



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
SLP College Leeds
Performing Arts College

Date of inspection: 21 – 25 February 2005

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Reference:

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	SLP College Leeds
Type of college:	Performing arts college
Principal:	Sandra A Reid
Address of college:	Studios La Pointe 5 Chapel Lane Garforth Leeds LS25 1AG
Telephone number:	0113 286 8136
Fax number:	0113 287 4487
Name of reporting inspector:	Alan Marsh HMI
Date of inspection:	21 – 25 February 2005

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

SLP College Leeds (Studios La Pointe) is a college for performing arts, specialising in musical theatre. In 1991, the college moved to its present site in Garforth, about five miles from the centre of Leeds. It is one of the smallest colleges in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) dance and drama awards (DADA) scheme.

The college was founded in 1974 as a part-time dance school. The three-year, full-time musical theatre course with teacher training options was established in 1991. From 2004 the Royal Academy of Dance teaching course teacher training options were no longer offered as part of the course. The college also runs a one-year foundation course. The college has close connections with a dancing school for children that occupies the premises each evening and at weekends.

The college aims to produce students who realise their full potential as versatile performers whilst retaining their individuality and nourishing their creative spirit.

At the time of the inspection there were 75 students enrolled on the three-year musical theatre course. Some 19 out of 28 students in the first year of the course, and 17 out of 30 in the second year, were in receipt of DfES awards. Only two of the 17 third-year students had DfES awards.

The college operates from one site in a large, converted chapel, together with an annexe studio in an adjacent building. There are 19 regular teachers, of whom two are full-time. Guest teachers also visit the college regularly. The principal is the founder and owner of SLP, and a sole trader.

SLP was last inspected in June 2002 and was graded 2 for the provision and 3 for leadership and management.

How effective is the college?

Key strengths

- much very good teaching
 - high standards in singing and contextual studies classes
 - well-disciplined and highly committed students
 - sensitive and comprehensive support for students
-

- highly effective musical theatre workshops
- effective action taken in response to the last inspection report
- good management with a strong team ethos
- highly effective quality assurance and monitoring

What should be improved

- retention rates
- the level of challenge in a minority of dance classes
- the degree of attack by students in a minority of classes
- the attention paid to standards in the college's self-assessment and planning
- detailed documentation on planning and future targets.

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

Students' view of the college

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

What students like about the college

- the broad range of subjects
- personalised timetables
- experienced guest teachers
- the small size of school allowing individual attention
- the supportive atmosphere
- workshops with touring companies.

What they feel could be improved

- the amount of studio space
 - the number of choreography classes
 - the time and space for individual preparation and practice
-

- the range of guest teachers.

Part B: The Dance Course

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

Strengths

- much very good teaching
- high standards in singing and contextual studies classes
- well-disciplined and highly committed students
- sensitive and comprehensive support for students
- highly effective musical theatre workshops.

Weaknesses

- low retention
- a minority of dance classes insufficiently challenging
- lack of attack by students in a minority of classes.

Scope of provision

1. The three-year musical theatre course offers core subjects of dance, including jazz, ballet, tap and modern, and singing and drama. Complementary subjects include the history and theory of dance, choreography, music theory, musical theatre appreciation, anatomy, fitness and body conditioning. All students in receipt of awards are entered for the national diploma in professional musical theatre.

2. The college mounts two shows a year in local performance venues when all students participate. Students get additional opportunities to perform in a wide variety of local venues for charity and sporting events, and in special commissions and projects, under staff direction.

Achievements and standards

3. Students have maintained the standards of performance achieved in the last inspection. Organising students into classes according to their ability across the years in jazz and ballet has led to a more disciplined approach to dance and helped more students realise their potential. Technical standards in singing are high and students demonstrate confident harmonic choral work and good individual vocal performances. The students approach their work with enthusiasm, although a few lack attack and confidence in their approach. They are

lively and articulate, and produce imaginative and well-researched presentations for their contextual studies. Levels of attendance are high for all classes and students arrive punctually and well prepared. Retention rates have remained low, however, averaging 63% over the last three years. This does not take account of students who left the course early to take up employment contracts.

4. The majority of students find work in the performing arts industry soon after graduation. Of the last three graduating cohorts, all of the 40 students successfully gained employment: five students in commercial television, 11 on cruise liners, 14 in musical theatre touring companies, five in regional musical and dance companies, and five others in pantomime and summer shows. This 100% record is to be applauded, although the college does not maintain contact with all of its graduates beyond their first employment.

Quality of education and training

5. Teaching is very good. The wide range of experienced staff gives the course depth and scope of provision. Most teaching stimulates an appropriate level of response by students, although in some classes students are not always sufficiently challenged. In musical appreciation classes, teachers set imaginative projects to which students respond with creative and well-researched presentations. The organisation of students into classes according to their ability in jazz and ballet has rectified the weakness, identified in the last inspection, of too wide a variation of technical ability in classes. In a musical theatre workshop, combined first and third year students rose to the challenges presented to them in dance and characterisation. In a carefully taught first year *pointe* work class, the teacher used clear imagery to convey correct technique when coming off *pointe*, by asking students to imagine a tennis ball under their heels. Although the better dance classes encourage individuality and high performance values, a minority remain too syllabus-orientated for a professional musical theatre course. In a particularly dynamic tap class, the teacher achieved subtleties and nuances of performance linked to professional practice, combined with high technical standards in rhythm and clarity of beat.

6. Assessment procedures work well and students appreciate their individual tutorial feedback. The weaknesses in the quality of the reflective diaries, referred to in the last inspection, have been addressed with more time for reflection and evaluation, and daily entries and self-assessed progress reports on each discipline. Formal assessments are held twice yearly and action plans for individual students are agreed for the forthcoming term.

7. Classes in ballet and jazz are organised according to ability in order to offer students equal opportunities to maximise their potential. Fitness is an assessed subject in its own right and much emphasis is placed on muscle tone. The course has been enriched by the addition of well-planned musical appreciation classes and weekly musical workshops integrating all three disciplines and taught by teams of teachers. Individual timetables are carefully planned and tailored to students' needs and aspirations. Students appreciate the chances given by touring companies for company classes and workshop days. A one-year foundation course is offered to students who, at audition, are considered not to be ready for the three-year course.

8. Staff and physical resources have both undergone change since the last inspection. Staff restructuring has led to an increase in the variety of expertise across the disciplines. In the music department, for example, qualified teachers include a technical vocal coach, a male classical singing teacher, and three multi-skilled pianists. This level of specialist support is good. The remodelling of the building has increased the changing room facilities and freed more space for working studios, which are good. The gym is very well equipped, although there is no dedicated Pilates room. Studios are bright and well maintained and of an adequate size for the current cohort. The dance studios have been equipped with full-length mirrors. The information and communication technology (ICT) facilities have been improved, although there is no access to the internet. The college library resources are adequate for students' needs and students also have access to a local library. The physical resources, including spaces for independent study and practice, are used to their maximum capacity for the numbers of students in the college.

9. Auditions are conducted fairly with clear and detailed criteria for entrance. A progressively higher technical standard is being demanded and selected each year. The induction process is well thought out and appreciated by students. Pastoral and academic support for students is very good. College-owned residential accommodation is available, particularly for first-year students. There is an effective system in place for monitoring students' injuries, with access to a physiotherapist and local sports masseur when required. Staff members include a qualified counsellor and a teacher qualified in specialist support needs. Third year students receive practical advice in preparation for working in the profession, with audition classes and assistance in finding agent representation.

Part C: Leadership and Management

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

Strengths

- effective action taken in response to the last inspection report
- good management with a strong team ethos
- highly effective quality assurance and monitoring.

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention, in self-assessment and planning, to raising standards
- lack of detailed documentation of planning and future targets.

10. Since the last inspection the college has continued to address issues raised in previous inspection reports systematically. Management accountability, quality assurance processes, standards of teaching, and the physical facilities at the college have all been thoroughly reviewed and improved. There are detailed plans and committed funds in place to extend further the physical resources of the college, and a planning application has been submitted.

11. The college is led and managed by a senior management team, headed by the principal. The vice-principal has specific responsibilities for staff support and development, the monitoring of teaching and learning, and overall quality assurance processes. An advisory board provides a range of perspectives on the work of the college. The college has a clear mission and sense of purpose, but plans, targets and actions for future developments are not fully documented. The development plan for 2004/05 is perfunctory, lacking significant detail.

12. The curriculum is reviewed regularly, and the college responds well to the changing demands of the profession and the needs of its students. Staff meet regularly both within their departments and across the college as a whole and part-time staff are paid to attend. These meetings maintain a sharp focus on students and the curriculum, and are well documented. The open channels of communication lead to high levels of creative collaboration between teachers.

13. There are clear and comprehensive policies and codes of practice for equality of opportunity, health and safety, appeals, discipline and grievance, and personal conduct. These are available for staff and students in handbooks. The college provides well for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, having commissioned a disability audit and provided staff with recent training. The college satisfies the requirements of the Special

Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001. Specialist support is available from qualified staff. Despite adaptations, many parts of the college remain inaccessible to people with significant mobility restrictions. The college has taken a number of measures, including outreach project work in schools and non-traditional venues and the appointment of male teachers, to try and attract more applications from boys, but fewer than 15% of students are male. The college has met its target of having 10% of students drawn from minority ethnic backgrounds. It is also running a publicity campaign and visiting schools to widen the participation of under-represented ethnic groups. A junior associate programme attracts children from across the north of England.

14. The college sets and maintains high standards of personal behaviour and discipline for both staff and students. New staff receive thorough induction and are carefully mentored when they begin teaching. All staff are encouraged to undertake relevant training and development. The majority of teachers are observed during the year by a member of the senior management team, and classes are graded. The results are used in the appraisal process. The grades awarded by the college were slightly higher than those awarded by inspectors. Students' views are canvassed on a wide range of issues, such as facilities and assessment arrangements, and their opinions are taken into account when the college reviews its provision and processes.

15. The majority of staff contribute to the annual self-assessment report, which is compiled by the senior management team. The report for 2004/05 is a clear and accurate account of many of the college's strengths and weaknesses. However, it fails to identify some weaknesses in the standards and achievements of students, such as retention rates and the range and quality of some students' destinations. There is no reference to any aspects of leadership and management that might be improved. A range of other quality assurance measures are effectively implemented. These include continuous assessment tracking by teachers, the active use of elected year heads to represent students' opinions, and the careful recording of why some students leave the course. However, data gathered on retention and destinations are not analysed systematically, and do not inform planning.

16. Resources are managed efficiently and the college's financial position is sound. Accounts are properly audited. Heads of departments are allocated annual budgets; but the college is also able to respond promptly to demand, and resources that will benefit students are often provided at short notice or when opportunities arise. Productions are set a deficit budget and subsidised by the college, to ensure high standards of presentation. Some activities generate income, which is re-invested in the work of the college. There is also a generous provision of bursaries and financial support to assist students who suffer financial hardship.

Notes