

Liverpool Theatre School & College Limited

Dance and drama school

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2019

Overall effectiveness		Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding	
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Leaders and managers have improved the quality of the provision markedly since the previous inspection and its overall effectiveness is now outstanding.
- Staff and students are strongly committed to the school's mission; they are proud to work and train at the school, and rightly recognise the strong and supportive leadership of the principal.
- Teachers have extensive industry experience; they provide detailed and insightful advice to students, which helps them improve and develop as performers.
- Students' work ethic is excellent; they readily understand the need to keep fit and to adopt a healthy lifestyle to help them succeed.
- Students receive extensive, high-quality advice and guidance from teachers and visiting professionals, which help them prepare for progression into work.
- Students develop their skills and performance quality to a very high standard. They acquire a diverse range of skills, over and above their main performance disciplines.
- Most students achieve their diploma and progress to sustained employment once they complete the course.
- Students develop the critical skills and independence they need to succeed when working in the industry.
- Students demonstrate only a limited awareness of British values and the 'Prevent' duty.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Liverpool Theatre School and College Limited (LTSC) is a private theatre school in Liverpool. The school recruits students aged 16 and above from across the UK, with the majority coming from Merseyside and Lancashire. The school prepares students for careers in acting and musical theatre. The three-year course leads to a level 6 diploma awarded by Trinity College. LTSC is accredited by the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre.
- At the time of inspection, 37 students were enrolled on the three-year diploma, of whom 30 were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award funding.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure managers create suitable opportunities for teachers to improve students' understanding of British values and the 'Prevent' duty.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders define a clear mission for the school, to provide high-quality, professional training to talented young people within a safe, supportive environment, helping them to pursue their dreams regardless of background. All staff are strongly committed to this mission. They are very proud to work at the school, and rightly recognise the strong and supportive leadership of the principal.
- The quality of the provision has improved markedly since the previous inspection. Leaders have extended the curriculum to introduce an acting strand, alongside the musical theatre strand. As a result, new staff have been appointed, introducing new ways of thinking to the design and delivery of the curriculum, and enhancing the breadth and quality of the course for all students. The leadership team continues to explore further opportunities to develop the curriculum and the quality of the accommodation in which the school is located.
- All teachers have extensive relevant professional training, and experience of working in the performing arts industry. They provide very high-quality education and training to students, and inform them well about the rigours and expectations of working professionally in the industry.
- Quality assurance procedures are highly effective. Staff review and analyse the quality of the programme in detail and produce a clear and concise quality improvement plan. Leaders and managers have successfully addressed many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, and raised the overall effectiveness of the provision at the school to an outstanding level.
- The quality of accommodation and resources around the school is good. Leaders exhibit photographs and bulletins which celebrate the high quality of past productions, and the professional successes of alumni. These displays motivate current students to achieve high standards.
- Leaders and managers have suitable procedures in place to review the quality of teachers' work, and to set clear developmental targets for them. While a minority of staff have the opportunity to attend occasional external training courses relevant to their professional development, teachers rightly indicate that relatively few opportunities exist for all staff to attend in-house training activities.

The governance of the provider

- The school does not have any formal governance arrangements. However, the principal uses external partners effectively as 'critical friends' to help monitor and assure the financial welfare, strategic direction and quality of provision at the school.
- While senior leaders rightly recognise the potential benefits of introducing an advisory or governing board, they have not yet put such a group in place.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Students feel safe in and around the school. They are clear to whom they would turn if they had any concerns about themselves or fellow students. Senior staff responsible for safeguarding maintain suitable links with external organisations, to which they can turn in the event of a safeguarding concern. They also adhere to safer recruitment practices.
- Students know how to stay safe online. In particular, they learn how their image on social media can have a substantial impact on their job prospects. Managers do not ensure that teachers create enough opportunities to improve students' understanding of British values and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers design and deliver very high-quality technical training across the performance disciplines, including acting and dance techniques, voice, singing, stagecraft and movement. This enables students to develop their skills and performance quality to a high standard as they progress through the school.
- Teachers are highly accomplished. They prepare thoroughly for lessons and share with students their excellent command of their performance disciplines. Students have a broad subject knowledge base. For example, during work on a Joe Orton play, students clearly demonstrated the breadth of their knowledge, through appropriate and topical references to the diaries of Kenneth Williams.
- Teachers have a fastidious attention to detail. They create an environment in which it is safe for students to experiment with how they develop their performance skills, and, at times, to fail. They teach students how to critique each other's work in a constructive and supportive manner. They then provide detailed, insightful advice to students, to help them improve and develop as performers.
- Teachers are ambitious for their students. They design the course to be both physically and mentally challenging. At the beginning of each lesson, teachers communicate clearly to each student their targets and objectives for the session, and check students' understanding. They provide encouragement and precise explanation of how each student can improve. For example, in a ballet lesson, the teacher gave accurate correction to individual students on their posture and alignment. As a result, the quality of the students' performance improved.
- Students thoroughly enjoy their training and are committed to the school. From the strenuous early-morning student-led warm-up, through to the late-afternoon practical classes, they respond very positively to the physicality of the course, engaging fully in the demands that it places on them. This immersive approach enables them to improve and develop as performers.
- Teachers use skilfully techniques such as improvisation to explore the accurate portrayal of emotions through performance. For example, in an acting session, students explored and experimented with the techniques of Stanislavsky when creating characters for performance. This work enabled them to understand how to communicate the emotions of the character to the audience.

- Teachers provide detailed, accurate and constructive feedback to students on all aspects of their professional development. The assessment and feedback give students excellent insights into how they can develop as performers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Students show a strong commitment to the ethos and values of the school. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. The courtesy and respect they show each other, and teachers, are outstanding.
- All students strictly adhere to the dress code. Their attendance and punctuality are excellent. They arrive fully prepared for lessons and are motivated and eager to learn. For example, at 8.30am every morning, third-year students run a mandatory, strenuous physical and vocal warm-up session. Students attend this promptly and enthusiastically. They recognise the value and benefits these sessions provide in helping prepare them for the daily rigours of their training.
- Students develop their performance skills to a very high standard. For example, a group of musical theatre students rehearsed and performed complicated four-part harmony with outstanding skill. Students have good access to a range of additional activities such as Pilates and vocal coaching, which help them extend their performance quality and skills.
- Students develop very good learning habits. Teachers give students the skills and understanding they need to review their own work, and the work of others. Students provide feedback to each other in a respectful and constructive manner. Recipients recognise the value of receiving feedback from their peers. These techniques enable students to develop the critical skills and independence they will need when working in the industry.
- Students readily understand the need to keep fit and to adopt a healthy lifestyle. They receive extremely helpful guidance on aspects of their performance, such as posture and alignment. Teachers also provide complementary advice, for example on healthy eating, hydration and injury prevention.
- Teachers ensure that students understand the demands of the industry, such as the importance of self-discipline and reliability if they aspire to work and progress in the industry. Teachers also make clear the extremely high level of competition that students will face when they work in the industry. This advice ensures that students have realistic expectations of how they might progress and succeed as performers.
- Students receive extensive advice and guidance from teachers and visiting professionals to assist them in preparing for progression into work. For example, a theatre agent provided detailed advice to students on how to gain agency representation. Final-year students also receive valuable guidance on themes such as producing a suitable CV, preparing for auditions and the benefits of joining the performers' union. This advice provides students with the insight and confidence they need to apply for professional work once they complete their diploma.
- Students demonstrate only a limited awareness of British values and the 'Prevent' duty and are not yet fully aware of how issues of equality and diversity might affect their aspirations and those of their peers.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Students, both on the acting and musical theatre strands of the course, acquire a diverse range of skills, over and above their main performance disciplines. For example, acting students acquire valuable skills in dance and singing, while musical theatre students develop their acting skills to a high level. This approach helps students become versatile performers and maximises their chances of gaining work in the industry.
- The quality of students' performance work in all disciplines is consistently of a very high standard. For example, when rehearsing 'Cell Block Tango', dancers repeatedly practised a long and demanding choreographed routine with assiduous attention to detail. They demonstrated complete focus and commitment to their work. As a result, the dancers' accuracy and ensemble improved with each run.
- The proportion of students who complete and successfully achieve their qualifications is consistently high. Most students complete the course, and all those who complete achieve the diploma.
- Over the past five years, the proportion of learners who have gained agency representation within a short time of completing their course has risen significantly and is high. Each year, several students have received multiple offers from agents, and have therefore been able to be selective about the agency they choose.
- On completion of their diploma, the vast majority of graduates successfully progress into regular employment in the industry. Roles vary widely, depending on the interests of the student. Graduates gain contracts on cruise ships, in regional theatres, in national touring productions, and in the West End. A small proportion of graduates opt for other related options, such as top-up degree courses at university, or develop careers as teachers. Managers maintain comprehensive records about the career pathways and professional engagements of the school's alumni.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50010
Type of provider	Dance and drama school
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	43
Principal	Maxine Ellis
Telephone number	0151 728 7800
Website	www.liverpooltheatreschool.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	28

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Peter Nelson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christopher Young	Ofsted Inspector
Christina Christou	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019