



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**Inspection Report**  
**The Hammond School**  
**Dance & Drama College**

Date of inspection: September 2002

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## **Basic information about the school**

Name of school:	The Hammond School
Type of school:	Dance school
Head of school:	Mrs Polly Dangerfield
Address of school:	Hoole Bank Mannings Lane Chester CH2 4ES
Telephone number:	01244 400143
Fax number:	01244 315845
Name of reporting inspector:	David Hornbrook HMI
Date of inspection:	September 2002

## Part A: Summary

### Information about the school

Founded in 1917, The Hammond School is a small, independent, co-educational boarding school for pupils aged 11–19 specialising in dance. The school moved to its present site in Hoole on the outskirts of Chester in 1968, where it occupies an elegant 19<sup>th</sup> century country house and additional accommodation built in its grounds. In its senior school, or sixth form, Hammond offers a three-year course in professional dance, leading to the national diploma in professional dance. Within the course, students may weight their studies either towards classical ballet or musical theatre if they so wish.

At the time of the inspection in September 2002, there were 166 pupils of all ages, of whom 62 were enrolled on the three-year professional dance course. Eighteen students out of 25 in the first year of the course, 19 students out of 25 in the second year and 6 out of 12 in the third year were in receipt of Department for Education and Skills dance and drama awards. Nine students on the dance course are boarders at the school and the remainder live in lodgings nearby. About 20% of the senior school is made up of students graduating from the lower school.

About 15 members of staff teach regularly on the dance course and there are four senior teachers. Additional guest teachers visit from time to time. The Hammond School is a non-profit making charitable trust and a limited company.

### How effective is the school?

#### *Key strengths*

- a high level of performance skills
- self-disciplined students who respond well to challenges
- very good, sometimes outstanding, teaching
- flexible timetabling which reflects the needs of individual students
- a wide range of performance opportunities
- very good learning resources
- an excellent environment for learning
- strong, systematic leadership and management
- very good staff development.

**What should be improved?**

- student aspirations
- the emphasis placed on core training
- the emphasis on standards in development planning
- the time between classes.

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

**Students' views of the school**

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

***What students like about the school***

- the friendly atmosphere
- the good rapport with teachers
- the lack of discrimination
- excellent guest teachers.

***What they feel could be improved***

- the extent of provision for jazz and musical theatre
- the extent of provision for acting
- the timetabling of the working day.

## Part B: The three-year professional dance course

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

Inspectors observed 15 classes. Classes were graded on a seven-point scale for teaching and learning.

### Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Grade	Teaching	Learning
1	3	2
2	8	6
3	2	4
4	1	2
5	1	1
6	–	–
7	–	–

*Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade1); Very Good (2); Good (3); Satisfactory (4); Unsatisfactory (5); Poor (6); and Very Poor (7).*

### Strengths

- a high level of performance skills
- self-disciplined students who respond well to challenges
- very good, sometimes outstanding, teaching
- flexible timetabling which reflects the needs of individual students
- a wide range of performance opportunities
- very good learning resources
- an excellent environment for learning.

**Weaknesses**

- aspirations which fall short of the capabilities of some students
- time-consuming study for additional qualifications
- inadequate time between classes.

**Scope of provision**

1. The course prepares students to be professional dancers. Teaching aims 'to prepare dancers of the highest quality' by focusing 'the potential of each student in a combination of enjoyment and hard work'. As well as the core dance subjects of classical ballet, jazz and tap, students can choose either to take additional ballet classes in repertoire and virtuosity, or musical theatre classes in singing, vocal technique and drama. Other subjects include contemporary dance, anatomy, fitness training, stage combat and Spanish dance. All students in receipt of awards are entered for the national diploma in professional dance. Dance students may also take General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) levels in dance and one other subject, in the first two years of their course, and external practical examinations in dance, and dance teaching.

2. There are very good opportunities for students to perform. All participate in the annual summer show, which takes place in a local theatre, and the 'Work in Progress' showcase at the school in the spring term. Students also take part in a variety of open days and parents' events. In addition, there is a third-year community performance company, the Taudevin, which performs in local primary and secondary schools, and schools for pupils with special educational needs. The company tours to Germany and has recently received a National Lottery grant.

**Achievements and standards**

3. Standards of performance are high and students' application and willingness to accept technical challenges are exemplary. In tap, students hold their weight well, showing good control. In singing, vocal standards are high in tone, pitch and enunciation, a strength particularly noticeable among students with little singing experience. In a first-year choreography lesson, students were developing social skills as well as producing imaginative dance work. In rehearsals, students achieved high technical standards and a developing grasp of the requirements of performance. In one musical theatre rehearsal, for example, a large group of students divided into small groups and quickly, and professionally, absorbed disparate choreography and vocal lines while maintaining their focus and concentration. Students are quite technically proficient in ballet. Some are developing highly-expressive performance skills, though some lack core stability and strong posture. Good progress was observed in most classes and, when inspired and motivated, as in one outstanding jazz class, improvements were immediate and demonstrable. Students' public performances are of a high professional standard and are notable for the high degree of polish and projection. By the time they graduate, students are confident all-round performers and have acquired a diversity of skills which makes them well qualified for a range of employment in the profession.



4. Performance in external examinations, including GCE A level, is very good. In 2000, for example, all GCE A-level candidates achieved A–E grades. About 30% of students leave the course before completing the third year. Most of those completing gain employment, or enter higher education, soon after graduating. The quality of the work gained by students has improved since the last inspection. Recent employment destinations include European ballet companies, musical theatre tours, cruise ships and private teaching. Former students are working in ballet and musical theatre companies in the United Kingdom and abroad. However, students do not always have sufficient confidence in their achievements and some have aspirations which fall short of their capabilities.

### **Quality of education and training**

5. Most teaching is very good or outstanding. Teachers have a passion for their subjects. Most manage to balance the development of performance qualities with the growth of technical precision. In a ballet class, for example, the teacher was constantly linking exercises to professional practice. Teachers frequently highlight technical elements that are common to the different dance styles. The best teachers use imaginative imagery to convey abstract conceptions. In one jazz class, for example, the teacher described a particular phrase of movement as ‘hot chocolate’ to encourage the students to bring the right feel to their movements. In a Spanish dance class, students picked up the complicated rhythms of the *Sevillianas* very quickly with a teacher who demanded absolute attention to detail. The vocal coach in a first-year singing class managed to elicit some strong and tuneful work from dancers who were unsure of their vocal abilities. The teacher gained the students’ confidence by initially rehearsing spoken lyrics to which melody was then added. Students are good at taking responsibility for organising some of their own learning. For example, there were instances of students working by themselves in small groups to perfect the accuracy of their movements.

6. The assessment of students is rigorous and effective. Formal assessments take place twice a year. In December, second and third-year students are assessed in their core subjects, classical or jazz, and one other chosen subject. First-year students are assessed in all subjects. Assessment standards are based on the criteria of the national diploma. An internal panel of four teachers watches students perform, grades them and awards an aggregate overall mark. Students are then given written and verbal feedback. All reports and assessment grades go into a folder, enabling students to track their own development. Teachers also assess the summer public performance. Students’ fitness is assessed every three months. There are two trained Pilates instructors on the staff and each student has a personal fitness regime that is reviewed regularly.

7. There are about 50 applicants for the course each year, all of whom are offered auditions. The audition process is thorough and very well documented. The audition panel comprises the head of dance and appropriate specialist teachers. Candidates are marked for their aptitude in classical ballet, other types of dance, and singing. In addition, their general health and physical aptitude, their ability to respond to instructions and their motivation are taken into account. There are comprehensive records of all audition outcomes. When they have enrolled, students are either housed in the school boarding house or billeted in approved and supervised lodgings. There is an induction programme for new students, and a very comprehensive handbook giving advice on facilities, transport, assessments, complaints and welfare, and providing other necessary information.

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8. Two tutors are allocated to each year group and students meet once a week for group tutorials. In addition, they meet individually with their tutors as the need arises. Students receive regular information on nutrition, fitness and the 'healthy dancer' programme and, each year, a number of tutorials are devoted to health and fitness. Injury support is satisfactory. The first point of contact for an injured student is an identified dance teacher who can quickly refer students to a visiting sports therapist who is a qualified nurse and responsible for diagnosis and treatment. A physiotherapist visits the school once a month, to give advice and to diagnosis difficult cases. Injuries are recorded and it is possible to track the injury history of any student through their time at the school.

9. A full-time member of staff has responsibility for careers guidance. In their third year, students are given help with developing a curriculum vitae and taught how to find out about jobs, using the Internet. A careers file lists agents, photographers, tax and union advice, and provides examples of jobs listings and contracts. It also contains contacts for employment in the holiday and leisure industry, including cruise ships. Many teachers at the school maintain contacts in the dance profession and these contacts are also made available to students.

10. The curriculum forms a sound basis for the preparation of students for a career in dance. It successfully balances the needs of the profession with those of individual students. There is a detailed course document, which summarises all aspects of the programme, and a flexible and effective timetable which allows students, with guidance, to adapt the curriculum to suit their individual needs. Generally, students opt to focus on classical ballet, musical theatre, or a combination of both. Ballet classes are arranged by ability although, from time to time, students of many different levels are taught successfully in the same class. The flexibility of the timetable allows students to spend time on those areas of their development needing the most attention. The short time between classes means that students and teachers are frequently late for lessons. This lateness can accumulate over a day causing students unnecessary stress.

11. In addition to their main course of study, students may opt for a range of external examinations. While these teaching and academic extras may provide a safety net for some students, they limit the time available for most to hone their professional performance skills to a standard high enough for the best jobs.

12. The school is set in elegant surroundings which include pleasant gardens and a tennis court. The quality of the environment is very high. The main building of the old house contains the dining room, the library and academic teaching classrooms. Learning resources are very good. The computer room has 13 terminals. There is a music room and a recording studio. The library is large and well managed, and houses an extensive range of books and videotapes covering dance and other subjects. There is also a well-stocked careers section. Dance students may use the computers in the library and information and communications technology (ICT) room when they are not being used for teaching, and ICT lessons are built in to the timetable. The eight dance studios are in separate buildings. All are light and well ventilated, of an appropriate size and sound proofed. They have barres and mirrors, pianos, sound equipment and appropriate floor coverings. Staff are well qualified and have had appropriate training and experience for the disciplines taught. Most staff have had ICT training and are able to support students, where necessary. The majority have good professional experience. The school regularly supplements its regular team with guest teachers who are practising dancers or choreographers.

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## Part C: Leadership and management

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

### Strengths

- strong, coherent leadership
- highly-effective operational management
- a commitment to continuous improvement
- a comprehensive range of well-conceived policies and procedures
- very good staff development.

### Weaknesses

- not enough emphasis in development planning on raising standards.

13. The school was last inspected in September 2000. In the relatively short period since the last inspection, improvements have been made, most noticeably in the implementation of the first phase of the building plan. Standards Fund money has been used to enhance the collection of dance books and videos, and new management information systems are beginning to allow the school to collate and examine student data.

14. The leadership of the school is strong. Senior managers are seen by staff as open, trusting, supportive and respectful. The school is the legal responsibility of the five directors of the company who implement the business plan and oversee strategy. They give the school a clear strategic direction. The directors are members of a larger group of guardians, or governors, and patrons who support the school and provide useful links with the dance industry. The head of school leads a senior management team comprising the heads of dance and education and the business manager. Job descriptions are in place for all full-time staff, lines of accountability are clear and communications are good, even with those only teaching a few hours a week. The head of school gives regular staff briefings and there is a comprehensive and useful weekly staff newsletter. Meetings of staff are held regularly at all levels, minutes taken and action points recorded. Among the responsibilities of the head of dance is that for the three-year dance course. Four senior teachers are responsible to the head of dance for classical dance, boy's training, music and musical theatre throughout the school. The operational management of the dance course is highly effective. The course is capably administered and records are properly kept.

15. Management processes are extremely well documented. The school has comprehensive policies and codes of practice for equality of opportunity, appeals and complaints, student welfare, and health and safety, accompanied, where appropriate, by suitable operational procedures. The health and safety committee meets once every two months to review and update policy, and all new staff are inducted into the school's health and safety procedures. School policies are included in the staff handbook.

16. The school has a development plan, to which staff are invited to contribute, and annual targets are set. Planning incorporates a wide range of categories for development, both at whole school and departmental levels. Departmental action plans are detailed and the outcomes are regularly evaluated. However, insufficient priority is being given in the school's planning to raising levels of achievement and employment prospects for students.

17. The school is clearly committed to a programme of improvement. Comprehensive quality assurance procedures are in place and these are largely effective. The course's evaluative statement, or self-assessment report, to which staff are invited to make a contribution, identifies many of the strengths of the institution, but gives insufficient recognition to the effectiveness of leadership and management. It also identifies some weaknesses, and the actions proposed to remedy them. Students are regularly surveyed for their views, but there is not enough constructive use of data, such as that derived from a breakdown of students' employment destinations over time, in informing judgements about the quality of provision.

18. The school is recognised as an Investor in People and a wide-ranging programme of staff development is in place. New staff receive an appropriate induction and there is an appraisal system which contains a large element of self-assessment. Lesson observations are carried out by the head of dance and contribute to the appraisal process. Teachers much value the staff development they receive as a result of this process. Staff development activity may be undertaken in a variety of different ways.

19. The school's equal opportunities policy and code of practice are comprehensive and detailed. There are statements on grievance, harassment and bullying, and information on appeals, for both staff and students. The student handbook contains a charter that sets out the rights and responsibilities of the school and the students. The school has a clear statement and accompanying guidelines on the appropriate treatment of those with additional physical or learning needs and additional detailed guidelines for teachers to help them identify students who may have additional needs. Of the 62 students on the dance course, only six are male. The school has recently appointed a community dance co-ordinator to develop performance projects with schools and the local community to attract male students into dance. The effectiveness of the prospectus in attracting male students is also under review and the school is increasing the number of bursaries available to male dancers.

20. The school manages its resources efficiently. Financial matters are monitored carefully by the business manager. Budgets are set for productions on a break-even basis and the school may seek sponsorship from regular suppliers. Heads of dance and education approve requests for teaching resources. The directors consider a financial statement at their monthly meetings and more detailed management accounts each term. Accounts are audited annually. The school takes steps to secure value for money when purchasing consumables and small equipment.

**Notes**