

St Albans Tutors

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

St Albans Tutors was founded in 1988 in its current location close to the centre of St Albans. It is a small tutorial college for young people studying for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications as either one-year or conventional two-year courses. Short courses are offered to students retaking examinations in either November or January. Students work in small class sizes or receive individual support; home tutoring is also arranged when there is a need. Easter revision courses are open to students not studying at the college and, as a registered examination centre, the college is used by external candidates to sit exams. There are currently 76 students between the ages of 14 and 20 on roll; seven are of compulsory school age. There are no students currently with statements of special educational need. The intake of the college is deliberately limited and it ensures it can meet each student's educational needs through interview. Additionally, as part of the assessment process, prospective GCSE students are required to sit English and mathematics tests. St Albans Tutors aims to 'provide every student with focused attention and tailored support in an informal and friendly atmosphere which emphasises individual study, in order to engender a mature and independent approach to learning'.

Evaluation of the school

St Albans Tutors generally provides a good quality of education. The college meets its aims, although currently it does not provide a full-time education for students of compulsory school age and this contributes to some shortcomings in the otherwise good quality curriculum. Older students appreciate the good standard of teaching and assessment, which is also confirmed by parents and carers. Students are making good progress which is aided by small teaching groups, regular assessment and feedback. Staff are vigilant for the safeguarding of students and the college fulfils most of the regulations, although further improvements are necessary to ensure security arrangements meet requirements. The behaviour of students is outstanding.

Quality of education

Overall, the quality of the curriculum is good. The college is flexible in providing a curriculum which meets the needs of most students. The curriculum is devised in such a way that all students effectively learn and make progress; for some students,

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

this follows periods of less than satisfactory progress in other schools and colleges. Each tutor has devised an appropriate scheme of work and plans thoroughly for each of their subject areas. The content of each lesson is carefully tailored to the aptitudes of the students. Links with other education and tutorial providers, for example music specialists, ensure that students follow a course of study appropriate to their needs. However, the college is currently not meeting the needs of the Year 10 and 11 students completely as they are not in school full time and not all receive sufficient human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative tuition. Most, but not all, GCSE students are studying the core curriculum of English, maths and science. AS and A level students' curriculum is more secure, although there is no wider curriculum provision for sixth formers outside of their chosen examination subjects and there is no programme of additional activities to enrich the curriculum. There is a programme for personal, social and health education for younger students, but so far this has been delivered inconsistently across the year. However, a tutor has recently been appointed to this area and the curriculum devised is suitable and ready for delivery. All students receive appropriate careers guidance and preparation for the next phase of their education, which, for most students, is their successful entry to their chosen university. Many younger students are also able to take part in work experience arranged by the college. The curriculum successfully ensures that students take personal responsibility for their learning and for their future adult life.

Teaching and assessment at the college are good, with some that is outstanding. Tutors have high expectations of the students and challenge them well. Through careful teaching they ensure that students fully understand the subject and what is required of them, consolidating learning where necessary. In the best lessons, tutors purposefully engage the students and ensure that they are able to share fully what they know already, explaining and expanding their answers to well-pitched questions. This helps the students to become critically evaluative and more actively engaged in their learning. While students continually apply their intellectual effort, there are too few opportunities for most students to engage with physical or creative aspects of learning. All students are highly motivated and take an interest in their studies. Lessons are consistently well planned and the pace of the lessons is brisk, although tutors are sensitive to when teaching and learning need to be slowed down. Class time is managed effectively and students confirm how much they get through. Tutors are highly knowledgeable in each of their specialist subject areas and of the requirements of current examinations, as many are examiners themselves. They also know their students well and this enables them to plan flexibly around individual and group needs. Although classroom resources are adequate, the range of resources and activities is a little limited to enliven the teaching at times. Students say they would like to have interactive resources to make lessons even more interesting. There are no specialist laboratory facilities for science, but arrangements with another local school ensure that students undertake some practical scientific experiences.

Students are assessed very regularly. This is beneficial to their good progress and to their understanding of what they need to do to reach their target grades. Although targets are not always referred to in lessons, they are made clear through regular

discussion, feedback on homework, monthly mentor sessions and helpful half-termly reporting to parents. Students say they find these are very constructive. Regular testing ensures student performance can be evaluated to the qualifications for which they are striving. Although there are fluctuations in students' progress according to their ability and the difficulties or success they experience with particular modular examinations, their progress is good overall. The college identifies those students who are not making the required progress and act upon this swiftly with both tutors and students.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' personal development is good. Their confidence and self-esteem grows as the support afforded to them helps them to succeed as responsible young people and as scholars. Strong relationships between tutors and students are evident and the students themselves recognise this as being a strength of the college. It is clear that they respect the tutors and the help they are offered. There is a happy and purposeful atmosphere and everyone enjoys their time here. Students are clear of the high expectations tutors have for them and respond well to this, so achievement is good. Students' examination successes and responsible attitude towards study prepares them well for the future. Students' behaviour is outstanding and they are respectful of others. They are polite and courteous and are very willing to talk about their college experiences and their work. Attendance rates are high, with almost all absence relating to students' professional sporting or musical commitments.

Students share that their ideas and suggestions are listened to by staff and acted upon. Social and moral issues are considered within their chosen subject areas. Younger students make a positive contribution to the wider community by organising charitable events for charities of their own choosing. Older students also participate. Last academic year, the college organised for GCSE students to take part in the British Red Cross Humanitarian School Award which involved five challenges, including first aid. Students have demonstrated assertion in using these skills outside of the college. They gain an understanding of parliament and the judicial system not only through their studies but also through visitors such as local politicians and through the relevant professional knowledge of their tutors. Students' understanding of different cultural and religious traditions is mainly incidental and through the wide mix of heritage of students, staff and tutors working at the college.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Welfare, health and safety is good overall because this is taken seriously by the college. All of the students spoken to and those who returned questionnaires to the inspection team confirmed that they feel safe here. However, there is one element of security which requires addressing. There are no incidents to report and only a very small number of minor injuries. There are clear policies for the protection of students and their welfare, including an anti-bullying policy. Relationships between students in lessons are strong and everyone works harmoniously together. Since the last inspection, the college has also produced a policy and guidance in relation to

safeguarding students on outside activities and visits. Thorough risk assessments are always carried out. Ongoing assessments are made of the buildings in relation to fire safety and suitable records are maintained. There were a small number of risks identified at the last fire audit; the majority have been suitably addressed.

Several members of staff have current first aid training and a high proportion of staff have undertaken safeguarding children training. The headteacher is the designated child protection officer for the college and has undertaken the required training. However, there is one training programme in relation to safe recruitment not yet undertaken. As required at the last inspection, the college has prepared a plan to fulfil their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. It continues to do what it can to meet the learning needs of all students. It is not necessarily meeting the health needs of all students due to the sessional nature of the college and the lack of physical experiences provided. Several students and a small number of parents commented that this aspect of provision was not provided for adequately.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The college complies with all of the regulations for the appointment of staff. All applicants, volunteers and trustees are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau and their references and qualifications are corroborated. All the required information, including checks of medical fitness, is kept on a single central record which is easily accessible to the responsible authorities.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The college premises and accommodation are suitable in most respects, but currently the headteacher's office is used for students who may be ill, which is inappropriate. The college has a reasonably well-equipped room for personal study or tuition in media. The whole of the school building has been recently redecorated and a basement room has been refurbished for use by students in break times, adding to the adequacy of the college environment. Classrooms are small but utilised efficiently for the number of students in the sessions. Suitable arrangements continue with the local school to make occasional use of science facilities for some practical experiments and a local church when there are high numbers of students sitting examinations. Currently there is no adequate outdoor space for students' use; the pleasant garden area is overgrown and in need of attention. There is one aspect of security to the premises which has not sufficiently been addressed to ensure the ongoing safety of students, but which could be easily rectified.

Provision of information

The prospectus provides parents and prospective parents with an acceptable overview of the college's aims and its broader provision and the college website is informative and contains all of the necessary information to meet all of the regulatory requirements. Here, it also notifies parents of the academic performance of students in the preceding college year. The college understands the requirement

to make available to parents information about the number of formal complaints registered in the past year. The college works closely with parents by regular communication with them. Since the last inspection, it has improved the quality of the reporting to them. Parents are generally very satisfied with the quality of care and education their children receive at the college.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a written complaints procedure which meets all of the regulations. The school has received no formal complaints in the last year or indeed to date this year.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

- ensure that there is a curriculum policy set out in writing which is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and is implemented effectively (paragraph 2(1))
- ensure that there is full time education for compulsory school age pupils that provides experience in all of the required areas (paragraph 2(2)(a))
- consistently deliver a programme for students' personal, social and health education (paragraph 2(2)(f))
- ensure that the teaching encourages students to apply physical and creative effort (paragraph 3(b))

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure that there are adequate security arrangements in place for the main college building (paragraph 23(d))
- ensure there are appropriate facilities for students who may be ill (paragraph 23(k))
- improve the accessibility of the outdoor area (paragraph 23(s)).

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- provide a greater range of suitable activities or equipment to enliven the lessons and further involve the students.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Tutorial college		
Date school opened	September 1988		
Age range of pupils	14–20 (only currently registered for 14-19)		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 46	Girls: 26	Total: 72
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	Fee structure per subject	£2395 per GCSE	£4355 per AS/A level
Address of school	69 London Road, , St Albans, AL1 1LN		
Telephone number	01727 842348		
Email address	office@stalbanstutors.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Assim Jemal		
Proprietor	Mr Assim Jemal		