

LIPA Sixth Form College

16 to 19 free school

Inspection dates

26–28 February 2019

Overall effectiveness			Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for students	Outstanding		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Governors have created a culture in which staff have very high expectations. Consequently, students aspire to reach exceptionally high standards in their written work and practical skills.
- Leaders and managers have developed a well-planned project-based study programme in which students develop excellent creative skills. Students strongly develop their resilience, which prepares them exceptionally well for work within the performing arts industry.
- Students benefit from consistently high-quality teaching from dedicated, inspirational and experienced tutors.
- Tutors are highly adept at helping students improve their English and mathematics skills.
- Students benefit significantly from an extensive range of additional activities, including masterclasses with high-profile professional musicians, actors, directors and dancers. They frequently participate in live performances across the city and in national competitions.
- Staff have created an exceptionally positive and inclusive learning environment in which all students thrive and grow in confidence and ability.
- Almost all students achieve their qualifications, and many achieve merit and distinction grades.
- Students receive outstanding impartial careers advice and guidance which help them make aspirational but well-informed choices about their next steps.
- The large majority of students who complete their study programme move on to higher education courses in conservatoires, prestigious dance and drama colleges and elite universities.
- Leaders and managers do not systematically collate and use the views of students and wider stakeholders to inform self-assessment and subsequent actions for further improvement.

Full report

Information about the provider

- LIPA Sixth Form College is a small 16 to 19 free school established in September 2016. The college is situated on the same campus as the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA). The college provides level 3 study programmes for students aged 16 to 19 years specialising in performing arts. The college currently has 358 students. There are 190 Year 12 and 168 Year 13 students following diplomas and extended diplomas across vocational pathways in acting, music, dance and technical theatre and design.
- The unemployment rate in Liverpool, at 4.4%, is slightly above the north-west rate of 4.1% and the England rate of 4.2%. Within Liverpool, 4.1% of employees work in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector, which is above the average rate in England of 2.6%.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Gather and analyse carefully the views of students and other stakeholders to inform self-assessment and identify areas for further improvement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Governors and leaders have quickly established a clear vision and ambition. They are committed to providing high-quality education and training to maximise opportunities for their students to progress within the performing arts industry. They have created a culture in which staff model high industry expectations and standards within a very caring and supportive environment. Students work diligently and collaboratively to achieve the high standards their tutors set. They make excellent progress and achieve their qualifications. As a result, the large majority move on to prestigious higher education institutions.
- Leaders and managers have been swift to respond to the needs of their students. They quickly adopted a qualification which enabled students to develop finely honed practical skills through project work, replacing a previous less-suitable qualification. They have developed an exceptionally well-planned study programme. Students develop their creative skills in a safe learning environment in which they have 'permission to fail' to help them learn to succeed. This develops their resilience well for working in the performing arts industry.
- Leaders and managers promote very high standards of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers carry out frequent observations of teaching, learning and assessment. They accurately identify good practice and areas for improvement that informs tutors' continuous professional development. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.
- Leaders ensure that tutors benefit from well-planned staff development activities that are highly effective in improving their practice. Tutors value highly the support they receive from their managers. Tutors are committed to continually improving their own practice. As a result, a culture of self-improvement is predominant among tutors.
- Leaders and managers ensure that students receive outstanding impartial careers advice and guidance. They use their links with high-profile industry professionals to inform students of the career opportunities available to them. For example, guest speakers such as directors, musicians, actors, dancers and designers inform students on the wide range of roles and opportunities within the industry. Students make exceptionally well-informed choices on their next steps.
- Tutors develop and build on students' existing English and mathematics skills to prepare them very effectively for working within the performing arts industry. For example, students in dance lessons calculate the degree of angles of arabesque positions. Students who resit their GCSE English and mathematics qualifications improve their grades.
- Managers and tutors have created a very caring and inclusive environment. Students model fundamental British values through their behaviours and attitudes. They demonstrate high levels of respect and celebrate individual differences.
- Leaders and managers meticulously evaluate the quality of provision. The self-assessment report is evaluative and self-critical and accurately identifies the strengths and areas for improvement. However, leaders and managers do not systematically collate and use the

views of students and wider stakeholders to inform the self-assessment and further improvements.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is highly effective. Governors include current members and the founding principal and chief executive of LIPA. They are highly ambitious and committed to the college providing high-quality aspirational teaching and learning. Governors have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Governors have extensive expertise in the performing arts industry and in education. They use their skills and knowledge exceptionally well to support senior leaders and students. For example, they sit on student audition and interview panels to help students refine their interview techniques and prepare for higher education.
- Governors play a full and active role in college life. They frequently attend student performances and parents' evenings. Governors have an excellent overview of the progress that students are making. They set challenging targets for senior leaders to improve the outcomes for students.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors, managers and staff place a high priority on safeguarding students. They receive appropriate training and have a good understanding of their responsibilities. Managers have put in place comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Managers implement safe recruitment practices to ensure that staff are suitable to work with young people. The designated safeguarding lead and deputy record and carefully monitor all safeguarding concerns raised. They have highly effective links with external agencies to keep students safe in matters such as substance misuse and sexual health. Staff work closely with the local authority so that representatives involved in the prevention of knife and gang crime frequently provide students with tutorial sessions. The student counsellor provides swift support for students who have mental health concerns and quickly refers students to appropriate external agencies when necessary.
- Students feel safe. They know who to go to and how to raise problems. Students have a good understanding and awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Tutors develop students' subject skills exceptionally well. They are excellent role models and leaders, and direct their students skilfully in lessons. In all vocational pathways, tutors break down complex tasks into more manageable small steps. This helps students of all abilities grasp concepts. Tutors help students concentrate on what they need to do to develop and complete a piece of work. This helps students build skills and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.

- Tutors improve students' capacity to critically judge their own and others' work skills through involving them in peer assessment activities. As a result, students develop resilience to being questioned about their work. Tutors are extremely proficient at demonstrating techniques in their specialist areas during lessons. They direct students to match this quality and achieve the best they possibly can. Students then work diligently to perfect their skills.
- The quality of students' performance across the performing arts pathways is consistently high. For example, in acting lessons, tutors help students focus on the precision of a character's physical movement. They guide students to develop the character for a role, encouraging them to imagine and play out the aspects of the character in different contexts. In dance, students choreographed routines to raise money for a dementia charity. They drew on their extensive research to develop a sensitive piece informed by the symbolism of mental distress.
- Tutors use their rich expertise gained from studying and working in the arts industry to benefit students' learning. They introduce relevant and highly useful arts industry materials which help students to gain an insight into the world of work and a strong knowledge and understanding of the arts industry. Tutors use their strong knowledge of their subject to enrich teaching and answer students' impromptu questions. For example, acting students carried out detailed research into the 'Theatre of Cruelty'. They devised group pieces with depth and accuracy. Students gained a first-rate understanding of the context in which the dramatist Artaud worked.
- Tutors create projects that build students' professional practice very well. The projects are demanding, akin to those found in the industry. They engender students' interest and motivation in their chosen art. The assignment content is stimulating. Students work fastidiously to meet deadlines and produce high-quality work. Tutors collaborate to make sure that the content of lessons links well to skills used in projects. This ensures that students see the connection and understand how theory connects with practice.
- Tutors set precise target grades which accurately predict students' final outcomes. Tutors closely monitor and frequently check students' progress throughout the year. They make accurate judgements of students' starting points. They update records of students' progress assiduously. Students are noticeably confident in the progress they are making and what they need for their next steps.
- Tutors assess students' work thoroughly. They give useful and accurate feedback. They follow up any actions they suggest, ensuring that students have understood and implemented the suggestion. A secure online system enables tutors to have regular useful dialogue with students on their progress and development.
- Tutors and students create a commendably inclusive learning environment. Students enjoy working in groups. They support those who have less confidence. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) develop skills in line with their peers. Tutors care for their students and ensure that they work safely. Tutors incorporate learning about diversity into their lessons exceptionally well.
- Tutors are particularly successful in improving students' English and mathematics skills. They give excellent one-to-one support to students with SEND. Tutors have clear well-founded strategies to help them get to the heart of gaps students have in their learning. They pinpoint key deficits in students' knowledge. They then work with students, finding

ways to close the gaps. Students make very good progress and improve their examination grades.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Students are very proud to study at LIPA Sixth Form College and of the work they produce. They develop excellent practical skills which prepare them well for working in the performing arts industry. For example, Year 2 acting students develop skills to analyse critically characters they are playing in preparation for rehearsals and to meet the high expectations of the play's director.
- Students benefit from an extensive programme of additional activities. Staff use their excellent links with industry to provide students with masterclasses from an impressive range of high-profile industry professionals. Guest speakers include well-respected actors, musicians, film directors and dancers. Students take part in live performances, both in and outside college, and in highly competitive national competitions. These help students develop an in-depth understanding of the industries in which they aspire to work.
- Students participate in high-quality purposeful and challenging external work experience placements relevant to their career aspirations. Students value working alongside professionals in their chosen industry. For example, music students performing in a local hotel develop high levels of confidence when performing in front of live audiences.
- Tutors skilfully encourage students to explore and debate personal, social and ethical issues in a safe and supportive environment. For example, in preparation for a performance on the topic of 'rebellion', students researched and discussed topics such as the suffragette movement and the Toxteth riots. They confidently articulated how this has shaped their performance piece. In tutorials, staff discuss with students the importance of good mental health and building resilience in preparation for working in the performing arts industry.
- Students benefit from outstanding careers advice and guidance. They visit universities and receive useful guidance from guest speakers in the industry. These help them to gain a valuable insight into the opportunities available in their chosen disciplines. Tutors provide excellent individual support to their students in their UCAS applications and when preparing to audition for prestigious higher education institutions. As a result, students make very well-informed choices on their next steps.
- Students enjoy their learning and are very enthusiastic about the vocations in which they are studying. They demonstrate excellent behaviour and attitudes to work. Collaborative learning and mutual respect for each other's individuality contribute to the culture of inclusivity and the vibrancy that permeates the college.
- Students feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They demonstrate a good awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for students

Outstanding

- The college's first cohort of students completed their two-year study programme in 2018. The proportion of students who achieved their qualification was high. The proportion of

students who achieved merit and distinction grades was high. Almost all students progressed from the diploma and remain on the extended diploma.

- Students make substantial and sustained progress from their starting points. Their written and practical skills demonstrate very good, and often excellent, progress over time, meeting or exceeding the standard required to work within the performing arts industry. For example, sound production students develop skills to overcome complex technical problems for live performances in real-life situations.
- Leaders and managers carefully monitor the performance of different groups of students. Students with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve as well as their peers.
- The few students who have not achieved a standard or strong pass grade in their GCSE English when they enrol on their study programme make very good progress in developing their English skills. In 2018, the vast majority of students achieved standard or strong pass grades when they resat their qualification. Students who resit their GCSE in mathematics make good progress and improve their grades.
- The large majority of students who completed their study programme in 2018 went on to higher education courses relevant to their chosen performing arts pathway. These included a range of conservatoires, prestigious dance and drama colleges and elite universities.

Provider details

Unique reference number	142891
Type of provider	Free school 16–19
Age range of students	16–19
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	359
Principal/CEO	Charles Bartholomew
Telephone number	0151 330 3232
Website	www.lipasixthformcollege.org

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of students (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	358	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of students aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of students for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	n/a							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of LIPA Sixth Form College, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Elaine Price, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Stanley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pauline Hagen	Ofsted Inspector
Ruth Szolkowska	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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