



SEND dance classes

Dance classes for young people with disabilities and additional needs

Contents

1. Introduction

2. Classes & Branches

3. Research

4. Opportunities

5. Feedback

6. Conclusion

7. References





Introduction

Imagination Dance CIC was founded in 2018 to provide dance opportunities to those who are rarely offered them.

We regularly work in the community, providing sessions for older people; those with long-term conditions such as Dementia and Parkinson's; children and adults with learning and/or physical disabilities; and many more! As well as hosting our own timetable of classes, we provide bespoke sessions within care homes, adult day services, schools, support groups and other organisations.



Our SEND dance programme first started in 2019 in Hitchin, and now has expanded to **6 branches across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire**. We have various different classes, suited to different age groups and abilities, focusing on **sensory movement, creativity, and technique**. We also place focus on the wellbeing of our students - physically AND mentally. We want our classes to **be a safe place for young people to freely express themselves**, and have fun!

Our classes

Imagine & Move

Our sensory movement class for our participants who struggle to follow instruction and need a parent/carer to support. We follow themes through the classes, allowing our participants to explore different topics of interest, and have fun in the process. We use props like scarves, ribbons, shakers, bubbles, feathers and more to enhance our participants experiences, and get the most out of our classes. We also use visual aids like picture cards to allow our students to find new ways of moving in an imaginative way.



Magic Movers

Our creative dance class for participants who can follow instructions and participate independently. We learn and build upon new dance skills, working to improve performance skills, co-ordination and fitness through dance routines, technique work and creative activities. These classes also offer a social element, allowing participants to meet and make new friends within a friendly and inclusive environment.



Moving on Up!

For our young adult participants, this 16+ class teaches technique and performance skills, and allows participants to express and communicate through dance. Aiming to improve social skills and creativity, we work with our young adults in collaboration to think up new ideas and ways of moving, and work towards creating routines that are creative, inclusive and fun!



Our branches

Hitchin

Our Hitchin branch was the first to be opened in September of 2019, at Westmill Community Centre.

Hertford

We opened our second branch in April of 2021, with classes now being held at the Hertford Wellbing Hub.

Biggleswade

In September of 2021 we opened our Biggleswade branch at Saxon Pool & Leisure Centre, which included our first Moving on Up class.

Stevenage

Our Stevenage branch opened in April 2022, with classes running at Hampson Park Community Centre, and the Stevenage United Reform Church.

Flitwick

April 2023 saw the opening of our Flitwick branch at Flitwick Lesiure Centre.

Welwyn Garden City

We opened our newest branch in Welwyn Garden City in January 2024, with classes held at Digswell Village Hall.



Example lesson plan



Activity	Music	Description
Welcome	Hello, Hello – Super Simple Songs	Introduce theme
Warm up	Jump Up and Down – Judi Cranston Shake Your Sillies Out – The Wiggles	Follow along with music on spots
Follow along	I'll Be The Captain – Splash'N'Boots	Put on our 'pirate costume', follow along routine
Movement cards	Ahoy Ahoy – The Lever Land Pirate Band	Pirate movement cards
'Sword fights'	He's a Pirate – Klaus Badelt	Inflatable swords
Pathway	Yo Ho (A Pirate's Life For Me) – Disney Studio Chorus	Avoid the sharks, walk the plank, look out the telescope, blast like a cannon
Drumsticks	Here Comes the Pirates - Bounce Patrol	Copy with the drumsticks - 'copying like parrots'
Stretch	Pirates Love The Carribean – The New Fangles	Sit back on spots and 'take off our pirate costume'
Goodbye	Stretch and Breathe – The Wiggles Bye Bye Goodbye – Super Simple Songs	Stretch and goodbye song

We always begin our classes with our **'hello song' and warm up follow along songs**. It is important to maintain **structure and continuity** in our classes, to help our participants settle into the class, to **alleviate any anxiety** before the lesson ahead.

We then introduce the **theme of our class**, these themes often span over a number of weeks, to **keep consistency and really allow exploration** of the theme.

We have discussions about the theme, and then move on to developing **movement based on these themes and any characters or key movements**.

Classes go on to explore our theme through a **variety of games and activities**, all designed to get our participants moving and exploring their ideas in a **creative way**.

We continue to explore the theme through a **sensory journey**, often using **props and sensory items such as bubbles** to expand our imaginations and bring the theme to life.

We always finish our sessions in the same way, with **our stretch song and goodbye song**, which helps our participants to **decompress at the end of the session**, and begin to transition to going home.

Example lesson plan



We always ensure to start our **classes with a dynamic and full body warm up**, to ensure our participants are physically and mentally ready for class. We include an **aerobic workout plus stretching of the body** to ensure our participants are fully warmed up, and to encourage them to reach their potential throughout the class.

Each half term, we choose a **new area of technique** to work on - this could be **balancing, kicks, turns or travelling steps**. We build on this technique from week-to-week, to see **progression and improved confidence** in participants over this period. This also helps us to maintain consistency of routine in the class whilst still trying out new techniques.

We then move on to the **routine** part of our class. We learn a routine each half-term, adding on small portions each week to help **build participant's memory, sequencing skills and confidence in dancing!** These routines vary in style, and we often liaise with participants to choose songs they enjoy or styles they want to try out! At the end of each term we do an **informal end-of-term performance to parents/carers** to showcase the hard work participants have put in. This is often a really special moments for both participants and their guardians to see progress!

We often include a **creative section** in our classes where participants are **encouraged to express themselves freely**. This may be using props, or working in groups/partners.

Before we cool down, we choose a participant each week for **'free choice'**. This is where a participant gets to choose a game for that week's class. Class always finishes with a **cool down**, to relax students and help them transition into going home. We will have a **full body stretch**, and often use this time to reflect.

Activity	Music	Description
Warm up	Better When I'm Dancing - Meghan Trainor Starstruck - Years & Years	Head to toe stretches, cardio including marches, heel digs, arm waves, jumps, etc.
Technique	Dance All Over Me - George Ezra	Turns - Gallop x4, star pose, leg behind, spin on spot. Repeat the other way. Repeat in groups/partners.
Routine	Out of the Woods - Taylor Swift	Ask if participants know the song and where's it from! Start first section of the routine.
Creative	By Your Side - Calvin Harris	Mirroring in partners with scarves. Take in turns to be leader/follower.
Free choice	n/a	Participant choice of game
Cool down	This Wish - Ariana DeBose	Head to toe stretch

Example lesson plan Moving on Up!

Activity	Music	Description
Warm up	Better When I'm Dancing - Meghan Trainor Starstruck - Years & Years	Head to toe stretches, cardio including marches, heel digs, arm waves, jumps, etc.
Technique	Sweet Talker - Years & Years	Gallops - introduce turning gallops. 2x facing the front, 2x the back, 2x the front. Repeat in groups/partners.
Routine	I'm Still Standing - Elton John	Ask if participants know the song. Start first section of the routine.
Choreography	By Your Side - Calvin Harris	Dice - choosing moves to go on our dice, rolling the dice to create a sequence of the dancers choice.
Cool down	Sweetest Human Being Alive - George Ezra	Head to toe stretch

We always ensure to start our classes with a **dynamic and full body warm up**, to ensure our participants are physically and mentally ready for class. Our Moving on Up participants are often encouraged to contribute to the warm up section of the class by **taking it in turns to add in their own stretches**.

Each half term, we choose a new area of technique to work on - this could be **balancing, kicks, turns or travelling steps**. We like to challenge our Moving on Up participants to more advanced steps which are **broken down to make them more digestible**. We will really take our time on the technique section to make sure participants don't rush their learning.

We then move on to the **routine** part of our class. We learn a routine each half-term, adding on small portions each week to help build participant's **memory, sequencing skills and confidence in dancing!** These routines vary in style, and we often liaise with participants to choose songs they enjoy or styles they want to try out! At the end of each term we do an **informal end-of-term performance** to parents/carers to showcase the hard work participants have put in. This is often a really special moments for both participants and their guardians to see progress!

Moving on Up classes are all about **improving the performance skills** of our participants, and so we like to encourage our participants to **develop their own ideas**. We support them in this by doing creative tasks such as working with props, or building sequences of their own choreography.

Class always finishes with a cool down, to **relax students and help them transition into going home**. We will have a full body stretch and use this time to reflect. We will often also play a game at the end of the class.



Research

Research shows that regular physical exercise can **boost our self esteem, mood and sleep quality**, making us less prone to stress and depression.

Figures from Sport England show that most young people fail to meet the **recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise** in the last academic year

“Children with additional needs may struggle with poor attention span, difficulty socialising and limited body awareness. Participating and **expressing themselves through dance can help students overcome these difficulties.**”

-Tiny Toes Ballet



Studies have shown that children with SEND participate less frequently and in a narrower range of physical activities than other children of the same age.

Dance is an accessible way for disabled young people to access exercise, due to the many different styles and ways we can adapt movement to each individual's needs.

When children with SEND engage in physical activity in groups, they have been found to **develop important life skills** like **verbal and non-verbal communication**, sharing, and the **ability to make and keep friends**. These skills are crucial in later life for developing strong and supportive social networks, gaining employment and living independently.



Benefits of dance

- Improved muscular strength and endurance
- Improved aerobic fitness and cardiovascular health
- Improved proprioception (awareness of body in a space)
- Improved co-ordination and agility- translating into movement patterns used for daily activities
- Improved balance and posture
- Improved range of motion and flexibility
- Improved confidence, and communication

75% of disabled young people feel more physically fit after participating in dance.

88% of disabled young people participating in dance classes feel better able to express themselves

Institute for voluntary action research

“Together, dance gives us a voice to be heard, it is our language of communication.”



Opportunities for our dancers

5 Year Anniversary Performance

In April 2023 IDCIC turned 5 years old! In celebration of this we held a celebration event, where participants from each SEND branch were invited to perform with their class. This opportunity, as stated by many of the parents who attended, is one that so few neurodiverse children get, and one that was so special to those who attended and performed. As seen by the smiles in the picture shown left, this day was full of joy for all of us at IDCIC, and something we hope to do again in the future.

Work Experience & Assisting

Over the years we have had the pleasure of some of our older participants returning to assist our teachers during summer camps and workshops. This experience is so special to the students involved, allowing them the freedom, independence and confidence to take steps into their future, and discover what they are capable of.

Workshops & Summer Camps

IDCIC are proud to work with Central Bedfordshire Council and Hertfordshires Holiday Activity Programme to bring holiday workshops to our participants and the wider community. These camps provide respite for the families of our participants, allow our participants a chance to meet new friends, learn dance routines, stay active and have fun throughout the holidays!





4. Feedback

Monitoring based on responses from 23 surveys.
Surveys completed in 2023

94% of parents said our classes were **extremely beneficial** in improving the **mental wellbeing** of their children
6% agreed they were fairly beneficial

71% of participants said our classes were **extremely beneficial** in improving their **friendships and social skills**



"Imagination Dance is invaluable to families of children with SEN. This is the one place we feel safe, not judged, and most importantly accepted"

It's always great to connect with other SEND families. It's a lovely bonding activity to do with my son after school.

"The openness of the staff to children with a wide range of needs is what makes the classes so special"

"I love that my children are able to meet and engage with other children in an accessible and inclusive environment."

"My child's confidence has grown so much thanks to IDCIC"

Case Study 1: Jared Armiger

“This session is the only thing in Jared’s week that he definitely looks forward to. **He cannot wait to get to the class.** All other classes and pastimes Jared shows little interest. The hardest thing is working out exactly what Jared wants and doesn’t want due to being mute, but **Imagination Dance is an obvious love of his.** These classes are a massive positive in Jared’s life. **The class is essential to his positive mental health.** He gains confidence through these activities and he can show off to dad that he is capable and able to flourish. Confidence is higher than ever!”

-Jared’s Dad



“If Jared could speak he would say he wants Imagination Dance everyday - I am almost certain.”

Case Study 2: Eliza Hebbert

Have you noticed positive changes in your child since they joined Imagination Dance classes?

She is more confident about going to the class without me, and talks about her dance club friends

How do you think the class has impacted your child's wellbeing - physical, mental and social?

She has always looked forward to dance club, and starts talking about it the weekend before each session. I have loved seeing her grow in confidence in using scarves and ribbons etc, and in moving her body. Her balance has improved, and her awareness of her body movements.

Do you think the classes have benefited you as a parent/carer - and if so, how?

I have been so proud and happy to see her take part in a hobby that she has really grown to love.



“I like dance club. I like Emma. I like my dance club friends”

5. Conclusion

Our SEND branches continue to be popular, and the feedback from our participants is always positive.

We often get enquiries from new participants, who have been searching for classes like our for a long time, and have never found anything suitable. A lot of our participants have tried 'mainstream' dance classes and struggled with the pace and environment and we frequently get comments about how the structure of our classes is unlike anything they have tried in the past.



From the research carried out this year (2023/24), we can conclude that our classes are beneficial in so many ways to our participants. The quotes from parents show just how grateful they are to see their children thriving in our classes, and the safe environment that they are so grateful for. Our participants themselves show evidence for their enjoyment in classes by the amazing smiles on their faces throughout, evidenced by the pictures included in this booklet. It is so encouraging to see such a breadth of different needs being met in our classes, and the joy felt by everyone.

We are looking forward to expanding our offer to reach new communities and new participants from 2024 onwards.

Thank you to everyone who supports us!

All information correct as of April 2024.

6. References

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