

Tring Park School for the Performing Arts

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

Unique reference number: 117618

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Information about the college

1. Tring Park School for the Performing Arts is a boarding and day school for boys and girls aged 8 –19. There are four vocational courses in the upper school: a three-year dance course, a two-year musical theatre course, a two-year performance foundation course and a two-year drama course, which all run alongside a full academic curriculum. Only the professional diploma in dance course receives external funding.
2. There are 312 pupils enrolled in the school, with 146 students in the sixth form, of whom 74 are on the sixth form dance diploma course. Of the 74, thirty-nine are in receipt of dance and drama award (DaDa) funding from the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA), around 53% of the course, and 12% of the school as a whole. The school also has funding from the music and dance scheme (MDS) for elite dancers, with 17 MDS-funded students in the sixth form, equating to around 22% of the sixth form dance course. The school received 14 DaDa-funded three-year awards for the academic year 2010/2011. Tring Park School was last inspected for DaDa in May 2008 when overall effectiveness was graded as good.

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Grade 1

Overall effectiveness

3. Tring Park School for the Performing Arts is an outstanding school, with outstanding capacity to improve. The staff and managers of the school provide highly skilled tuition and guidance in a safe and caring environment. Students respond extremely well to the training and care they receive. They develop rapidly into self-reflective practitioners who have a strong desire to hone skills and perfect technique.
4. Progress is excellent, as are achievement and retention. During the past three years, almost all students have completed their training successfully and gained their professional dance qualification. The destinations of students have improved year-on-year, and especially since the school has developed a sustainable third year to its programme. The school does track destinations but should improve its tracking of time spent by graduates in first, second and subsequent roles. Graduates in recent years have been successful in gaining places with prestigious employers such as The English National Ballet Company, Ballet Cymru, Scottish Ballet Company, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Transitions

Dance Company, and Ballet Theatre UK. Graduates have also gone into shows including major productions such as the *Mama Mia!* international tour, *Rock of Ages*, *We Will Rock You*, *Evita* and others. Many graduates move to significant roles quickly.

5. Teaching and learning are good overall, with many outstanding lessons. Students enjoy their training and place great value on the very significant professional experience and expertise of their teachers. Very well planned and executed activities, clear differentiation of tasks, and careful and productive use of peer learning and demonstration are hallmarks of some of the strongest classes. Teachers give excellent correction and individual support in all classes, and students make very effective use of dance journals to record corrections on performance. Students develop very good technique and are able to push themselves to achieve in a safe environment. In all sessions there is excellent concern for physical safety and injury prevention.
6. The core styles units of the programme are very well supported by the integrated professional studies unit, which gives an outstanding preparation for auditions, for life as a professional dancer and for a 'second career' in a wider vocational setting. Many graduates who return to the school some years after leaving speak of the excellent ways the course prepared them for working life. Support and guidance are impressive throughout the course, and students value highly the individual attention and care they receive.
7. Managers set a clear direction for the school and communicate their vision with openness and clarity. A very wide range of measures provide students with a voice in the running of the school, and they feel that their views are taken seriously. In recent years a number of beneficial changes to course design have taken place following student feedback. The school self-assesses well, and has in place a number of effective processes to ensure the quality of provision. The teaching and learning observation systems are being improved, and there is a need to standardise observation judgements and grading in order to ensure reliability. The assessment process provides an excellent means for managers to assess the quality of student performance and teaching and learning. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding, as are measures to promote equality and diversity. The school has significantly enhanced its teaching and rehearsal resources with the completion of five new dance studios.

What does Tring Park School need to do to improve further?

- Improve the recording and monitoring of graduates' destination and progression data, including the recording of time spent in initial and subsequent roles.
- Refine further the arrangements for teaching and learning observation including the formal standardisation of observers' judgements and the placing of greater emphasis on pedagogical skills in observation reports.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the wide range of dance styles that they are able to study
- the strong industry links and experience of their teachers
- the caring, family atmosphere of the school
- the useful and interesting integrated professional studies course
- the strong preparation for a 'second career' after dancing
- the willingness of staff to deal with individual needs
- very comprehensive health and well-being support systems
- the new dance studios
- increased opportunities to perform and showcase work outside the school
- the thorough twice-yearly assessment process, which provides an opportunity to make comments on the course and receive detailed individual guidance.

What learners would like to see improved:

- increased opportunities to focus on character in performance.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the thorough training that prepares Tring Park graduates for demanding professional work
- the confidence of graduates
- the evident maturity of graduates
- the ability of Tring Park graduates to move quickly into roles of responsibility
- the very high levels of understanding of health, well-being and injury prevention amongst students and graduates.

What employers would like to see improved:

- greater development of graduates' ability to project character in roles.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

8. Outcomes for students are outstanding and have been so since the previous inspection. The range and quality of graduate destinations has improved during the past three years since the school has established a sustainable third-year cohort. Many graduates now secure significant work and sustain employment with notable companies. In their employment, many graduates progress quickly to roles of greater prominence, including as soloists and lead dancers. Graduate destinations are tracked, but monitoring of time spent in first, second or subsequent jobs is not routinely undertaken. The standard of students' work in classes is very good. Students derive very high levels of satisfaction from the trust placed in them and the high expectations the staff have of them. Teaching and learning are good overall with many outstanding features. The balance of the academic and dance curriculum is very well managed and students are given outstanding guidance and support, especially on health, safety and injury prevention. Students are well prepared for their working lives through an excellent integrated professional studies course.
9. The dance department and the dance course are very well managed. In the four years since the previous inspection managers have dealt successfully with all of the points for action and all but one of the points for consideration identified by inspectors. Communications amongst teachers and managers are excellent and there is a clear and purposeful focus on students' growth, well-being and success. Self-assessment and action planning processes are comprehensive and inclusive. The current self-assessment report is broadly accurate in its identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and is suitably self-critical. Lesson observations are undertaken frequently, but a planned standardisation of observers' judgements has yet to occur.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

10. Achievement levels are exceptionally high. Retention and success rates were outstanding at the previous inspection and remain so. Over 98% of students who start the course complete it, and all of those achieved the qualification. Trinity college reports are very positive and the most recent speaks of 'talented students who clearly enjoyed the opportunity to perform in professional standard works.' Other reports identify many excellent individual performances focusing, for example, on students' articulation in lyrical work, on pure lines, secure jazz alignments and technical precision.
11. Retention of students on the courses is excellent, with very few withdrawals during the period since the previous inspection. Students have a mature and highly responsible attitude towards their training and towards the wider school body. Punctuality at classes is excellent. Throughout the years of the diploma

course, students apply themselves to their studies with energy and enthusiasm, despite what are often considerable workloads and long working days.

12. Students feel exceptionally safe and speak of a strongly caring family atmosphere at the school. However, as they move from first to third years they are given, and accept, progressive levels of additional responsibility and independence. Second and third-year students value highly the independence of off-site boarding houses and self-managed accommodation.
13. All students have a mature and highly developed understanding of health and safety, nutrition and safe dance practice. Teachers, managers and support staff provide outstanding guidance on injury prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. The excellent integrated professional studies unit of the course provides students with a very strong grasp of the professional environment in which they hope to work, and develops confidence in students as they approach auditions and their graduation. The school's focus on 'second careers' is constructive and is much valued by the students.
14. Through the 'Reach4Dance' and various other community and schools-based projects, students make an excellent contribution to the local community and the dance community. Teachers in schools with whom students have worked speak highly of the benefits for their pupils.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

15. Teaching and learning are good overall with many outstanding features. Students value the professional expertise and extensive industry experience of their teachers and work very hard to develop their own practice in this light. The best classes provide excellent pace, good levels of challenge, varied use of demonstration, and productive use of imagery; for example, to allow students to understand lines of energy generated through the body. Teachers in most classes make effective use of peer learning and peer support. Students have high levels of enthusiasm for, and engagement with, their classes, which they clearly enjoy. They are very keen to improve their practice and make progress, especially because they are set according to ability and progress in each of their dance style classes. Dance journals are very well used to record teachers' corrections and reflect on practice.
16. Students appreciate the challenges made of them in the best classes, and value highly the close support they receive from teachers and their peers. They also appreciate the fact that staff know them very well and the way that this enables staff to make specific detailed comments about progress and technique. All students acquire impressive contextual knowledge of the profession and can articulate their often sophisticated understandings of dance both as an art form and a way to earn a living. Through student managed and devised project performances they enjoy very good opportunities to practice front of house, stage management, choreographic and other skills.
17. Students benefit from frequent contact with guest practitioners, who give very good insights into the sort of professional demands they are likely to encounter

on leaving the school. However, some guest teachers have commented on the need to develop in students a broader range of performance skills over and above their core subject technique. Practitioners and employers have commented on the need for students to present character more convincingly in performance. Opportunities to perform beyond school settings have improved considerably since the previous inspection, and third-year students now perform in the school, in a London theatre and on tour.

18. Arrangements to observe the quality of teaching and learning are comprehensive in scale, with frequent observation of all staff in a range of settings. However, standardisation of observers' judgements, though planned, has yet to be carried out. Judgements on existing reports are at times generous, and there is a variation in the quality and methodology between observers, and sometimes insufficient focus on teaching and learning. In addition to routine observations of teaching and learning, managers undertake a twice-yearly sequence of assessment sessions. These are highly effective in giving staff and managers an opportunity to deliver detailed assessments of students' progress and technique, and students an opportunity to comment on the quality of teaching and learning. Staff, students and managers value these assessments highly and all make very good use of the feedback they receive.
19. Partnership working has increased in scale since the previous inspection and is excellent. The staff of the school have a wide range of very well-placed industry contacts whom they use for the benefit of students. Employers, including prestigious companies such as English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet, and Ballet Cymru, speak highly of the maturity, strength, reliability and developed technique of graduates. In its work with local and regional schools, the school also provides students with valuable experience. Such work also provides an important first experience of dance and a route into training for numbers of pupils from minority and under-represented groups. The school provides opportunities for many local pupils from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds with its bursaries and scholarships.
20. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The well-developed network of health, pastoral, academic and vocational support professionals ensures that all students are able to achieve their potential. Communications between specialist health and well-being professionals and teachers is frequent and focussed. Students feel very well cared for, and have confidence in seeking support for any vocational, academic or health problems. Guidance on health and safety, nutrition, injury prevention and rehabilitation is impressive. Pilates classes condition students and encourage good posture, and the services of a physiotherapist, nurse, general practitioner and orthopaedic specialist are available.

21. Leaders and managers set high standards and are approachable, open and reflective. Staff understand the direction of the department and school, and share a strong ethos centred upon student development and achievement. Discussions of students' progress and support needs form a prominent part of the various well-organised and recorded staff meetings. Measures to manage performance and provide professional updating and development are very good. Staff feel that their training and development needs are taken seriously by the school, and they have confidence that managers will support development activity. However, there is insufficient emphasis on ensuring staff gain teaching and learning qualifications in addition to specialist vocational qualifications and expertise in the departmental continuing professional development plans.
22. Governors provide good oversight and strategic planning for the school. They are routinely present at school, and attend many of the student performances. Staff are represented on the governing body, though students are not. The governors do not provide direct comment upon the self-assessment report for the programme.
23. Staff and learners have a clear and well-informed understanding of equality and diversity. The course considers a good range of multi-cultural dance and musical forms, and some students have gone on to work in companies whose work centres on non-traditional forms because of the training they received at the school. There is no discernible variation in performance between any identifiable groups of students. Despite thoughtful and consistent attempts to broaden the ethnic range of its applicants, the school still recruits only a small number of students annually from minority ethnic groups. Students with disabilities and with learning difficulties or disabilities perform at least as well as their peers.
24. Safeguarding and measures to ensure learners' safety and health are excellent. The school meets all aspects of legislation regarding the safe vetting of its workforce. Students are closely monitored for health and healthy eating, and staff are highly responsive to any signs of eating disorders amongst students. Excellent training and systems support a range of teaching and guidance sessions on injury prevention and rehabilitation. Since the previous inspection managers have responded sensitively and thoughtfully to requests from students for progressive freedoms as they move through the sixth form. As a result, students now make a staged progress from on-site boarding in year one, to off-site living in school houses for year two and into independent accommodation in year three. Students appreciate the graduated increase in personal responsibility and feel it prepares them well for graduation and independence.
25. Students are given a very wide range of opportunities to share their views with staff and managers, and have high levels of confidence about raising concerns or asking for variations or improvements in their programme. Student representatives are very well established and play a key role in feeding student views to senior managers. The assessment process gives an excellent opportunity for students to comment on their course and the quality of the teaching they receive. Students value this. Employers and visiting practitioners

provide a very good, detailed source of feedback for the school on the quality of students and graduates, and managers analyse this well.

26. Self-assessment is effective in providing managers with a view of strengths and areas for improvement in training. Consultation is good and the report draws on a good range of evidence. The current report is largely self-critical and judgemental though it grades teaching and learning higher than the grade awarded by inspectors.
27. The school provides excellent value for money. Since the previous inspection a new block of five studios has been built, which significantly enhances the teaching and learning and rehearsal space available. A second stage of development work is planned, which will provide much improved performance space for dance and drama students. Bursaries are very well used to encourage under-represented groups into the school and the profession. Fundraising is highly effective and additional funds are quickly directed into staffing or improvements in training facilities.

Information about the inspection

28. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the school's Director of Dance, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
29. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They also observed lessons.

Record of main findings			
Provider name	Tring Park School for the Performing Arts	Inspection number	50525
Learning types:16-18 learner responsive: FE full-time			

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall
Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection Full-time learners	38
Overall effectiveness	1
Capacity to improve	1
Outcomes for learners	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1
How well do learners progress?	1
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1
How safe do learners feel?	1
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1
Quality of provision	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1
Leadership and management	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1

*where applicable to the type of provision

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