

# Millennium Dance 2000 Theatre School

Inspection of colleges in the Dance and Drama Awards

Inspection report

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Provider reference

50030

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## Main findings

Course:	Three year National Diploma in professional musical theatre and dance
Overall effectiveness:	Good (grade 2)
Date of inspection:	12 March 2008

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 and dance course was previously inspected by Ofsted in October 2004 when it was graded good (grade 2) for achievement and standards and the quality of education and training, and satisfactory (grade 3) for leadership and management. At a re-inspection in November 2005, leadership and management were graded as good (grade 2).

### Achievement and standards

Recent reports produced by Trinity College London show that the standards of dance and singing in classes and performances have been maintained at a very high level. The recent re-validation report judges the college to be 'a very good provider' and notes that the 'standards range from good to excellent'. The assessor, in commenting on particular individual performances notes, for example, 'a wonderful voice', and 'a clean, dynamic dancer'. Overall, the quality of work is described as 'exceptional', but it is apparent that 'acting is of a less developed standard than singing or dancing'.

Retention and success rates range from good to satisfactory. They have dropped slightly over the last three years from 81% to 74%, which means that in 2006/07 one quarter of students starting the course did not complete it successfully. In 2007/08 this figure will be no better, since a quarter of the cohort that started in 2005/06 has already left. All those who have completed the course in the last three years have achieved the qualification. The college keeps good records of why some students leave. Punctuality and attendance are very good.

Most students gain employment in the performing arts profession when they leave. From those students graduating in 2006, some 92% had secured work by the time of the inspection; of those who left in 2007, nearly 60% were in work some seven months after graduating. The school collects this information as far as it can from individual students, but it has not analysed the employment histories of students who left before 2006 and its records on these students are not thorough.

Typically, ex-students work in musical theatre on national and international tours, in ballet companies, cruise ships and commercial cabaret. Recent graduates have danced with the Scottish Ballet, Phoenix Dance company and Australian Dance Theatre, sung and danced in *Sinatra* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* on national tours, danced in *The Spirit of the Dance* on a national tour, and joined the National Theatre company. Recent graduates have also won named roles in *Lord of the Rings*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Carmen Jones* and *Mary Poppins*, all in the West End.

### Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are very good and staff and students share high expectations in lessons. Students' skills and development are carefully tailored to their potential and needs. Their versatility as performers is a distinctive feature of the training. One student expressed a commonly held view that 'I am given a lot of control over how I develop' and students are very appreciative of this emphasis on the requirement that they assume significant personal responsibility for their work. Indeed, a clear professional etiquette prevails throughout the school. Technical dance skills are very assiduously taught and assessed throughout the course.

Since the last inspection, the school has sought to improve the quality of singing and has recently appointed a new head of this discipline. She and her team have already made a considerable impact on the technical development of students' voices, on students' musical knowledge and on the focus that singing commands within the curriculum. Consequently, students are developing as more rounded, versatile musical theatre performers and enhancing their job prospects. Acting has not yet been reviewed in this way. Students consider it to be undervalued in the school and it is not yet developed to the same degree as dance and singing. For example, the natural links between the training of the voice for singing and for acting are underdeveloped in the school's overall strategy. The curriculum is otherwise very well balanced, with a strong emphasis on health and fitness. Regular Pilates classes are supported by a Putkisto stretching programme, a powerplate machine and a fitness regime designed to condition the body and build muscle tone and stamina.

Assessment is clear and rigorous. Students receive good, detailed feedback on their work and have ample opportunity to discuss their progress with teachers, tutors and heads of discipline. The school has created a genuinely

open forum in which students feel they can discuss their developing skills with any of the appropriate staff and teachers regularly discuss students' needs and progress. Much of this work is informal, but no less effective for that. Students with perceived learning difficulties are sensitively supported and some staff have been trained in how to recognise such common conditions as dyslexia and eating disorders. Students are not, however, given a routine initial diagnostic assessment on joining the school to ascertain their learning needs, nor are there specialist staff available to advise and support them.

A particular strength of the school, much appreciated by students, is the annual Christmas show in which students create and mount a full evening's entertainment. They assume full collective responsibility for this and staff first see the results at a dress rehearsal. This offers students excellent opportunities to create choreography, build repertoire and consider all aspects of technical and commercial production.

## Leadership and management

The course is strongly led and well managed, with an increasing emphasis upon formal processes and critical self-assessment to tighten up areas of perceived weakness. For example, in order to try and improve retention the interviewing of students at audition is now more rigorous, investigating more thoroughly the circumstances of students' finances and health. The outcomes of students' formal assessments are now beginning to be analysed in order to scrutinise the nature of the training and inform a school-wide discussion of standards and the curriculum.

The self-assessment report is a useful working document and is now supported by a development plan with clear actions, responsibilities and timescales. Quality assurance is generally effective because of the mature, professional liaison that exists between the three directors who have excellent shared insight into all that goes on within the school. Lesson observations are conducted to ensure that teachers are working to consistently high standards. Observations are frequent and often unannounced, but only ballet and contemporary dance lessons are formally observed and evaluations recorded. The school is still in the process of developing an agreed set of common criteria against which to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning in any particular lesson.

Teachers work very effectively as a team and share their ideas and approaches well. All teachers are highly experienced in their specialist artistic field and most have significant teaching experience, but few have teaching qualifications. The school is currently exploring ways of helping teachers become appropriately qualified.

Links with professional companies and agencies are very good. Since just before the last inspection, the school has established its own independent,

associated employment agency to help students find work. This is now improving the school's capacity to track students' destinations and early careers, as well as preparing them more specifically for particular auditions.

Students now have a more formal representation system whereby their ideas and concerns may be put forward for consideration by staff. Students consider that they are listened to carefully and they enjoy the responsibility they are given for their own creative development.

Resources are adequate, but the school acknowledges that studio space is at full capacity. The school actively seeks to attract to the course students from under-represented minority ethnic groups, sharing workshops with a neighbouring south Asian dance company and developing plans for a tour to local schools.

Points for consideration

The school might usefully:

- ensure that more students who start the course complete it
- review and improve the nature and extent of the acting component of the course
- introduce a routine diagnostic assessment to ascertain student's additional learning needs, and ensure that specialist support is available to fulfil them
- explore further the opportunities for staff to train and become qualified as professional teachers.