Inspectors judged leadership and management to be outstanding (**Grade 1**).

Strengths

- strong, coherent leadership and business processes
- good operational management
- strong and beneficial community links
- successful strategies, bringing about continuous improvement
- a comprehensive range of well-conceived policies and procedures
- very good staff development.

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses.

10. The school was last inspected in September 2002. Since then, it has implemented improved business processes, strengthened its links with local schools and the community, increased the proportion of males studying dance and improved its accommodation.

11. The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The senior management team, comprising the head of school, heads of dance and education and the business manager, ensures the school operates effectively and efficiently. The team and the directors have set a clear strategic direction. Directors carry out a valuable monitoring and advisory role. They oversee the educational character of the school, review the performance of students and evaluate progress against the school's development plan. The school has successfully obtained outline planning permission for a suite of new studios, classrooms and a performance space. The mission, aims and objectives for the dance course, stated in the course manual, lack clarity.

12. The operational management of the school is strong. The staff structure has well-defined areas of responsibility and lines of accountability. Managers set staff at all levels realistic targets and monitor their performance closely through the appraisal process. Communications across the school are very good. Staff meetings are held regularly, and informative briefings and copies of minutes from relevant meetings are circulated to staff. In 2002, the school obtained funding to appoint a community dance co-ordinator. This role has raised the profile of the school and added significant value to its work. There are improved links with local schools and community groups, increased opportunities for students to perform and lead workshops and heightened media coverage of the work of the school in the

community.

13. The school's well-developed quality assurance procedures have led to continuous improvement in the quality of provision. The school gathers valuable feedback from students through student perception questionnaires and a student committee. All academic staff are actively involved in the annual review of the curriculum and resources. The self-assessment report and development plan identify most weaknesses and include strategies for improvement and lack clarity in only a few instances. The school gathers only limited information on the career progression of former students. Senior academic managers monitor the quality of teaching each year through a comprehensive lesson observation scheme and the findings are used in staff appraisal. The school is committed to continuous professional development of its staff and has successfully maintained Investors in People status. Staff induction is thorough and teachers undertake training regularly. The school provides teachers with good opportunities to maintain and enhance their professional experience by working in the performing arts industry. The training and professional theatre work carried out by teachers adds substantial value to students' learning and experience.

14. The school has a well-defined and effective set of policies and procedures. Since the last inspection, management systems and procedures have been improved. For example, the review and development cycle and the budget-setting process have been aligned. The school has comprehensive policies and codes of practice for equality of opportunity, appeals and complaints, grievance, harassment, bullying, student welfare, and health and safety. These are accompanied, where appropriate, by operational procedures. The student handbook contains a charter that sets out the rights and responsibilities of the school and students. The school has a clear statement and guidelines on the support to be provided for those with additional physical or learning needs.

15. The school manages its resources very effectively. Financial management processes are thorough. The senior management team and directors receive detailed monthly financial statements. The school maintains a suitable level of cash reserves. The ongoing commitment to expenditure on premises and teaching resources has led to very good facilities and well-maintained teaching accommodation. The school offers good value for money

Notes