

The Hammond School

Inspection of colleges in the Dance and Drama Awards

Inspection report

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Audience	Post-Sixteen
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Main findings

Course: Three-year National Diploma in Professional Dance or Musical Theatre

Overall effectiveness: Good (grade 2)

Date of inspection: 6 October 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 dance course was previously inspected by Ofsted in January 2005 when it was graded good (grade 2) for achievement and standards and the quality of education and training. At the same time, the leadership and management of the senior school were graded outstanding (grade 1). A new musical theatre route was introduced in September 2007.

Standards

The validation report for the new musical theatre route from Trinity College London was not available at the time of the inspection. However, Trinity's re-validation report produced in September 2007 covers most of the senior school's work in musical theatre which was, at that time, incorporated in the National Diploma in Professional Dance.

The 2007 report shows that Trinity thought the standard of students' work was good overall, with a few students considered to be worthy of special mention. 'Assessors were clearly satisfied by the teaching and the achievement of standards by the students both in technical assessment and the graduate performance... No student was seen to be weak or failing.' In 2008, at a final year dance students' performance, a Trinity assessor noted that students 'were clean and accurate in their techniques and showed a good sense of performance quality'. Students attain high standards in their support studies; in 2008, Trinity recorded 'a sense of energy, interest and commitment in the students' work'.

Trinity assessors' reports in 2008 for the new musical theatre route have been more variable. One performance report was particularly critical of first year students' acting skills, noting an overall lack of energy and weak voices and students who 'looked uncomfortable and lacked confidence'.

Retention has improved slightly since the last inspection and is now about 80%. All students who completed the dance course over the last three years gained the Trinity diploma.

Students are hard working and committed. Their attendance is excellent, at about 98%. Students are realistic about what they need to do to gain and maintain regular employment. Thoughtful about their learning, they are articulate and measured when expressing their views.

The 2007 re-accreditation report produced by the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) notes that 'students have a very good employment record'. Employment records, which are more complete than at the time of the last inspection, give some indication of graduate employment over time. The majority of graduates quickly gain work as dancers and work patterns for the last three years show employment spanning Europe, America and Japan. One 2006 graduate secured a role in the West End production of *Fame*; others have worked with companies such as Wuppertal Dance Company, Bourne's New Adventures and Lisbon Ballet Company. About a third of recent leavers have had contracts with cruise lines or worked in commercial entertainment.

Quality of provision

In September 2007, Trinity revalidated the professional dance course, judging the Hammond School to be 'a good provider', with 'an emphasis on high-level performance skills, gained through a wide range of performance opportunities and excellence of teaching in a healthy and supportive environment'.

In 2005, inspectors thought teaching and learning were 'very good'. Students' feedback on individual lessons and evaluations are overwhelmingly positive; students say they appreciate both the high standard of teaching and the experience of the industry teachers bring to their classes. Trinity is clear that the high quality of work in support studies 'is driven and supported by staff enthusiasm, and a creative approach which is underpinned by excellent systems'. Teachers are experienced professionals in dance and musical theatre and many have been teaching at the school for a number of years. Some have teaching qualifications and the school supports those who wish to acquire certification in post compulsory education and training. Visiting directors, choreographers and performers complement the work of class teachers.

There is a comprehensive process of student assessment involving judgements about performances, standards in classes and reviews of students' integrated professional studies portfolios. According to Trinity, assessment is 'rigorous, accurate and effective... Students receive detailed and constructive written and verbal feedback on their progress. Students are set clear targets when they are assessed and they are encouraged to assess themselves and their peers. As a result, they say they are always clear about their level of attainment and about what they need to do to improve.

In revalidating the dance course in 2007, Trinity was confident that it was current and met students' needs. 'Core subjects and the course content are entirely appropriate ...' Arrangements for support studies are particularly good. Students choose which route they wish to follow when they enrol but may be counselled to

change after an initial assessment. Information gathered as part of the admission process and in the induction period is used to place each student in a group suited to their level of development. To give them an experience of the rigours of professional work, third year students audition for the Taudevin Performing Company, which works within the local community as well as nationally and internationally. Hammond makes other efforts to become involved locally. For example, the senior school's community dance outreach recently produced an integrated dance piece with two local special schools which was subsequently performed at the Playhouse Theatre in London.

The quality of the accommodation has improved dramatically since the last inspection with the completion of a fine new performing arts centre and performance opportunities for all students have been significantly enhanced by a large, on-site theatre. A number of new, well-appointed studios have enabled the senior school to reduce class sizes, an issue at the time of the last inspection. Other resources, such as those for music, continue to be good.

The care and guidance of students are good, with the school's strong caring ethos resting on a supportive structure based on the careful consideration of each student's needs. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own health and fitness and, following a fitness screening, they negotiate individual fitness programmes. Injury support is good. In 2007, the CDET reported that 'the care and well-being of students is enhanced by initiatives to prevent injury' and that 'a well structured rehabilitation system for injured students is in place'. Diagnostic testing during the induction fortnight includes a writing task and support is available to students with dyslexia and for any student who has English as an additional language. The tutorial system is good and students enjoy high levels of individual attention. However, students report that although they feel well prepared for work, they believe that their relatively low exposure to agents may be impeding their employment prospects.

Leadership and management

In reaccrediting the dance course in 2007, CDET noted the senior school's strong and clearly focused leadership which enabled students 'to take responsibility for their learning within a well-defined and supportive structure'. The operational management and leadership of the dance provision continue to be good. Weekly dance staff meetings informally monitor both courses and address the needs of individual students when necessary. However, existing management arrangements, where the head of dance is simultaneously head of musical theatre, do not sufficiently reflect the need to give both dance and musical theatre courses clear, accountable leadership.

There is a well-structured development plan and many elements of an effective quality assurance process are in place. However, while much useful information is collected, it is not effectively brought together to provide an overall analysis of the quality of the two courses which can be used to drive improvement. Teachers are regularly observed as part of the appraisal process and students' questionnaires are

used to elicit feedback. However, Hammond provides no overall judgement about the quality of teaching in the dance and musical theatre courses or any analysis of its features. Similarly, although the school collects records of graduate employment, this information is not fully exploited either to illuminate the courses' strengths and weaknesses or to inform curriculum development. Hence, while the self-assessment report contains a wealth of information, it is too dependent on assertion rather than evidence-based judgements to be a useful quality assurance tool. Crucially, the report needs a more detailed focus on outcomes in the key areas of standards, employment and the quality of teaching and learning.

Adjustments to the courses made over the past few years, such as the reduction in time allocated to GCE A levels, may have been influenced by external monitoring. However, no action plans were made available to show how the school has responded to the issues raised in the previous Ofsted report or to the reports of Trinity assessors.

Points for action

The school must:

- ensure that the quality assurance process for both courses is based upon a rigorous process of self assessment at course and subject level and clear, accountable leadership
- that suitably monitored action plans are created in response to external judgements about the quality of the provision.

Points for consideration

The school might usefully:

- continue to explore ways of supporting students into employment and bringing them into contact with the dance and musical theatre industry
- further develop the systems for recording and evaluating graduate employment.