



**EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT INSPECTION OF PRIVATE FURTHER
EDUCATION COLLEGES AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS**

ACCESS TO MUSIC

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Proprietor	Mr Adrian Armstrong	
Age Range	16+	
Total number of students	1778	
Numbers by age and type of study	16-17	721
	18+:	1057
	FE only:	1778
Inspection dates	9-11 December 2014	

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the Framework for Educational Oversight of private further education colleges and English language schools. The inspection consists of a three-day team inspection of the institution's educational provision.

The ISI is an approved Educational Oversight body authorised by the Home Office to inspect privately funded further education colleges and English language schools in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework. It is designed to improve the quality of education on offer to international students who attend UK colleges through Tier 4 of the points-based system for student visas.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Educational Oversight Standards;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the quality of colleges, and by placing reports in the public domain, makes this information available to students, Government and the wider community. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success.

The inspection of the college is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on students. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the college, its services or other physical features;
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the college or its accounting procedures;
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the college's compliance with employment law.

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1. CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 Access to Music was established in 1992 as a private company. It is an independent provider of music education and training. In February 2009 it changed ownership, becoming part of Armstrong Learning Limited, a company which also delivers employability and return to work training. It is led by a board of three directors. The company operates from nine centres across England, with a group of senior leaders responsible for managing all centres and undertaking work centrally on behalf of the whole group. Managers are also in place in all centres, with variations in staff levels based upon the size of each centre. The college's aim is to develop students' creativity, intellect and vocational ambition through broad, relevant engagement with a music and music-related curriculum.
- 1.2 Since the previous monitoring visit the college has opened new premises in the centre of Manchester.
- 1.3 The company offers a wide range of courses, from entry and Level 1 to first degrees, in popular music performance and music business. It also offers courses for music teachers. The large majority of courses are at Levels 1 to 3 in a range of music specialisms, including music performance, composition, digital music, music technology and the music business. Most further education students also undertake functional skills training and assessment in English and mathematics as part of their course.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection there were 1778 students at the college, the large majority of whom were aged between 16 and 18. It admits students from the age of 16 upwards. The inspection focused on the work of the Birmingham and Manchester centres, with 212 and 150 students respectively. The majority of students are male. The vast majority are from the UK and the college receives government funding for most of these. The recruitment of international students started in 2011 and at the time of the inspection there were six students on Tier 4 student visas. Almost all home students speak English as a first language; the international students attending have English as an additional language (EAL).
- 1.5 Most full-time courses enrol students annually for courses starting in September. The selection of students takes place following the receipt of an application form and an interview, which includes an initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills and an audition or a review of students' music performance. For international students, English language test results are checked to ensure their English language skills are at an appropriate level. Support is provided for a very small minority of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- 1.6 This visit took the form of a full inspection as the college reported the following material change: the addition of a new centre.
- 1.7 The college was first inspected on 4 to 6 December 2012 when it met all key Standards and the quality of education exceeded expectations. A monitoring visit was undertaken on 26 November 2013 which confirmed the quality of education as

judged at that time had been maintained. The main recommendations from the previous inspection report are:

- Strengthen induction for HE students so that it includes more information and personal support on living and studying in the UK for international students.
- To enhance their learning experience, provide opportunities for HE students to interact with a larger group of HE and international students.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 2.1 **The college exceeds expectations for the quality of education.** At the time of the inspection, all Standards for Educational Oversight were met and quality is excellent.
- 2.2 The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievements is excellent. Students receive an extremely good education in accordance with their objectives and the college's aim to inspire its learners through high quality music education. The college offers a wide range of very high quality courses that fully meet the needs and aspirations of the students and provides clear routes to further study. Courses satisfy Home Office requirements. Testing of students prior to and on arrival is accurate and is highly effective in ensuring that students are placed on the right course in accordance with their abilities and career aspirations. Students are supported by excellent teaching and a well-planned vocational curriculum. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use a wide range of effective teaching methods to inspire and keep the students' interest. Students demonstrate very high levels of knowledge and understanding across the range of courses. High quality music resources are provided and are used very effectively to promote learning. This enables students to be highly creative and develop excellent practical skills. Feedback on assessments is thorough and clearly identifies suggestions for improvement. Overall, students' achievements and progress are excellent.
- 2.3 Arrangements for the health, safety and welfare of students are excellent. The college's buildings are very well maintained and provide a comfortable environment which effectively supports learning. However, sound proofing in a small number of performance areas at the Manchester centre is underdeveloped. A comprehensive range of health and safety policies and procedures are in place and implemented effectively. The college provides a very safe and secure learning environment for students and staff. Fire precautions, drills and evacuations are systematically undertaken and are clearly understood by all students and staff. Student registration and attendance records are extremely well managed and are highly effective in monitoring attendance and taking necessary action. Procedures for reporting to the Home Office are highly secure. The college's pastoral structure provides excellent support and guidance for the students in accordance with its aims. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students under the age of 18 are very good and reflect official guidance. Students report that they are happy and very well supported.
- 2.4 The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management is excellent. The proprietors provide outstanding oversight and discharge their responsibilities extremely well for financial planning and investment in the future. They take the welfare, health and safety of students very seriously and all appropriate legal permissions are in place. Leadership and management are excellent. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and there is highly effective communication between managers and other staff. Well-defined policies and procedures are introduced at all levels, and implemented and monitored appropriately. However, a small number are not yet implemented fully at the Manchester centre. Mechanisms

to monitor quality and the tracking of student progress are excellent. Self-evaluation is very well developed and uses performance data to systematically evaluate and improve performance on the different courses offered. The college successfully attracts highly experienced and professionally respected tutors and managers. Recruitment of staff is in accordance with legal requirements. The college maintains excellent communication with students, who in pre-inspection questionnaires and interviews expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the education provided.

3. THE QUALITY OF THE CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) Assessment of students prior to or on arrival

- 3.1 The assessment of students prior to, and on, arrival is excellent. Detailed entry criteria are set and used by the college to provide accurate and appropriate advice and guidance to prospective students. Effective testing and one-to-one interviews ensure students have the appropriate level of competence and literacy and numeracy skills for their selected programme of study. The process is accurate and students are highly satisfied with their course placements, which they feel are appropriate to their needs and future career aspirations.
- 3.2 On enrolment, students enter a comprehensive six week induction period where they become familiar with the college and their chosen programme of study. They are provided with a comprehensive handbook that includes detailed information regarding attendance requirements and college policies. In addition, following the previous report's recommendation to strengthen induction for HE students, International students are further provided with comprehensive information about living and studying in the UK and in the area in which a centre is located. The college's virtual learning environment (VLE) also provides a wide range of interactive resources to help international students settle into their course quickly. In addition, a local university provides them with full access to their student support and help services including careers advice, counseling and advice on housing, health and disability issues.
- 3.3 Student information gathered before and on arrival, as well as initial course reviews and tutorials, clearly identify if the course is of an appropriate level. Good use is made of this information by teachers to guide their planning. Detailed advice is provided to students if they wish to change classes.
- 3.4 High quality information, advice and guidance are made available to students through the college's brochure and website. The website is detailed and includes accurate information about the curriculum on offer. Students confirm that they are highly satisfied with the pre-enrolment advice they receive.

3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum

- 3.5 The suitability of course provision and curriculum is excellent. Students are extremely well educated in accordance the college's aims and their objectives. The flexible nature of the provision enables the college to provide courses which are appropriately tailored to students' needs. There are pathways for performers, composers and those focusing on music technology or the music business. As a result, students highly value their learning experience and make good progress.
- 3.6 Retention on nearly all programmes is excellent, with the vast majority of students completing their course. Student evaluation is very well integrated into all courses

and each centre makes excellent use of student feedback to inform planning and assessment. Qualifications are in line with the requirements of the Home Office.

- 3.7 Students value and regularly participate in a wide range of music-related enrichment and social activities, which provide good opportunities for the application of developing skills. In addition, following the previous report's recommendation to provide opportunities for HE students to interact with a larger group of HE and international students, specific opportunities for international students to interact with a wider range of learners are provided. For example, students are encouraged to work collaboratively with learners in the media department, and are also provided with an opportunity to use a local professional music studio to work with other artists and students from a local University.
- 3.8 The curriculum is based on a suitable policy statement, is well planned and provides a wide range of courses to meet the different needs and aspirations of students. The courses offered, ranging from entry level to first degrees, encourage progression of learning. Tutorial sessions effectively monitor student progress and enjoyment and ensure that courses are still appropriate for their needs. Courses match those listed in the prospectus and marketing material.

3.(c) The quality of teaching and its impact on learning.

- 3.9 The quality of teaching and its impact on learning is excellent. As a result, students make outstanding progress according to their ability and learning objectives. Students' achievements are promoted by well-informed, interesting and highly stimulating lessons. Thorough planning and an extensive understanding of the needs of their students allows teachers to successfully adapt lessons to meet individual learning needs and effectively challenge students.
- 3.10 Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are highly effective at building students' enthusiasm and confidence for learning. They are generous with their time in and out of the classroom and have extremely good relationships with their students, who feel they care for them as individuals. In most cases, lessons proceed at a brisk pace and quickly engage students' interest and imagination. A wide range of activities and approaches stimulates their interest, enabling them to make rapid progress. Teachers ask searching questions that prompt students to think and respond successfully. Students work extremely well in groups, showing excellent co-operative learning and independence.
- 3.11 Teachers know their students well and readily offer individual help and support to ensure high levels of skills, knowledge and understanding are developed. Lessons address the needs of students through tasks designed to meet their varying abilities. The high expectations of teachers ensure that all students are consistently challenged and well supported to meet their learning goals. Teachers are highly skilled at keeping students focused on their work, even when they are engaged in self-managed activities. The use of technology to enhance learning in the classroom is highly developed and is used well to stimulate students to explore ideas and

express their creativity. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject often inspires and motivates students to greater efforts.

- 3.12 Assessment is regular and thorough; it accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses in the students' progress and highlights areas for improvement. Marking is of an excellent quality. Feedback to students is positive, encouraging, accurate and clearly identifies areas for improvement. Arrangements for tracking students' progress are excellent. The progress of each student is very carefully tracked, allowing managers to monitor their progress effectively.

3.(d) Attainment and progress

- 3.13 Progress and attainment are excellent. Students receive an excellent education which reflects the aims of the college. They quickly master and build confidence in their subject, demonstrating excellent levels of knowledge and understanding.
- 3.14 The evidence from lesson observations, assignments and scrutiny of work shows that the overall standards being reached are excellent, and that outcomes are high in relation to the students' starting points. Analysis of success rates over the past three years indicates that attainment is very high and improving.
- 3.15 Attendance levels are good and very few students withdraw from their chosen course of study. Students report that they are extremely pleased with their progress.

4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY

4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises

- 4.1 Arrangements for the health, safety and security of the premises are excellent. Comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures ensure that the health and safety of students and staff are effective, and the premises are secure. The premises enhance the students' education, being very well maintained with regard to the health and safety of students and staff. Classrooms are spacious, light and well furnished. Sound proofing in classrooms and the vast majority of the more specialised teaching areas is good. However, the sound proofing in a small number of performance areas at the Manchester centre need improvement. All electrical equipment is tested regularly as required. Toilet facilities are adequate in number and are well maintained. Security arrangements are excellent. Students report that they feel very safe, secure and comfortable when at the college.
- 4.2 All necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. These conform to requirements. A comprehensive health and safety policy is in place with clearly allocated responsibilities, supported by appropriate checklists. Up-to-date general and fire risk assessments are carried out with clear follow-up actions. These are regularly reviewed. Detailed individual risk assessments are carried out for all organised off-site activities. An appropriate number of trained fire marshals and first aiders are in place, as well as first aid kits and accident books. Fire action notices are clearly displayed and fire exits are well signposted. Fire protection equipment is properly sited and regularly checked. Regular fire drills are carried out which are well recorded. Students and staff are made aware of their responsibilities in regard to health and safety at induction. Senior staff take swift and effective action when matters of health and safety are brought to their attention.
- 4.3 Proper provision is made for students who are ill or injured. Staff are responsive to individual needs. Both centres are fully accessible by wheelchair users or students with mobility difficulties.

4.(b) Student registration and attendance records

- 4.4 Arrangements for student registration and attendance recording are excellent. Admission procedures are detailed and properly observed. A central register is accurately maintained and individual student files contain relevant information on admission details, academic records and, where appropriate, copies of student visas.
- 4.5 Daily attendance is accurately recorded and closely monitored with unexpected absence followed up on the same day. Communication between administrators and academic tutors is excellent and effectively identifies students who are late or who fail to attend sessions. Students are made aware that regular absence may seriously disrupt educational progress and, where appropriate, will be reported to the Home Office.

- 4.6 Management and administrative staff have a clear understanding of Home Office requirements regarding the enrolment and attendance requirements for students and adhere to them rigorously. Accurate records of all these matters are recorded on the college's database and in students' individual files.
- 4.7 Clear policies and procedures are in place for the collection and refund of student fees and deposits. The policy is fair and applied consistently.

4.(c) Pastoral support for students

- 4.8 Pastoral support for students is excellent. Student welfare is a key priority and the college has invested heavily in ensuring that it meets its aim of providing a safe and supportive environment where students can progress quickly. Detailed oversight and co-ordination of the welfare and pastoral support for students is provided by senior managers. A comprehensive system of progress reviews and attendance reports ensures that individual students' personal and academic development is reviewed regularly. Detailed records are kept.
- 4.9 Relationships between staff and students and amongst the students themselves are excellent, with a strong culture of mutual respect, integration and tolerance. A wide range of policies and procedures reinforce this culture and the expectations of behaviour and conduct. The college has clear anti-bullying and harassment policies and procedures, and students report no instances of such behaviour. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students show that they feel that the college is providing them with a very safe and comfortable environment which is highly effective in meeting their learning needs. Nearly all would recommend the college to others.
- 4.10 Students are fully involved in the review of provision and facilities. Course representatives meet formally with managers and student feedback is effectively analysed and results in clear actions for improvement. The college provides reports to students on responses to their feedback.
- 4.11 Effective careers advice ensures that students are very well prepared for further study choices and life beyond the college.

4.(d) Child protection/safeguarding

- 4.12 The safeguarding arrangements for students under the age of 18 are very good. Arrangements have proper regard to official guidance and the implementation of all strategies is frequently checked by senior managers. There is an overall designated child protection officer who is appropriately trained and takes responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the policy and procedures and advising centre staff. In addition, there is a designated person and a deputy in each centre. All designated staff have undertaken appropriate specialist training. All staff are subject to relevant Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and other checks; accurate records are maintained by the college.

- 4.13 A range of suitable safeguarding policies is in place and effectively implemented. Staff are made aware of safeguarding issues through appropriate on-line training.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) Ownership and oversight

- 5.1 The governance and oversight of the college are outstanding. The college has a well-developed educational purpose that is shared by all staff. The board of directors, through their role in the senior management team, has a clear oversight of its operation, strategic direction and management. The focus of governance and leadership is forward looking, with a clear emphasis on supporting students and achieving very high academic standards.
- 5.2 The board knows the college extremely well and has a clear insight into the day-to-day working of the college, both through their own roles and through comprehensive reports received from other managers. Financial management is highly effective and ensures that excellent teaching and learning resources are in place to meet the recent growth in student numbers and the opening of a new centre. The board has established management structures and both formal and informal procedures that are highly effective in monitoring all aspects of the college's performance.
- 5.3 Excellent governance ensures that the college meets its obligations with regard to safeguarding, health and safety and fire safety, including all statutory duties in respect of students under the age of 18. The college has in place all necessary legal permissions for the use of the premises and relevant insurances and licenses.

5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities

- 5.4 Management structures and responsibilities are excellent. The quality of leadership and management in both centres is excellent. Self-evaluation is rigorous and provides an accurate account of the college's key strengths and areas for development. The leaders are highly successful in sharing the organisational vision and development plans with staff. As a result appropriate action is taken with regard to course development, maintenance of the college's premises and student welfare. A culture of caring for students is successfully embedded throughout the whole organisation and this ensures that all decisions and actions consider the student experience and meet students' needs.
- 5.5 A clear management structure promotes effective systems to initiate and implement policies to meet the college's needs, and to monitor their operation. The structure operates very smoothly and successfully, because it provides clearly defined roles and responsibilities and excellent lines of communication. However, a small number of policies and procedures are not yet fully implemented at the Manchester centre. Relationships between the leadership team and the teaching staff are excellent. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with staff show that they are very happy and extremely supportive of the college.

- 5.6 The college is highly successful in securing and retaining well-qualified staff. A comprehensive system of staff review is in place and is used to ensure staff are well qualified for the work they do, and appropriately supported by the management team. An excellent programme of staff development is in place to ensure that staff are appropriately trained for their roles.

5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback

- 5.7 Quality assurance arrangements are excellent. There is a very strong culture of improvement within the college and arrangements for quality assurance are fully embedded in its operational structure. Data on performance and progress is used extremely well to monitor and evaluate performance, with appropriate actions initiated in a timely manner to bring about effective change. Teaching is regularly observed and effective feedback for performance improvement given, which reflects the college's aims and educational direction.
- 5.8 Student feedback is collected systematically through questionnaires and discussions with students. This feedback is analysed, shared with staff and managers and used regularly to inform teacher development, academic action planning and the identification of the college's priorities. End-of-course questionnaires are analysed by senior academic managers and changes are implemented if appropriate. Responses to pre-inspection questionnaires and meetings with students indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the college.
- 5.9 The complaints procedure is clear and appropriate. Complaints are handled and reported on very effectively which has a direct impact on quality assurance and improvement planning. Complaints are few and students confirmed that they are aware of the policy.
- 5.10 No arrangements for the protection of student fees are in place.

5.(d) Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks

- 5.11 Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks are excellent. The college secures very well-qualified staff through a thorough and efficient staff recruitment policy. All required recruitment checks have been carried out in a timely manner and recorded. Teachers are experienced practitioners and appropriately qualified in their subject areas. The process to validate references and qualifications is excellent and the audit trail is clear with due regard to statutory requirements. A central record is maintained and monitored by senior staff.

5.(e) Provision of information

- 5.12 The college website provides comprehensive, detailed information about the college in line with requirements. The college was highly responsive in providing information for the inspection in a timely manner.

6. ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for further improvement

In order to further improve the excellent quality provided, the college should:

- Ensure policies and procedures are fully implemented at the Manchester centre.
- Ensure sound proofing in the performance areas at the Manchester centre is effective.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with students and examined samples of students’ work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietor and attended registration sessions. The responses of staff and students to confidential pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

Inspectors

Dr Nigel Chambers	Lead Inspector
Ms Penny Horsefield	Team Inspector
Ms Mareve Kilbride-Newman	Team Inspector
Mr Simon Patiniott	Team Inspector