

Inspection of St Albans Independent College

69 London Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1LN

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 March 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very happy to attend this school. Many describe the hugely beneficial impact the school has for their achievement and well-being. Pupils really enjoy the excellent relationships they have with their teachers and their peers. They like the fact that the very small class sizes allow them to receive a high level of individual support.

Pupils can study different combinations of subjects over different time periods. For example, if appropriate, they can complete an A-Level qualification in one year. Pupils like that there are lots of subjects that they can choose to study. This bespoke approach benefits the pupils. Pupils' education is very tailored to their needs.

The culture of the school is one of kindness and understanding. Pupils consistently behave well. They listen respectfully to each other's views. They engage with alternative viewpoints and are interested in what others have to say. Pupils benefit from the fact that their teachers give them the knowledge and skills to engage in interesting and relevant discussions. This helps to ensure that they are well prepared for their next stage of education or training.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is coherent and ambitious. Since the previous inspection, the school has made improvements to their curriculum planning. In the main, plans are clear and well structured. Although there is inconsistency in the level of detail in some subject plans, teachers have a good understanding of what to teach and when.

Teachers consistently demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge. They have a good understanding of the requirements of the examination boards. They know how to plan lessons with appropriate resources to best support pupils to achieve well. This includes the high number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In the main, teachers use appropriate strategies to support pupils with SEND to do well. They check how well pupils are doing via formal tests, live marking and skilful questioning. Teachers effectively adapt their teaching if there are gaps in pupils' understanding, or to further deepen pupils' knowledge. This supports the majority of pupils to do well.

The school has recently introduced subject leaders to support senior leaders in developing consistency in the teaching of the curriculum. In many areas this is effective. However, the school has not given staff sufficient training to fulfil their new role effectively. This means that some of the best practice is not shared across the school.

Pupils are attentive in lessons. They appreciate the calmness and friendliness of the school. They get along well and support each other to achieve. Pupils want to learn. There is no disruption to lessons. Teachers skilfully help pupils when they struggle to maintain good levels of attention. They adapt their lesson activities to help pupils

regain their concentration. This means that pupils maintain good levels of focus on their learning.

Many pupils attend school regularly. However, the school has not fully acted on recommendations from the previous inspection regarding improving pupils' attendance. Although they are accurately logging if pupils are absent, the school's systems are not sufficiently robust in order to support some of the more vulnerable pupils to attend well. Subsequently, some pupils do not attend school as frequently as they should.

The school ensures that there is a range of opportunities for pupils to explore their wider interests. They take part in clubs, such as crochet. Pupils engage in raising money for local and national charities. They receive appropriate, independent careers advice. Pupils speak confidently about different opportunities open to them, such as gap years, university and apprenticeships. They also learn important information about taxes and how to budget. Pupils learn about different beliefs and values. They demonstrate a high level of respect for each other's views.

The headteacher is also the proprietor. Since the previous inspection, leaders have a clearer understanding of what the independent school standards are and how to meet them. The school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders engage with external support. This brings important opportunities for scrutiny and challenge to their work.

Parents and pupils are highly complimentary about the school. Many pupils have struggled in other educational settings and now achieve well. They value the nurturing environment and how inclusive the school is. Many pupils report how well staff respond to them as individuals. One parent echoed the words of many when they described the school as 'turning their child's life around'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's systems for monitoring and improving pupils' attendance need to be further refined. Leaders must raise their expectations of what all pupils' attendance should be, particularly vulnerable pupils. If pupils' attendance falls below these high expectations, the school must ensure that they act swiftly to support all pupils to attend well.
- In some areas, leaders are not sufficiently knowledgeable in order to identify where improvements are needed. Some leaders have not been supported well enough to know how to monitor their areas and intervene if standards are not high enough. Although this has not impacted the quality of education that pupils

receive, the school needs to establish a robust system for staff training to allow all leaders to fulfil their role well.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	134087
DfE registration number	919/6243
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10286406
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	49
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Assim Jemal
Headteacher	Assim Jemal
Annual fees (day pupils)	From £19,500 to £41,475
Telephone number	01727 842348
Website	www.stalbanscollege.co.uk
Email address	office@stalbanscollege.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	15 to 17 March 2022

Information about this school

- The college has two sites, at 69 London Road, St Albans AL1 1LN, and at 19 Victoria Street, St Albans AL1 3JJ.
- The college provides GCSE and A-level courses.
- In key stage 5, A-Level courses are provided as two-year, one-year, AS, A2 and retake courses.
- In key stage 4, most pupils study GCSE courses full time over two years.
- Pupils learn in small classes of between one and seven pupils.
- More than half of the pupils in the college are pupils with SEND and approximately 25% have an education, health and care plan. Pupils' needs mainly relate to autism and social and emotional development.
- The governance of the college rests with the proprietor, who is one of the two principals of the college.
- The college does not use alternative provision.
- The last standard inspection took place in March 2022. At this time, the school was judged as inadequate. There were unmet standards, and the school was served with a notice by the Department for Education (DFE), which required an action plan to be drawn up. The action plan was assessed in October 2022 and was found to be unacceptable. A further action plan was assessed in May 2023 and was found to be acceptable with modifications. A progress monitoring inspection took place in January 2023, when the school did not meet all the independent school standards that were checked at that time. A further progress monitoring inspection took place in September 2023, when the school met the independent school standards that were checked at that time.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, classics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, the inspectors held

discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector scrutinised documentation relating to school improvement and quality assurance.
- Inspectors reviewed attendance and behaviour records and observed pupils' behaviour around the school site.
- An inspector scrutinised documentation and met with leaders to discuss the school's approach to pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator and reviewed documentation relating to pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors toured the premises to review the suitability of accommodation. They also scrutinised healthy and safety documentation, including maintenance checks.
- The lead inspector considered responses to the online parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. She also reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Pryor

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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