



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

# STUDIOS LA POINTE COLLEGE

**Inspection of dance and drama schools in receipt of awards allocated by the  
Department for Education and Skills**

This inspection was carried out by OFSTED under section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. It was a joint inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

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# **STUDIOS LA POINTE COLLEGE INSPECTION REPORT**

**Inspection: June 2002**

## **Basic information about the college**

Name of college:	Studios La Pointe College
Type of college:	Performing arts school
Principal:	Sandra A Reid
Address of college:	5 Chapel Lane Garforth Leeds LS25 1AG
Telephone number:	0113 286 8136
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Name of reporting inspector:	David Hornbrook HMI
Date of inspection:	June 2002

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## **Part A: Summary**

### **Information about the college**

Studios La Pointe is a college for performing arts and teacher training, 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) awards 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. The college's programme also includes full-time singing and teacher training courses, and the Dancing School, an extensive part-time evening and weekend dance provision for children.

At the time of the inspection in June 2002, there were 47 students enrolled on the three-year musical theatre course. None of the 16 first-year students had DfES awards. Some 13 students out of 15 in the second year of the course, and 12 out of 16 in the third year, were in receipt of awards.

The college operates from one site in a large, converted chapel. There are 22 regular teachers, of whom two are full time. Guest teachers also visit the college from time to time. The principal is the founder and owner of Studios La Pointe, and a sole trader.

### **How effective is the school?**

#### ***Key strengths***

- good and very good teaching
- high performance standards in jazz, singing and drama
- well-motivated and self-disciplined students
- effective collaboration between subject teachers
- good student support
- significant improvements to provision since the last inspection
- significant contribution to the management of the college by key heads of department.

***What should be improved?***

- the wide variation in students' technical competence in some classes
- individual guidance and correction
- the clarity of senior management roles
- the attention paid to standards in the college's self-assessment.

**Students' views of the college**

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

***What students like about the college***

- the friendly atmosphere
- good rapport with teachers
- good individual support
- the varied curriculum
- student housing
- the range of specialist input.

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

- the number of studios
- the size of the gym.

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## Part B: The three-year dance and drama course

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

Inspectors observed 16 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	1	1
2	5	1
3	9	8
4	1	5
5	–	1
6	–	–
7	–	–

*Key: The range of grades includes: excellent (grade 1), very good (2), good (3), satisfactory (4), unsatisfactory (5), poor (6) and very poor (7).*

### Strengths

- good and very good teaching
- high performance standards in jazz, singing and drama
- effective collaboration between subject teachers
- well-motivated and self-disciplined students
- good student support.

### Weaknesses

- too wide a variation in students' technical competence in some dance classes
- lack of individual guidance and correction in some classes.



**Scope of provision**

1. The college aims to 'preserve and nourish the individuality and creative spirit' of its students while helping them to develop their full potential as performers. The musical theatre course with teacher training options aims to provide all-round training in dance supplemented by training in singing and drama. Core subjects are dance, including jazz, ballet and tap; singing; and drama. Additional subjects include the history and theory of dance, fitness and body conditioning, and teaching. All students in receipt of awards are entered for the national diploma in professional dance (musical theatre). Students may also take external practical examinations in dance teaching.

2. Opportunities for students to perform in front of an audience are satisfactory. The college mounts summer and winter shows in a local performance venue and all students participate. Students can also opt to take part in a range of small-scale internal and external productions, including, in 2002, performances at the Edinburgh Festival.

**Achievements and standards**

3. Overall, students are realising their potential and many are reaching high standards of performance. Students are highly motivated and self-disciplined. Improvements in standards since the last inspection are most noticeable among second-year students, where levels of technical competence in dance are now satisfactory and standards in jazz, singing and drama are high. In one jazz rehearsal, a second-year female student, who had joined the third-year men, performed with great technical skill, projecting her personality to the audience with maturity and confidence. In singing, students harmonise well and many are also developing good solo voices. In acting, students work creatively together in groups and produce subtle characterisations. Their public performances are of a high standard. A recent performance of *Joseph's Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* was notable not only for the quality of the acting, dancing and singing, but also for the quality of the production. In lessons, students are developing a good understanding of the link between technical instruction and quality of performance. A few third-year students are not achieving satisfactory standards of technical competence in dance, particularly in ballet, although several have strong voices and considerable potential as actors. Pass rates in external examinations are very good. Levels of attendance are high and students are punctual for classes. Retention is about 70%. At the time of the inspection, there were 16 students left in the third year, compared with 24 who started in 1999. Four of these left early for professional work.

4. Most students leaving the course gain employment soon after graduating. In 2000 and 2001, a significant proportion of them became private dance teachers, although the proportion is likely to fall in future because of the college's decreasing emphasis on teacher training. Other first destinations, in recent years, include pantomime, touring companies, cruise ships and television. A small number of students audition successfully for West End musicals.

**Quality of education and training**

5. Most teaching is good, or better. None is unsatisfactory. Teaching is equally strong in jazz dance, singing and drama. Lessons are demanding and professionally orientated, and the teachers' enthusiastic approach generates an energetic and focused response from the students. Classes are well constructed. There are detailed lesson plans, and teachers pay keen attention to the development of students' performance skills and the relating of technique to musical theatre styles. In singing tutorials, sensitive and encouraging teaching produces a good response from nervous individuals. Since the last inspection, there is a much more structured and disciplined approach to the teaching of acting. In one class, all students were actively involved in the direction of a dialogue. The teacher skilfully drew from the students' impressive insights into character and motivation. In dance classes, both heeled work and free jazz are taught with energy and purpose. Tap is also well taught. Students in tap classes pick up routines quickly and cope well with complicated rhythms. In general, teaching is at a level appropriate to students' development. However, in some dance lessons, there is too wide a variation in students' skills and ability, and work is pitched at a level that is too demanding for some students. This is a particular problem in the third year, where students are not receiving enough individual attention in lessons. Although never less than satisfactory, some ballet teaching lacks flair.

6. Procedures for twice-yearly assessment work well, although some assessed classes are over-graded and there is no external moderation. The criteria for assessment are understood by students. Students receive regular formal and informal feedback on their progress. Mark sheets from formal assessments are summarised in a twice-yearly report and an action plan for each student is agreed. Students are required to make entries in their diaries at the end of each class. The exercise is designed to encourage students to be reflective about their progress. However, the quality of the diaries varies significantly and the process is in need of review.

7. The musical theatre course is well designed. It meets the needs of the students and of the profession. Since the reorganisation of the management structure, the course is much more streamlined and focused. Ballet is taught as a core discipline, but jazz dance has replaced ballet as the main dance component, and equal emphasis is now given to singing and drama. The components of the course are brought together effectively and this helps students to develop as rounded performers. Students still have the opportunity to acquire external qualifications in dance and dance teaching, but the time allocated to examination syllabuses has been greatly curtailed, allowing adequate time to be given to the college's core work. The college offers a one-year foundation course that seeks to raise the technical standards of students who, at audition, are judged unready for the three-year course. Most foundation students progress to the three-year course. Visiting professional teachers enhance the curriculum, and students receive lectures on the professional Equity union and on tax matters. The college is in the process of developing links with a local secondary school to further extend students' educational opportunities.

8. Staff are suitably qualified. Most have professional theatre backgrounds and some continue to work in the performing arts industry, providing valuable contacts for students in their search for employment. There are five studios on site, with planning permission for one more. Students also use accommodation in an adjacent community centre. Studios are of adequate quality and are spacious for the number of students. The sound equipment is good and there is provision for live accompaniment. The fitness studio, although small, is well

equipped and used a lot by the students. The library and resources room, which contains two computers, is small, but adequate for most students' needs. The college has increasing access to the learning resources of the local secondary school to which it is linked. Students have the benefit of a subsidised cafeteria on site, which sells nutritionally balanced meals.

9. Parents and applicants receive detailed information about auditions. Criteria for acceptance onto the course are clear, but not sufficiently detailed. The standards set at audition are appropriate and decisions are recorded. Students appreciate their induction to the college. There is a thorough and rigorous introduction to the use of the fitness studio during the first week when students' individual fitness programmes are worked out. Fitness testing for students, at the beginning, and end of each term, is compulsory, and programmes are monitored and updated throughout students' training. Most students live in accommodation owned by the college. Students are well supervised and receive detailed guidance on how to fend for themselves. Injury procedures are very thorough and students' attendance, health and wellbeing are monitored closely. Pastoral care is also very thorough. Students meet the student counsellor, a senior member of staff, at least once a fortnight for a personal tutorial and review of targets. During their third year, students are helped to find agents and are given appropriate preparation for auditions.

## Part C: Leadership and management

Inspectors judged leadership and management to be **satisfactory (Grade 3)**

### Strengths

- significant improvements since the last inspection
- significant contribution to the management of the college made by key heads of department.

### Weaknesses

- lack of clarity over senior management roles
- insufficient attention to standards in self-assessment.

10. The college was last inspected in March 2000. Since then, the college has diligently addressed the issues raised in the inspection report and has made significant advances, particularly in the operational management of the college. Improvements are shown in key indicators of institutional performance, such as levels of attendance, the quality of teaching and effectiveness of learning. The management of the college is now satisfactory, though developing systems still lack overall coherence.

11. Since the last inspection, the principal has devolved responsibilities to involve teaching staff more fully in decision making. The course is divided into departments of ballet, singing/music, musical theatre/jazz, tap/modern and drama, each led by a head of department. Heads of department are responsible for the day-to-day management of the curriculum and are directly accountable to the principal. Although all staff have job descriptions, however, the responsibilities of heads of department are not spelt out in sufficient detail. The head of ballet, for example, undertakes no teaching and is, in reality, a consultant advising the principal. The significant contribution made by a team of heads of department to the management of the college at a senior level is widely acknowledged, but this additional commitment is not sufficiently recognised in the college's management arrangements. The principal is aware of the need to strengthen and extend her existing advisory group and to establish it on a more formal basis.

12. The operational management of the course is satisfactory. The course is very capably administered, records are properly maintained and systems that have been recently introduced, such as those for monitoring attendance, are working effectively. There is no adequate written record of the strategic direction of the college, particularly in relation to its partners. In the light of recent curriculum changes, a review of the college's overall aims and direction needs to be undertaken.

13. The curriculum is reviewed at the end of each year, at a full staff meeting which teachers are paid to attend. Other meetings take place throughout the year and their outcomes are recorded. There are staff meetings at department levels, and heads of department meet the principal regularly. Meetings are not yet keyed into a published planning cycle. Discussion at meetings is largely operational and there are usually opportunities to discuss issues relating to individual students. Key staff, including the principal, maintain and update individual action plans.

14. Since the last inspection, the college has sought advice about improving its management arrangements from a number of sources. The principal has made good use of the college's links with a local school for this purpose. A member of staff has responsibility for quality assurance, and appropriate systems are either in place or being developed. Key elements, such as the use of student questionnaires to gain feedback on performance, and an internal lesson observation programme, are in place. Students' feedback is evaluated and changes are made as a result of their suggestions. Lessons are observed by the principal and heads of department. However, lessons are not graded, and the outcomes of the observations are not analysed in a way which would enable the college to identify and address specific weaknesses in students' achievements or the quality of teaching.

15. Departments each contributed to the self-assessment report, which was then compiled by the principal with outside assistance. The report picks out many of the strengths of the institution. It also identifies some weaknesses and the actions proposed to remedy them. However, the college's evaluation of students' achievements concentrates too much on students' success in external examinations. It does not identify the low standards which exist in some classes. It also overestimates the overall quality of the work which students undertake after leaving college.

16. The college has policies and codes of practice for equality of opportunity, appeals and health and safety. These are available to staff and students, although only the appeals procedure is included in the students' handbook. The college's disabilities policy and code of practice are comprehensive and detailed, and signal the college's commitment to the appropriate treatment of applicants with disabilities. There is a college charter outlining the respective expectations of the college and its students, and there are satisfactory arrangements for complaints and appeals. The health and safety policy adequately covers staff responsibilities and procedures for accidents and emergencies.

17. The college manages its resources efficiently. Financial matters are monitored carefully by the principal, who receives a monthly financial statement. Budgets are set for productions, and heads of department have termly allocations for teaching materials. Students contribute to the cost of their show costumes and the singing/music department produces a small income for the college from external performances. The college takes steps to secure value for money when purchasing services and materials.

**Notes**