

SHINING STARS SCHOOL OF DANCE & PERFORMING ARTS

Criteria for Progressing to Pointe Policy

Now you child/young person has started their pre pointe class they must be able to obtain and understand these criteria before progressing on to pointe.

“Progressing to pointe prematurely has the potential to cause serious and prolonged injuries, so it is essential for the safety and wellbeing of pupils that the pre-requisites detailed in this document are completed/achieved prior to any pupil being considered for pointe”.

The pupil must be at least 12 years old before they go onto pointe. The bones of the feet do not fully develop and harden until approximately 13-15 years old. A dancer must be strong enough to protect the bones and joints before they are fully developed. Beginning pointe too early can permanently damage immature bones.

The pupil must have at least 3 years of consistent training in ballet. Regular attendance at pre pointe classes (for at least one year) and all ballet classes (for at least three years) is essential before being considered for pointe. Exercises will focus on developing the technique and the muscle strength needed to support the dancers' weight en pointe. Poor attendance (at either pre-pointe classes or regular dance classes) significantly impacts a dancer's ability to develop the necessary strength and technique to progress to pointe. Dedication and a mature and responsible approach toward one's own learning and training is fundamental.

Dancers must know how to sew and tie their ribbons correctly. The ribbons on a shoe are not decorative; they are to support dancers' ankles and encourage correct alignment. The front of the ankle pushes against them when en pointe so there must be resistance, snug to the foot and not gaping. Training is provided in pre-pointe/pointe class on the correct tying of ribbons.

The pupil must be in good health and able to take a whole class. If the pupil frequently needs to rest because of illness or injury, or their attendance is poor, they will not be strong enough for the extra demands that pointe work requires.

Be able to maintain a strong, straight trunk while dancing without any tilt in the pelvis. A straight trunk is held by both the back muscles but more importantly by the lower abdominals. A weak trunk will throw the pupil off balance while en pointe and will make it difficult to perform the ballet steps. This also puts the dancer at risk for injury.

Be able to perform a correct demi-plie position for all transitions. Demi-plie should be performed with turnout from the hips while maintaining the kneecap in line with the 2nd toe, and without allowing the heels to pop up. This should occur in pirouette preparation, jump preparation, relevés, and prior to en pointe positions.

Be able to hold correct turnout while dancing from flat to demi-pointe. Correct turnout is achieved from the hips and not from the feet and knees. In the turned-out position, the foot is in line with the knee cap and hip joint. Correct turnout should be easily maintained in demi-pointe. Weight centred forward over the big toe, heels forward to avoid sickling, and knees straight. Maintaining this correct turnout is more difficult en pointe so it is important a strong position is achieved in demi-pointe prior to being considered for progression.

Pointing of feet/extension of the ankle. The dancer should be able to fully pointe her foot in all steps, without being reminded and without “sickling” (Keep the heels forward toward the big toe). Using floor pressure to pointe (tendu exercises) strengthens muscles in the feet and ankles. The most stable position for pointe work is to have the weight slightly forward over the big toe. If the weight is over the little toe, it will increase the chances of strain and injury. If the pupil is not in the habit of using these foot and lower leg muscles, then they will not be able to support their body weight en pointe.

Posé onto demi-pointe with straight leg. Pupil should have enough strength to push themselves onto demi-pointe without needing to bend the knee. This step is harder to do en pointe and a bent leg is usually a sign of weakness or improper step preparation.

Be able to do 32 relevés in the centre without stopping or ankles wiggling. Strength for pointe work is achieved by repetitive exercises. Relevés are excellent for building up calf muscle strength, which is vital for pointe work. This exercise is more difficult to do en pointe because of the extra height, so strong relevés on demi-pointe is a good sign of strength. The pupil must also go up as high on demi-pointe as they can, improving extension of the ankle and preparing the calf muscles adequately for pointe work.

Be able to hold a relevé passé balance on demi-pointe. The pupil should be well-placed (hips square, back straight, legs turned-out), and have the strength to balance on demi-pointe. This pose is more difficult to correct en pointe, as the surface area for balancing is smaller and the strength requirements are greater.

At Shining Stars, the safety and well-being of pupils is of the highest priority. For those attending pre-pointe classes, careful and continued consideration is taken toward pupils' readiness for pointe. The progression of a pupil onto pointe is at the absolute discretion of the teaching staff and no pupil should attempt pointe or be fitted for pointe shoes prior to receiving appropriate approval to proceed.

Wearing pointe shoes without proper training, professional fitting, and supervision can lead to serious foot and ankle injuries. The stiff structure of the shoe is designed to support the dancer's weight only after years of training to build sufficient muscular strength and proper technique.

Here is a general **disclaimer** regarding the use of pointe shoes:

Disclaimer: The Use of Pointe Shoes

The use of pointe shoes for dancing (pointe work) carries inherent risks of physical injury if not used correctly. The following precautions are essential:

- **Professional Fitting is Mandatory:** Pointe shoes must be professionally fitted in person by a qualified and experienced fitter. Improperly fitting shoes are a primary cause of pain and permanent damage to the feet, ankles, and lower limbs.
- **Requires Years of Training:** A dancer must undergo several years of foundational ballet training to build the necessary foot, ankle, and leg strength before attempting pointe work. Bones in the feet do not fully harden until approximately ages 13-15, making early or untrained pointe work particularly dangerous.
- **Seek Expert Instruction:** Only use pointe shoes under the direct supervision and guidance of a qualified and certified ballet instructor or physiotherapist who has determined the user is physically ready.
- **Potential for Injury:** Dancing en pointe significantly increases the risk of injuries, including sprains, stress fractures, tendon issues, and permanent bone damage if proper technique and equipment are not used.
- **Shoes Have a Limited Lifespan:** Worn-out or "dead" pointe shoes offer less support, increasing injury risk and requiring replacement every 10-20 dancing hours on average for professional dancers.
- By using pointe shoes, you acknowledge the potential risks and confirm that you have met the necessary training and fitting requirements, or are using them solely as a prop with full awareness of the dangers involved.

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Policy ratified January 2026

Policy review January 2027