

Young
Dancer Program

Orlando Ballet School young dancers train with the American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum. Whether you're just starting out or taking steps toward the world's greatest stages, you can cultivate your love for ballet as early as 18 months and hone your craft through your teenage years.

BABY & ME – 18+ Months

- 45-minute class, once per week
- Parent/guardian participation required
- Focuses on coordination, direction, balance, rhythm, and movement
- Encourages early kinetic development, exercise, and family bonding
- No placement required

PRE-PRIMARY 3 – Age 3

- 45-minute class, once per week
- Develops coordination, direction, balance, and rhythm
- Uses fantasy, imagination, and colorful props
- Introduces basic ballet vocabulary
- In-studio showcase performance
- No placement required

PRE-PRIMARY 4 – Age 4

- 1-hour class, once per week
- Introduction to music and movement
- Focus on rhythm, dynamics, and placement
- Builds spatial awareness, alignment, teamwork, and focus
- Showcase performance
- No placement required

PRIMARY A – Age 5

- 1-hour class, once per week
- Continued development of rhythm, dynamics, and placement
- Strengthens spatial awareness and correct alignment
- Encourages teamwork and classroom focus
- Showcase performance
- No placement required

PRIMARY B – Age 6

- 1-hour class, once per week
- Reinforces ballet fundamentals
- Further develops placement, rhythm, and movement quality
- Builds confidence, focus, and teamwork
- Showcase performance
- No placement required

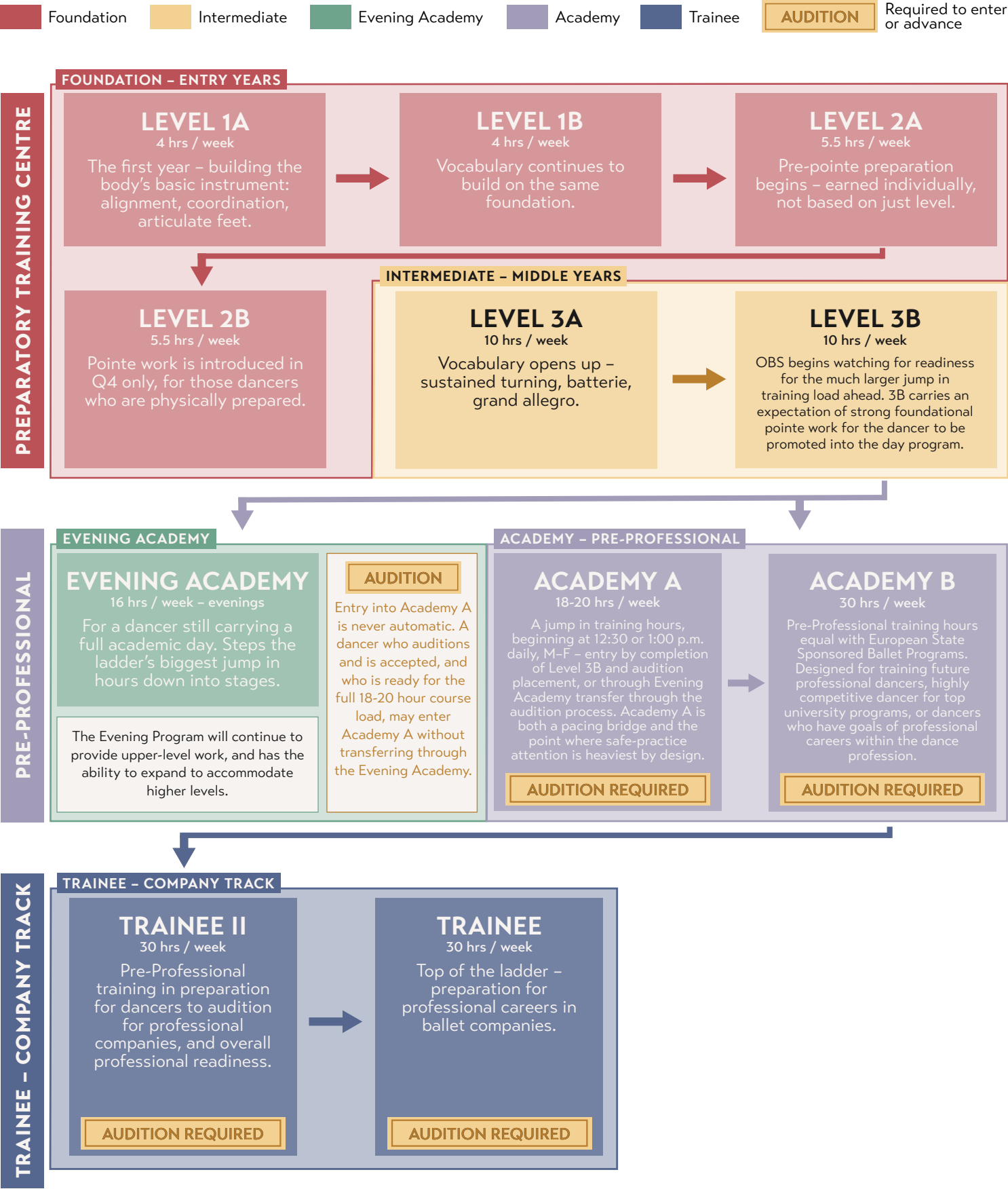
PRIMARY C – Age 7+

- Meets twice per week
- 2 one-hour Ballet classes
- 1 one-hour Jazz class
- Strengthens technique, flexibility, and overall dance knowledge
- More advanced vocabulary and faster pacing
- Students advance according to individual progress
- Showcase performance
- Placement available for ages 7-10

The Orlando Ballet School Curriculum Ladder

How a dancer's training progress, from their first step through pre-professional training

Placement and pace are individualized to each dancer – this shows the possible sequence of levels, not a fixed timeline for every student.



Orlando Ballet School Curriculum

– A Guide for Parents & Guardians

Ballet training can look, from the outside, like it follows its own private logic. This guide is here to make that logic visible: how placement and evaluation actually work at Orlando Ballet School, what it means when a dancer moves up a level (or doesn't), how to support your dancer's body at home, and where to find good outside resources if you want to go deeper.

This guide isn't a substitute for a conversation with your dancer's teacher about their individual progress, and isn't medical advice. Where a topic touches health or injury, the right next step is always a conversation with Orlando Ballet School staff and, when appropriate, a qualified clinician.

1. Understanding the Orlando Ballet School Ladder; Preparatory Training Centre through Academy Levels

Band	Levels	Roughly	Hours/Week	What's Happening Developmentally
Foundation	1A, 1B, 2A, 2B	Entry years	~3-4.5	Building the body's basic instrument — alignment, coordination, articulate feet — before any of the “exciting” vocabulary (turns, jumps, pointe) is layered on. Pre-pointe preparation happens in 2A; pointe shoes are earned individually, not handed out by level.
Intermediate	3A, 3B	Middle years	~8 (up to ~12.5 with Academy Prep)	Vocabulary opens up — sustained turning, batterie, grand allegro. This is also where Orlando Ballet School starts watching for a dancer's readiness for the much larger jump in training load that comes next.
Evening Academy	Evening Academy	The bridge into Academy	16 (an evening schedule — weeknights plus one weekend block)	Orlando Ballet School's bridge into the Academy tier, built for a dancer who is still carrying a full academic day. The Evening Academy is designed for PTC 3B graduates who aren't prepared or are uninterested in pursuing the full-day Academy hours. The curriculum will not be compromised. Evening Academy splits what would otherwise be the ladder's single largest jump in training hours into two smaller, safer steps.
Academy (threshold)	Academy A	The step up	20–25	A big jump in training hours. Where a dancer arrives from Intermediate directly, or by way of Evening Academy, Orlando Ballet School treats this level as both a pacing bridge and the point where injury-prevention and safe-practice attention is heaviest by design, not because something is wrong.
Academy	Academy B	Pre-Professional	30+	Training approaches the pace of a vocational program where hours support it.
Trainee	Trainee II, Trainee (graduating year)	Pre-Professional/ Company Track	30+	The top of the ladder – company-audition and further-training readiness.

The one thing worth knowing at every level: a dancer's placement and pace at Orlando Ballet School are individualized to their own body and readiness, not to their age or cohort. **A dancer is never moved forward just to keep pace with peers, and a dancer working at their own pace is not behind – that's simply how the program is designed to work.**

2. How Evaluation Works at Orlando Ballet School

Evaluation at Orlando Ballet School isn't a singular test at the end of the year – it's built from several layers that work together and that you can ask about anytime:

- The ten-point standard.** Every movement a dancer learns is taught and assessed against the same ten points – name, purpose, character, timing, correct execution, stages of study, combination, common errors, and use on stage. This is how a teacher can say a skill is or isn't secure – it isn't a subjective impression. **As parents or guardians, please review the Alphabetic Scoring as they differ significantly from standard academic grades of A, B+, B, etc. See the following bullet point and read carefully.**
- Quarterly progress.** Within a year, each level tracks a small number of strands (for example, turns, adage, allegro, conditioning) on a simple four-point scale – Introduced, Developing, Consolidating, Finalized. You can ask your dancer's teacher where they sit on any of these strands at any point in the year.
- A year-end standard.** Promotion to the next level is judged against a stated year-end bar – consistent performance across the strands above, plus the specific technical skills that level is meant to build. Syllabi can be shared; curriculum cannot be shared as this is intellectual property.*
- General criteria that apply at every level,** independent of technique: work ethic, compliance with class protocols, full participation and attendance, classroom etiquette, and the recommendation of current and prospective instructors.
- Some gates are firm, not gradual** – pointe readiness is the clearest example (see Section 4 below). These exist to protect a developing body, not to slow a dancer down arbitrarily.

3. When Your Dancer Moves Up a Level

Promotion is built from:

- Consistent performance at or above the year-end standard across the strands tracked that year.
- The specific technical skills named for that level (for example, in 2A: single pirouettes en dehors/en dedans from a clean preparation, a full centre adage, the first batterie, and secure pre-pointe work for dancers who've earned shoes).
- The general criteria above – attendance, participation, protocol, instructor recommendation. Technical skill alone doesn't automatically promote a dancer.
- Some privileges are earned within a level rather than at its boundary. Pre-pointe shoes at the end of 2A are the clearest example: that privilege is awarded individually and can land at a different point in the year for different dancers in the same level. Moving up within a level and moving up between levels are not the same event.

4. When Your Dancer Does Not Move Up (or Stays Longer in a Level)

This is worth stating plainly, because it’s central to how Orlando Ballet School’s program is designed: **staying at a level, working at a modified pace within a level, or not yet earning a privilege like pointe shoes is not a deviation from the program – it is the program working correctly.**

As Orlando Ballet School puts it, on pre-pointe readiness:

“A dancer who is not yet ready is at no disadvantage and is never moved on to keep pace with a cohort – it is rare for a whole class to be ready at once, and each dancer works to their own timeline, receiving the shoes when their preparation is complete.”

That gate has no exceptions in either direction – reaching a level, or reaching the final quarter of it, isn’t itself the reward. The preparation is complete, or it isn’t. Across the ladder, the design principle is *individualized pacing, not cohort pacing*. A dancer who needs more time in a level is being protected from the real cost of rushing – most concretely, injury risk from progressing before their body, not just their skill, is ready.

What this looks like in practice:

- Staying in a level looks like a modified track within the same class, continued full participation, and no loss of standing – not being singled out, and not falling permanently behind.
- If your dancer isn’t ready to move up, expect a conversation with faculty about specifically what needs to develop, an honest sense of timeline where one can be given, and concrete ways you can reinforce that work at home (see Sections 5–6 below).
- As parents and guardians will be receiving quarterly reports, there shouldn’t be any surprises at the end of the academic year as to the dancer’s progress, promotion, or retention. All full-time faculty members have office hours intended to be used for requested meetings.

5. Supporting Your Dancer’s Body at Home

Before the conversation about home practice, cross-training, and stretching at home, etc. We want to state clearly, that this can easily lead to injury in younger dancers. Without proper knowledge going into cross-training conditioning work, and stretching without knowledgeable supervision, there is always a risk of injury.

A few themes that come up again and again in how Orlando Ballet School approaches a dancer’s body and home cross-training are discussed below:

- **Turnout is not stretched into - it’s released and controlled.** Limited turnout is usually a soft-tissue or muscle-recruitment issue, not a bone-structure issue, and forcing it – including through aggressive at-home stretching – risks the knee and ankle rather than helping the hip. If your dancer wants to work on their turnout at home, that’s a conversation for their teacher, not a home program to self-direct.
- **Growth and readiness are individual, not calendar-based.** A dancer’s body develops on its own timeline, and growth spurts, in particular, are a known point of added injury risk in adolescent dancers. That’s a normal, expected part of the ladder, not a setback.
- **Rest and recovery are part of training, not the absence of it.** More practice isn’t always better.
- **Any at-home conditioning tool – resistance bands, foot stretchers, and the like – should be used the way it’s used in class, or not at all.** These tools are meant to support correct alignment, not force

range of motion; **used incorrectly at home, the same tool can reinforce exactly the habit your dancer’s teacher is training out of a movement.**

- **Pain is not a normal part of progress.** Soreness from work is different from pain. Persistent pain – especially anything localized, or anything around a joint – is a signal to talk to Orlando Ballet School and a clinician, not to push through.
- **PBT, mat Pilates and the floor barre and stretching introduced in class in Levels 1-3** can be practiced at home if the dancer is grounded and understands the goal they are working toward.

6. At-Home Cross-Training, Health, and Resources

The resources below are independently published – not created or endorsed by Orlando Ballet School – so if anything here ever seems to conflict with what your dancer’s teacher tells you, follow Orlando Ballet School’s guidance.

6.1 Dance medicine & science

- **International Association for Dance Medicine & Science (IADMS)** – iadms.org – the field’s main professional body. Their [education resources hub](#) and specifically the resource paper [The Challenge of the Adolescent Dancer](#) speak directly to the growth-spurt-related injury risk mentioned in Section 5. IADMS also maintains a [mental health for dancers](#) resource area.
- **The Ballet Blog (Lisa Howell, physiotherapist)** – theballetblog.com – accessible articles on turnout, pre-pointe assessment, and safe resistance-band use, useful if you want the “why” behind what you’re hearing in the studio. Her book, [The Perfect Pointe Book](#), and the companion *My Pre-Pointe Assessment Workbook*, walk a parent through what a pre-pointe assessment is actually checking for.

6.2 Books worth having on the shelf

- **Dance Anatomy** by Jacqui Greene Haas – an accessible, well-illustrated anatomy book aimed at dancers and dance families, not clinicians; good for understanding *why* alignment cues matter.
- **The Perfect Pointe Book** by Lisa Howell, PT – the standard lay reference for understanding pre-pointe readiness.

6.3 Cross-training programs commonly used alongside ballet training

- **Progressing Ballet Technique (PBT)** – pbt.dance – a supplementary strength/conditioning program built specifically around ballet vocabulary, widely used by ballet schools as an add-on rather than a replacement for technique class. PBT is offered in-house as an important tool in conditioning Orlando Ballet School dancers.
- As a general rule, any outside cross-training or conditioning class should build strength and control that supports the alignment your dancer is learning in class, not add flexibility work that overrides the turnout and pointe-readiness principles in Section 5. When in doubt, ask Orlando Ballet School before enrolling.

6.4 Nutrition

- [Nutrition for Dancers](#) – **Children’s Hospital Colorado** – a parent-readable overview of fueling a young dancer, including how increasing training hours changes nutritional needs.
- [Dance Parents: Your Role Matters](#) – **Dance Nutrition** – written specifically to parents about

- supporting, rather than managing, a dancer’s relationship with food.
- For a dancer training 20+ hours/week (Academy A and above), a consultation with a registered dietitian with pediatric or sports-nutrition experience is a reasonable step to raise with Orlando Ballet School or a pediatrician.

6.5 Safety, wellbeing, and the parent community

- Youth Protection Advocates in Dance (YAPD)** – yapdnow.com – an organization focused on safe, healthy dance environments for minors.
- Dance Parent 101** – danceparent101.com – a large, parent-run resource site (not affiliated with Orlando Ballet School) with practical articles organized [by category](#) – everything from recital logistics to supporting a dancer emotionally through setbacks.

7. A Short Glossary for Parents

Term you’ll hear	Plain-language meaning
Aplomb	Stable, centered balance – the base everything else is built on.
Turnout	Outward rotation of the legs from the hip – trained by control, not forced by stretching (Section 5).
Épaulement	The expressive use of the shoulders, head, and gaze – “dancing,” not just steps.
Demi-pointe / pointe / pre-pointe	Rising onto the ball of the foot (demi-pointe); dancing on the tips of the toes in a hardened pointe shoe (pointe); the individually earned preparation phase before pointe shoes (Section 4).
Barre / centre	The two main parts of a ballet class – holding a rail for support (barre), then dancing in the open floor (centre).
Allegro	Jumping work.
Adage / adagio	Slow, sustained, controlled work – balances, extensions, and connecting movements.
Promotion / placement	Which level a dancer is working in – individualized to the dancer, not tied to age (Section 1).

8. Frequently Asked Questions

What does it mean if my dancer is placed in a level below (or above) most kids their age?

Placement is individualized to your dancer’s own readiness, not their age (Section 1) – being in a different level than same-age peers isn’t a judgement about them, and it isn’t unusual.

How will we know where our dancer stands before an official evaluation?

Ask their teacher directly. The quarterly strands described in Section 2 are meant to be a concrete, ongoing conversation, not a surprise at year-end.

What if our dancer isn’t ready for pointe shoes when their classmates are?

They’re at no disadvantage, and they’ve never moved on to keep pace with a cohort – see Section 4 for how Orlando Ballet School frames this.

Can our dancer do other sports or activities alongside Orlando Ballet School training, and does that change as they move up the ladder?

Talk with Orlando Ballet School faculty, especially as training hours increase through the ladder (Section 1) – what’s reasonable to combine with training changes a great deal between, say 3-4.5 hours aweek and 20+.

What should we do if our dancer says something hurts?

Persistent or localized pain, or anything around a joint, is a signal to talk to Orlando Ballet School and a clinician – not to push through (Section 5). Muscles being sore, however, is a normal part of a dancer’s training. Help establish the difference with your dancer so if they are injured they are able to describe specific points on the legs or feet.

How much should we be doing at home, if anything?

Follow your dancer’s teacher’s lead rather than self-directing extra stretching or conditioning – see Section 5 for why, and Section 6 for vetted outside resources if you want to learn more.

What happens if our family disagrees with a placement decision?

Bring it directly to your dancer’s teacher or Orlando Ballet School’s Director of Education, with specific questions about what you’re seeing and what would need to change. Placement conversations are always open.