

Inspection of St Albans Girls' School

Sandridgebury Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 6DB

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| Inspection dates: | 26 and 27 November 2024 |
| The quality of education | Outstanding |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Sixth-form provision | Outstanding |
| Previous inspection grade | Outstanding |

The executive headteacher of this school is Margaret Chapman. The head of school is Paul Kershaw. This school is part of Ambition Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by two chief executive officers (CEOs), Margaret Chapman and Alan Gray. It is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Deborah Strazza.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since January 2013.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish in this truly exceptional school. From the moment they join 'STAGS', pupils are welcomed into a warm and supportive community. They delight in the array of enrichment opportunities, including singing in the choir, staying active with netball or learning sign language in the inspiring 'sign choir'. Pupils care for others and celebrate acts of kindness. They demonstrate commitment to their community by organising or supporting numerous charity events, including a recent colour run. This active engagement in school life fosters a deep sense of belonging and pride in the pupils.

The school sets no limit on what pupils can achieve. This aspirational culture leads pupils to impressive academic success at all stages of their education. Pupils are inspired by their teachers' passion for their subjects. This helps to create a deep love of learning in pupils. Staff know their pupils incredibly well. They tailor the support they give precisely to ensure pupils achieve highly.

Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour. Their conduct reflects the school's ethos of respect and excellence. The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' well-being. Pupils benefit from this highly nurturing environment where they thrive.

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

The school offers a rich and varied curriculum that inspires pupils at every stage of their education. With a broad range of subjects, including an impressive selection in key stage 5, the curriculum is carefully designed to build on ambitious starting points. Welcoming pupils from a variety of primary schools, the school ensures a smooth transition into Year 7. Across all year groups, the curriculum supports pupils to excel and achieve their best.

Teachers are specialists in their subjects. They demonstrate a deep passion and knowledge for what they teach. Enrichment activities are thoughtfully designed to complement the curriculum, inspiring and engaging pupils in their learning. The school ensures that staff benefit from high-quality professional development. Staff are skilled in adapting their teaching to meet the needs of different pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils meet the school's high academic standards.

Teachers check pupils' understanding expertly. They use strategies such as quizzing, testing and targeted questioning to ensure key knowledge is firmly embedded. Teachers guide pupils skilfully to make meaningful connections with prior learning. This enables pupils to retain important information and deepen their understanding. This strong foundation allows pupils to build on their knowledge, achieving high levels of expertise in their subjects.

Reading is prioritised in the school. The school quickly identifies any pupil who is not a fluent reader and gives them high-quality support to gain the skills they need to read confidently. As a result, pupils cultivate a deep passion for reading and make it a regular and joyful part of their lives.

The school's environment is exceptionally positive and harmonious. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and around the school. They are consistently respectful, polite and supportive of one another. In lessons, pupils show remarkable focus and motivation, contributing to a purposeful atmosphere. Pupils take pride in celebrating each other's successes, reinforcing the school's ethos of helping each other thrive.

From Year 7 to Year 13, pupils are encouraged to be curious and reflective about the wider world, fostering a deep understanding and respect for others. Pupils engage thoughtfully with important themes. For example, during the weekly 'STAGS Talks,' pupils explore topics such as misinformation. Pupils celebrate diversity and promote inclusion by supporting peers in wheelchairs through activities such as chair volleyball. Leadership opportunities are plentiful, ensuring pupils develop confidence and responsibility from an early stage. Pupils are actively encouraged to take on meaningful roles, such as sports and house captains, which hone their leadership skills and contribute to the vibrant school community.

Careers guidance is excellent, equipping pupils with a comprehensive understanding of their future options. Pupils benefit from a wide range of enriching experiences. For example, Year 12 students meet successful leaders to develop the skills needed for workplace interactions. These opportunities ensure pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps in life.

Leaders, including trustees and governors, are unwavering in their ambition for all pupils and set a clear, values-driven vision for the school. Their meticulous attention to detail ensures every pupil benefits from their work. Staff and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, reflecting its culture of excellence and care.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and](#)

[protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 137339 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10318610 |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Girls |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,428 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 240 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Deborah Strazza |
| CEO of the trust | Margaret Chapman and Alan Gray |
| Headteacher | Margaret Chapman |
| Website | www.stags.herts.sch.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 22 and 23 January 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- On 1 September 2024, the school became part of Ambition Education Trust.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school currently uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school is part of a consortium of six local schools. As a result, pupils from other schools, including boys, join lessons in the sixth form.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first 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.
- Inspectors met with trust staff, including the CEOs of the trust. They also met with the headteacher, the head of school, two deputy headteachers and senior staff, including those with responsibility for pupils with SEND and responsibility for the sixth form.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and governors.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to: school improvement and governance; behaviour and attendance; alternative provision; the personal, social and health education curriculum; and pupils with SEND. They also held meetings with staff with responsibilities in these areas.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff, parents and pupils. They also spoke to groups of pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, English, art, design and technology, and history. For each deep dive, 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, the 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.

Inspection team

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bessie Owen, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Donna Young | Ofsted Inspector |
| Caren Earp | Ofsted Inspector |
| Sharon Pritchard | Ofsted Inspector |
| David Piercy | Ofsted Inspector |

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