

Laine Theatre Arts Ltd

Inspection of colleges in the Dance and Drama Awards

Inspection report

Provider reference	50012
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Main Findings

Course:	Three-year National Diploma in Professional Music Theatre or Dance
Overall effectiveness:	Outstanding (grade 1)
Date of inspection:	6 December 2007

This feedback contains findings from the inspection visit. It draws on the evidence available from performance data, external and internal reviews, other available documentation and interviews held on the day.

The musical theatre or dance course was previously inspected by Ofsted in June 2004 when it was graded outstanding (grade 1) for achievement and standards and the quality of education and training. At a subsequent short inspection in November 2005, the leadership and management of the school were graded good (grade 2).

Achievement and standards

Recent reports produced by Trinity College London show that the standard of acting, singing and dancing in classes and performances has been maintained at an outstanding level. The recent (2007) re-validation report judges the college to be 'an exemplary provider' with 'several outstanding students in every cohort'. Assessors of productions highlighted outstanding work from students in all core disciplines of singing, dance and acting, and in particular commended the 'quality and integrity' of students' ensemble work. They expressed some concern for the standards of classical ballet amongst some first year students, but acknowledged that for these students it was a minor option on their course. Trinity assessors who scrutinised students' contextual studies work commented that they now produced 'very interesting, high quality work in this area'.

Retention is satisfactory, although it fell slightly in 2006: of those students who started the three-year course, some 83% completed it in 2005 and 2007; only 79% completed it in 2006. Of those who completed the course, almost all passed the qualification. Punctuality and attendance are outstanding, and the college instils in its students a very strong sense of personal discipline and responsibility.

A large majority of students gain employment in the performing arts profession when they leave. Over 90% of students who left in 2005 and 2006 found such employment, and of those who left in 2007 over 70% had secured contracts within four months of graduating. Typical jobs include musical productions in the West End, international touring shows, commercial dance and cabaret work and cruise ship shows. A few students secure West End contracts immediately on leaving. For example, some students who left in 2007 are working in *Grease*, *Wicked*, and *Dirty Dancing*.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Students appreciate the very high expectations that teachers have of them, yet are adamant that this hard work does not preclude their thoroughly enjoying most of their training. Teaching is expertly tailored to the individual needs and levels of skill that students have, and teachers use constructive criticism skilfully to enable students to realise their fullest potential. There is a very strong emphasis upon developing in students their own capacity for self-awareness and self-criticism in class, rehearsal and performance, and the college succeeds in preparing students very well for this aspect of their subsequent self-management as performers.

Assessment is rigorous and very effectively structured. Students are assessed and graded for technique and personal application, against a range of standards that are well understood by all and consistently applied. The results of assessment are collated in regular reports back to students, to reinforce verbal feedback. Subject tutorials in the spring term give a reflective overview of students' progress in each discipline, and all students also receive an annual personal review with one of the two vice-principals.

The curriculum is very well designed and provides, as Trinity assessors remark, 'a balanced training in all aspects of the performing arts'. Students have individual timetables which take full account of their levels of technical skill, particular strengths and areas in need of development. They particularly appreciate this sharp focus on their training needs. The musical theatre lessons are highly effective at bringing together into an integrated professional performance forum the three separate core disciplines. Preparation for professional auditions is outstanding. The college uses very imaginative, practical ways to ensure that students are confident, flexible, and as prepared as possible for the demands that may be made of them during their professional working lives.

Support and guidance are outstanding. Weekly group tutorials ensure that students are able to discuss any issues that they wish to, as well as giving them a first point of personal contact for any support they might require.

Tutors work to an agreed set of guidelines, although they have not been formally trained to carry out this work. Students also appreciate that they may approach any more senior member of staff on any issue that concerns them. Students receive good training and advice in personal health management, including nutritional guidance and injury management, and have access to physiotherapy and specialist counselling if required. Students feel very secure in a college that has their all-round welfare as its first priority. Those with additional learning needs or disabilities, such as dyslexia or Aspergers, are given close personal support by teachers when identified as needing it, but the college has no systematic way of diagnosing such needs before the course starts nor of providing support from recognised professionals.

Leadership and management

The college is very well led and managed. Teachers are formally observed teaching as part of their annual appraisal, although in 2006/07 not all teachers were so seen or appraised. Observations are carried out by the principal, and the level of analysis and critical feedback varies according to the particular teacher's discipline. Some observations would benefit from being conducted by a subject specialist. The sharing of good practice amongst the teaching body is, however, already very well established, and there is enthusiasm for a plan to hold a regular series of open classes to which other staff and students would be invited. Teachers thrive in an environment in which they are given a high degree of autonomy to find their own approach to the work within a common framework and ethos. Communications are excellent throughout the college and meetings are businesslike.

Most teachers are well established and bring a wealth of experience from the performing arts profession to inform their work. Few, however, are qualified as teachers. The college is seeking to provide opportunities for recently appointed staff to undertake such training. Students are listened to carefully, and a variety of mechanisms are used – from questionnaires to year-group representatives – to find out what they think and need. For example, recent questionnaires revealed that many students wanted to have more time for singing, and the college is exploring how this might be done.

The college makes very good use of its associated agency to help students find their first contracted work. The very detailed knowledge the agency has of their particular skills means that students can be matched expertly to performance briefs and prepared precisely for auditions. These preparations make a significant contribution to students' early job prospects.

Resources are generally very good. There are only three computers for over 200 students, but many have laptops and they make good use of these. The college has no library or accessible stock of books or journals. This deficiency is partly compensated for by the proximity of the local public library which has an extensive performing arts stock, including musical scores. However, the lack of on-site provision hampers to some extent students' capacity to read and research particular references that arise from their lessons and projects.

Quality assurance and self assessment have improved since the last inspection. The self assessment is a clear, succinct and evaluative document, underpinned by some detailed analysis of performance measures and data. There are some excellent examples of departmental reviews which inform the overall self assessment, and the college seeks to achieve greater rigour and consistency by reference to these models. Overall, the college knows itself very well and is in a position to make informed strategic decisions about its own future development.

Points for consideration

The college might usefully:

- explore further the opportunities for recently appointed staff to train and become qualified as professional teachers
- re-examine its decision not to provide students with an on-site stock of books and journals
- expand the formal lesson observation scheme to allow for teachers to be critically observed by subject specialists
- undertake initial diagnostic assessment of students' additional learning needs and provide professional support where necessary.