

LIPA Sixth Form College

Address: 41 Upper Duke Street, Liverpool, L1 9DY

Unique reference number (URN): 142891

Inspection report: 28 April 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, and leadership and governance

Expected standard	● ●
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Expected standard

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have created a welcoming, inclusive culture where staff know their students well and support them to participate fully in their learning. Staff quickly identify students who are disadvantaged or have barriers to their learning through the recruitment process, induction and early project work. They personalise, adapt and refine their teaching strategies and resources to meet students' individual needs. Leaders and staff make learning accessible for all, regardless of disadvantage, barrier or starting point. Students with barriers to learning or disadvantage achieve at least as well as or, in many cases, better than their peers.

Leaders, teachers and support staff work effectively with external organisations and build relationships quickly. They provide swift access to the financial, academic, emotional and personal support that helps students thrive. Staff identify students' changing and emerging needs and vulnerabilities quickly.

Special educational needs staff are well qualified. They provide staff training on how to adapt teaching, how to better identify support needs and how to support specific needs. For example, staff share innovative practice in presenting information through video or audio means to make learning accessible. However, leaders recognise a need to ensure a systematic approach to planning, reviewing and adapting the support that students need.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Following the previous inspection, new leaders and trustees have brought swift improvements and increased stability to the college. They have worked hard to help students to make progress and achieve, to reinvigorate and re-establish the wider curriculum and to repair and rebuild fractured relationships with staff who had lost faith in the previous leaders of the multi-academy trust.

Leaders and trustees know the strengths and weaknesses of their college. They focused quickly on the recommendations from the previous inspection and have now started a thorough self-assessment of the provision. Leaders use a range of activities to monitor and improve the quality of students' experience. They use themed peer observations, departmental observations and college-wide observations to celebrate the work that staff do, share best practice and identify and act on any areas for development. Leaders have a secure oversight of the quality of the curriculum and teaching that students receive.

Teachers and support staff are dual professionals. Many continue to work in the sector to maintain their professional relevance, competency and craft. They benefit from well-planned, evidence-informed training to enhance teaching and professional practices. Staff and students receive training on neurodiversity to help them to better understand each other's needs, wants and behaviours. Staff work with professional external organisations on projects to maintain their industry currency.

New leaders and trustees are mindful of staff's workload and wellbeing. They are visible and present in college and care about their staff. Staff explain that there is greater transparency from trustees and that they feel listened to. Staff are proud to work at LIPA Sixth Form

College. A few staff are still concerned by the uncertainty that remains about the future of the college.

2. Education programmes for young people

Strong standard	
Expected standard	

Strong standard

Achievement Strong standard

Students, regardless of starting points or barriers to learning, achieve extremely well. Almost all students gain merit and distinction grades across all pathways. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve at least in line with their peers, and all students who are disadvantaged gain high grades. Those who study GCSE English and mathematics achieve well.

Students develop comprehensive and extensive new knowledge and skills in their chosen discipline. They fluently and confidently apply their new skills in frequent live performance and production opportunities that require them to work under pressure to very high industry standards and to demanding time frames. By the end of the course, many students are working at a professional level. They achieve excellent outcomes and progress to the destination of their choice.

Students are prepared very well for their next steps. Most progress to destinations that reflect their aspirations, interests and career goals. Students go to prestigious conservatoires, to specialist performing arts institutions, to university and into employment.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching Expected standard

Leaders plan inclusive and ambitious curriculums that are informed by industry practices and that are highly relevant and responsive to students' and industry need. They have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculums they provide.

Leaders and teachers make sure that the curriculums for all pathways are sensibly and logically sequenced. Students develop their creativity, technical skills and knowledge and

academic ability through a well-thought-out curriculum that is closely aligned to the needs of the performing arts industry.

Teachers are experts in their specialist pathways and are highly qualified. Many staff continue to work professionally outside college in performance and production. They bring this expertise and currency to the classroom for the benefit of their students.

Teachers are ambitious for their students and know them very well. They demonstrate physically and vocally the techniques that they teach, so that students can see, hear, feel and understand exactly what they are being asked to do. Students then explore and practise the techniques, repeating until they develop fluency. Teachers create a culture of experimentation that encourages students to take risks in a safe environment. They challenge students to work beyond their comfort zone.

Teachers use a range of effective assessment strategies to check students' understanding and for any misconceptions. In theory lessons, they make effective use of frequent questioning, quick quizzes and short practical tasks to make sure students fully understand technical terminology. In practical settings, teachers use continuous assessment and feedback in workshops and rehearsals, mirroring industry practices. Teachers provide valuable, individualised and real-time feedback on students' work. Students develop a broad range of industry-standard knowledge and skills on their course.

Participation and development

Expected standard

Staff are ambitious for their students. They invest in them and want them to achieve their best. Students are motivated to meet the high expectations of their teachers. They mostly behave professionally and with respect for their teachers and their peers. Students have high attendance rates at college.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have designed and implemented a comprehensive personal development curriculum. They make sure that personal development is tailored to students' specialist subjects and specific needs.

Teachers benefit from training to teach sensitive topics, manage difficult conversations and facilitate meaningful discussions. They teach topics including misogyny, extremism and involuntary celibate culture. Students enjoy their personal development sessions and value the professional input from their specialist teachers that makes the topics relevant.

Students who missed learning in their personal development in the previous year have covered the essential topics that they need to ensure they leave with a deeper understanding of the risks they may face in the professional world. They learn about relevant topics such as consent, professional boundaries, healthy relationships, sextortion and intimacy coordination in the performing arts.

Students benefit from useful careers advice and guidance that helps them to make better-informed decisions about their next steps. They value industry days and visits from practitioners to gain valuable sector insight and networking opportunities.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Students benefit from multiple and frequent opportunities to take part in work-related learning. Every project is subject to industry-standard expectations and work environments. Technical theatre students provide live technical support for rehearsals and productions, often working with high levels of autonomy. They feel the responsibility of their role in the same way as the performance students do in live performances. Performance students are held to the same high expectations and standards as they would be in a professional context.

Students are encouraged to challenge themselves to try new techniques and work outside their comfort zone. They develop self-reliance, independence and confidence from the start of their course. Students quickly feel like they belong. They thrive at college.

Students participate in social action and community projects, led by an active student council, that support their understanding of diversity and vulnerability in the community and roles as responsible citizens. Students organise fundraising events that benefit charities involved in cancer research and awareness, mental health and wellbeing and childhood illness. They benefit from opportunities to engage with other creative professionals and take part in external competitions.

Students enjoy studying at the college. They value the support that they receive and the progress that they make. Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or barriers to learning, feel well supported by staff and peers at college. They feel seen and listened to. Students enjoy positive working relationships, and find that staff are vigilant to their needs and make adaptations that help them. Students with SEND and barriers to learning explain how staff make them feel comfortable to ask for any help that they need. They do not feel judged because of their support needs. Students explain how this helps them to develop their independence and helps them to do well.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to improve teachers' skills so that students benefit from a consistently high-quality curriculum and expert teaching and training across all pathways.
 - Leaders should fully embed the new personal development curriculum so that students confidently and routinely apply and demonstrate fundamental British values, tolerance and respect.
 - Leaders should implement a systematic approach to planning, reviewing and adapting the support that students need to progress, achieve and thrive.
 - Leaders and trustees should continue to build on the improving relationships they have fostered with staff following the mistrust previously prevalent.
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About this inspection

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with trustee board members, leaders, teachers, learning support assistants and students during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the provider:

LIPA Sixth Form College is a 16 to 19 academy. It is part of the LIPA Multi-Academy Trust. The college was established in 2016 and is sited on the same campus as the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA). It provides education programmes for young people, specialising in level 3 study programmes in the performing arts.

At the time of the inspection, there were 395 students studying diplomas and extended diplomas in acting, dance, design for performance, music performance and production, musical theatre and technical theatre. Additionally, 57 students were studying GCSE English and/or mathematics as part of their course.

During the previous inspection, in February 2025, the college was experiencing a prolonged period of industrial action, with around half of staff on strike for 3 days per week every week. Some senior leaders were absent from the college due to illness. Staff returned to their teaching timetables in April 2025, following the industrial action.

Interim principal: Edward Pinner

Lead inspector:

Alastair Mollon, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Anne Tyrrell, Ofsted Inspector

Judy Lye-Forster, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 28 April 2026

Number of learners

Total learners

Education programmes for young people

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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