



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Short Inspection Report
The Arts Educational Schools London
Dance & Drama College

Dates of inspection: 23 and 24 March 2004

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The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspects dance and drama colleges in receipt of awards allocated by the Department for Education and Skills.

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	The Arts Educational Schools London
Type of college:	Performing arts school
Principal:	Iain Reid
Address of college:	Cone Ripman House 14 Bath Road London W4 1LY
Telephone number:	0208 987 6666
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Name of reporting inspector:	Ian Spencer (ALI)
Dates of inspection:	23 and 24 March 2004

Part A: Summary

The Arts Educational Schools London, known as ArtsEd, is an independent provider of performing arts training and is based in Chiswick, west London. The Cone School of Dancing, founded in 1919 and the Ripman School, founded in 1922, merged in 1939. They adopted their present name in 2000, with branches in London and Tring, Hertfordshire. The London schools moved to their present location at Cone Ripman House in 1986, and separated from the Arts Educational School, Tring Park in 1994. The college comprises a pupils' department for young people aged eight to 18 specialising in expressive arts, and two vocational training schools for older students. The school of musical theatre offers a three-year Bachelor of Arts degree with honours (BA Hons) in musical theatre and the national diploma in professional musical theatre. The school of acting offers a Master of Arts degree (MA) in acting, a three-year BA Hons degree in acting, the national diploma in acting and the national certificate in professional acting. The pupils' department was not within the scope of this inspection.

At the time of the short inspection in March 2004, 250 students were following the degree-level programmes. Of these, 126 were enrolled on the BA musical theatre course, 23 on the MA course in acting, and 101 on the BA acting course. Of the total number of students, 166 were in receipt of DfES dance and drama awards as follows:

Entry year	2003	2002	2001
BA (Hons) musical theatre	29 of 43	31 of 40	31 of 43
BA (Hons) acting	21 of 33	23 of 34	23 of 34
MA acting	8 of 23		

There are 15 full-time management, administrative and maintenance members of staff. In the schools of musical theatre and acting there are 37 visiting specialist tutors and 50 visiting professional directors, choreographers and musical directors. The college is a limited company with charitable status. The two schools of acting and musical theatre are each managed by a director, assisted by heads of section. The pupils' department is run by a headmaster. The directors and headmaster are accountable to the dean, who has overall responsibility for the strategic direction and smooth running of the organisation. The dean is accountable to the council of management.

The last full inspection of the Arts Educational Schools London took place in October 2002, when achievement and standards, and the quality of education and training in both musical

theatre and acting were graded outstanding, as were leadership and management. The October 2002 report can be downloaded from the OfSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

On the basis of the short inspection carried out in March 2004, inspectors are satisfied that the outstanding standards reported at the last inspection have been maintained.

Part B: Leadership and management

Inspectors judged leadership and management to be outstanding (**Grade 1**)

Strengths

- highly effective leadership
- active development work with external organisations
- effective management of the learning programmes
- a strong commitment to continuous improvement
- good quality assurance
- thorough staff appraisal and development programmes
- well managed resources.

Weaknesses

- under-developed use of data on student destinations.

1. The leadership of the organisation remains highly effective. The dean works closely with the directors of the schools of acting and musical theatre to follow a coherent strategy for the development of the organisation. Members of the senior management team present development ideas for consideration and approval by the council of management. The council, which is the organisation's governing body, is made up of professionals from a variety of backgrounds, including education and finance; it provides the dean with a unique advisory resource. A five-year business plan for the Arts Educational Schools sets out the mission and aims of the organisation. The aims are articulated through seven key objectives which take into account past performance and achievements, using these as a base-line from which to set demanding targets. All business plan decisions are moderated against external factors which may influence the future direction of Arts Educational School. The business plan is both realistic and ambitious, and is founded on a clear requirement to maintain and enhance existing high standards.

2. There is strong emphasis on the cultivation of external links, both to develop performing opportunities for the students and enhance the reputation of the school. These include performance tours around local further education colleges and open days for secondary schools. The organisation's head of development is the chair of Prospero, a European network for higher education institutions involved in theatre arts. Together with the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA), Prospero is helping to develop a European credit accumulation and transfer scheme to allow students to create degree

programmes which are built around pan-European study. The college has strong links with the theatre industry, including one with the Royal Court Theatre. Productive relationships with a number of theatrical agencies result in students having the benefit of a high representation of agents and casting directors at the Arts Educational Schools student summer showcase performances.

3. The acting and musical theatre courses are effectively managed and internal communication structures are good. Within each school there are two full staff meetings a term, which the dean attends as necessary. The senior management teams of the two schools meet independently each week to discuss operational and student-related issues, and these are detailed in minutes of the meetings. The dean monitors the work of each school through his monthly meetings with all senior managers and also holds individual meetings to monitor managers' progress. There is a group meeting in which good practice is shared and cross-organisational issues are discussed. Formal meetings are supplemented by effective informal communications. The organisation produces an informative monthly bulletin, together with a regular newsletter, which celebrates the success of the college's work. Job descriptions are in place for all full-time staff and lines of accountability are clear.

4. The atmosphere at the Arts Educational Schools is one of mutual and professional respect between students and staff. High standards of discipline and behaviour are demanded of students. Staff pay careful attention to feedback from students about the day-to-day operation of the learning programmes. Both schools have formal mechanisms for the collection of students' views. In the school of acting, year tutors meet with their student groups each week to discuss issues and concerns. Student representatives are also elected to discuss issues directly with the heads of department. In the school of musical theatre, two student representatives from each year group are elected to form a student council. They meet every six weeks to collate the views of their colleagues and communicate these to the heads of department. Students are confident that when issues are raised with staff their concerns are taken seriously and appropriate action is taken. Examples of improvements introduced in response to students' concerns include changes to the film and television curriculum, the introduction of stage combat into the MA course, the increased clarity of assessment criteria and written feedback, and the resolution of health and safety issues. The musical theatre student council introduced the idea of first-year students acting as mentors to applicants who had accepted places, good practice which was then adopted by the acting school.

5. The arrangements for quality assurance and monitoring within the Arts Educational Schools are of a high order. In September 2003, the college brought all elements of quality assurance into a single annual cycle in order to improve co-ordination, avoid duplication of effort, and compare and contrast achievements across the schools. A quality assurance schedule now sets dates for aspects of the quality assurance cycle to be completed by all students, staff, schools and other departments. Dates are determined by external deadlines, set by awarding, monitoring and funding bodies, and related to internal requirements for staff appraisal, course review, self-assessment and budgeting.

6. The thoroughness of the quality assurance framework is demonstrated by the college's rigorous self-assessment reports, and the overall organisational self-assessment for the leadership and management of the whole of the organisation. Each aspect of self-assessment is formed around the key questions in the *Common Inspection Framework* (CIF), with self-devised quality statements being set and agreed against each CIF key question. Each quality statement is supported by an evidence base and this evidence is reviewed to identify strengths and weaknesses, which in turn lead to action points for improvement. Inspectors were able to track the cycle and examine evidence that action taken resulted in demonstrable improvement to the learning experience of students. One example is the improvement made to the library, which has been significantly increased in size. Library opening hours have been increased from 11 to 35 hours per week, appropriate stocks of books, periodicals, videos and CDs have been purchased and a purchasing plan is in place. The staffing of the library has been increased by the appointment of a part-time librarian to support the existing full time appointment.

7. Data on students' destinations are gathered annually. However, this information is not organised in a way that enables trends to be identified or benchmark comparisons to be made.

8. In both vocational schools, there is a formal cycle of teaching observation and annual appraisal. These procedures identify the development needs of individual members of staff. Through staff development events, teachers are able to improve their subject knowledge and teaching skills, and introduce the curriculum innovation necessary to ensure that the college's courses reflect contemporary practice in the professional performing arts sector. The dean monitors and comments on all the appraisals, ensuring that there is a clear link between the appraisal process, the maintenance of high teaching standards, curriculum relevance and the overall business aims and objectives for the college.

9. The acting and musical theatre schools have satisfactory policies and codes of practice for health and safety, equal opportunities, discipline and complaints. These are contained in the student course handbooks and a staff code of practice. For example, both schools have a strict policy requiring punctuality and attendance. Whilst a summary of the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities does not appear in the prospectus, a short disability statement signals a commitment to the appropriate treatment of applicants with disabilities. The ground floor of the Arts Educational Schools is adapted to ensure access for people in wheelchairs. However, the rest of the building remains inaccessible for people with restricted mobility. The schools monitor the background and ethnicity of applicants, those called for audition and those enrolled. Monitoring identifies that the success rate for applicants from under-represented groups is high, but that the number of applications for entry is low, despite the promotion of the Arts Educational Schools courses in publicity material, schools, and community settings locally and nationally. Currently, 8.5% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college is addressing how it will broaden an already diverse student intake: it is starting to put in place support mechanisms and staff development strategies to cater for future changes to the composition of the student body. It is too early to judge the impact of these measures.

10. The organisation continues to develop and manage its resources efficiently. Great care is taken to ensure that funding is used effectively. Finances are monitored carefully by the financial controller, who provides monthly reports of expenditure against budget to the heads of each department. The dean monitors all aspects of the accounts on a monthly basis and circulates copies to the council of management of the financial sub-committee. The accounts are also presented to the full council of management at their quarterly management meetings. Each school submits an annual budget request for approval by the dean as part of the Arts Educational Schools quality improvement cycle. The overall budget is signed off by the council of management. The organisation maintains an operating surplus and a contingency fund for repairs and renewals. The accounts are audited annually. The external auditors also produce the annual accounts, which are presented to the council of management.

Notes