

St Albans Tutors

Independent Sixth Form College

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	9196243
Unique Reference Number	134087
Inspection number	320005
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the college

St Albans Tutors was founded in 1988 on its current site near the centre of St Albans and is now established as a small co-educational sixth form college. The intake of the college is deliberately limited *'so that every student is assured of personal attention'*. There are currently 42 students aged between 15 and 19 years of whom six are below the age of 16. Intake is non-selective. The college emphasises its *'ability to tailor courses to meet students' individual requirements. Each course is designed to help students to make the most of their abilities by consolidating their knowledge, improving examination technique and building up confidence'*. All students attend on a daily basis. There are no students currently with statements of special educational need, although the college occasionally has students with statements placed by the local authority. This is the college's first published report by Ofsted.

Evaluation of the college

The college provides a good quality of education. The college meets its aims by providing carefully planned teaching which recognises the students' individual abilities and aptitudes and supports them in making good progress. Feedback on students' progress is very regular. Students respond well to the small teaching groups and good quality of care and attention that they receive. The college meets most of the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. The college is successful in providing a curriculum which meets the needs of students of all abilities, including those who are under 16. It has a clearly defined and documented curriculum policy which is expressed through the prospectus and college website. It provides a wide range of subjects that can be combined to meet the individual needs of students at both GCSE and advanced levels. Courses at both levels can be taken over one or two years and there is provision for a minority of students to attend 'retake' college courses. The curriculum for students of compulsory age is supported by schemes of work for each subject and a wide range of other published material. Whilst having a number of strengths, some schemes of work place too little emphasis on the teaching and learning strategies to be employed. All Year 11 students attend the college on a full-time basis, although provision is also made for a minority of part-time students who

attend courses by arrangement with their full-time schools to take particular subjects. Such courses normally take place at the end of the college day.

The college takes considerable care to ensure that students, including those who may have previously experienced difficulties during their education, are placed on suitable courses. The curriculum provides them with all National Curriculum subjects with the additional options of German, French and Spanish and such subjects as psychology and sociology. All GCSE students study a core curriculum of English, maths and science, plus a choice of options from a wide range of subjects. Combined or separate sciences are available according to student need and previous learning experience. Art has recently been introduced to the range of curriculum options available.

A programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taken by all students below 16, which includes aspects of citizenship and careers. Most students take the opportunity of having a week's work experience arranged by the college. The college is aware of its responsibility to those occasional GCSE students who may not wish to proceed automatically to advanced level courses. The college has clear strategies for supporting students who may experience learning difficulties. Although the college regularly tailors education programmes for young people who have major sporting commitments, it does not ensure regular physical exercise for all students of compulsory school age. There is no programme of additional activities to enrich the curriculum. Both were issues raised in feedback from students in response to a pre-inspection questionnaire.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. A high proportion of teaching is outstanding. As a result students make good progress and this is reflected in the quality of examination results and in the vast majority of older students proceeding on to a university of their choice. Teachers are all specialists in their subjects and have high levels of awareness of examination requirements and, importantly, the necessary study techniques required. They demonstrate a keen awareness of the learning needs of individual students. Lessons are invariably well planned and are conducted at a good pace, reflecting the teachers' wide experience and subject expertise. Because classes have rarely more than five or six students, and usually less, teachers are able to ensure that all students, irrespective of their ability, are fully engaged with the learning. Discussion and interaction between staff and students is usually good and the level of expectation and the nature of questioning are pitched well to meet individual abilities, but always at an intellectually stimulating, mature and challenging level. Students usually show good levels of interest and response, although this can depend on how long they have been at the college.

Resources are appropriate to meet the needs of all courses and although there is no college library, there is an appropriate range of books available to support learning. Although the college has no specialist laboratory facilities for science, arrangements

are made to use the facilities at a local school for practical science activities. A specialist room for film and for media studies is appropriately resourced.

Assessment is suitable and regular. There are clearly established strategies for monitoring students' progress at GCSE and advanced levels. Teachers maintain appropriate records of students' progress and this is closely monitored. Students have regular discussions with their tutors. Testing for GCSE core subjects is weekly for mathematics and English (science fortnightly) and three-weekly for all advanced level subjects. Central records are carefully maintained. Teachers mark students' work regularly and carefully. Marking focuses on the very regular tests and is effectively supported by ongoing feedback and dialogue between students and tutors; it appropriately includes close attention to the development of literacy skills. Reports to parents made each half-term contain generally helpful information about students' progress. Nevertheless, sometimes reports say too little about what the individual student has actually learned and understood and do not set precise targets for improvement during the subsequent period of time.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The quality of the college's provision for students' personal development is good. Most students enjoy the opportunities provided by the college. The college is effective in raising students' self-knowledge, self-esteem and their self-confidence. Students are expected to take responsibility for managing their own time and accepting responsibility for their own development. Where appropriate they are expected to face the weaknesses that they may previously have experienced. Praise is used effectively by teachers to encourage students and to support their developing self-esteem and self-confidence. In discussion and feedback teachers emphasise the positive aspects of students' progress. Because they improve their learning and understanding, and subsequent examination results, students improve their prospects for their future economic well-being.

Students of all ages respond well to the college's mature expectations of behaviour. Their outstanding behaviour is reinforced by the positive working relations between staff and students and the relaxed atmosphere of the college in general. The high expectations for learning in lessons encourage a mature response from students. Their understanding of right and wrong is developed through aspects of the course in personal, social and health education (PSHE), including visitors such as local police officers. They contribute to the community through fundraising for local and national charities. Their knowledge of public institutions is developed through the citizenship element of PSHE and elements of subjects in the curriculum. Cultural development is supported through discussions in classes and students from a range of cultural heritages mix well together.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The quality of welfare, health and guidance is good. The quality of guidance that students receive has a number of outstanding features. The ongoing monitoring of students' work and the guidance they receive reflect the high quality of provision for their personal as well as academic development. The majority of students confirm that they are happy to be at the college.

The college has prepared and implemented the majority of the required policies relating to welfare, health and safety, but has not yet prepared a policy or guidance in relation to safeguarding students on outside activities or visits. Nevertheless, suitable precautions are taken in most respects to their safety. Appropriate assessments have been made of the buildings in relation to fire and suitable records maintained. The college understands its responsibilities in relation to child protection and related requirements. Although it does what it reasonably can to support students in having a healthy diet, there are no facilities for serving food within the college. Although the college has an effective informal plan to improve access for students who may have a disability it does not yet have a written three-year plan to describe these strategies to meet its responsibility in relation to the Disability and Discrimination Act, 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The college fulfils its responsibilities in most respects for ensuring that new staff are appropriately checked with the Criminal Records Bureau prior to them taking up appointments. However, the college does not ensure that checks of medical fitness are completed as part of this process. Records of all checks are maintained appropriately.

College's premises and accommodation

The college premises and accommodation are suitable in most respects, but it does not yet provide suitable facilities for students who may be ill. Overall, the college makes excellent use of the limited space provided by the centrally located site and there are plans for further improvements. Classrooms are well decorated and furnished. Although they tend to be quite small, classrooms are adequate for the numbers of students that use them. Suitable arrangements are made with a local school to make occasional use of science facilities for some practical experiments.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The college provides all the required information to parents and prospective parents by means of its prospectus and helpful website. Reports to parents are very regular. Communications with parents are good and they are encouraged to call at the college to discuss their children's progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy fully meets the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The college meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide regular opportunities for physical experiences within the curriculum for students of compulsory school age (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare a written policy relating to the health and safety of students on activities outside the school (paragraph 3(2)(c)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment all staff ensure their medical fitness (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for students who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the college should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the college could do to improve further

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

- raise the quality of subject schemes by them providing more detail relating to teaching and learning strategies

- raise the quality of all reports to that of the best so that they focus on what has been achieved and clearly identify specific targets for further development.

College details

Name of college	St Albans Tutors		
DCSF number	9196243		
Unique reference number	134087		
Type of college	Tutorial College/Sixth Form College		
Status	Independent		
Date college opened	1988		
Age range of students	15–19 years		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 29	Girls: 13	Total: 42
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 4	Total: 11
Annual fees	£1,785 – £4,080 per subject		
Address of college	69 London Road St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 1LN		
Telephone number	01727 842348		
Fax number	01727 846804		
Email address	office@stalbanstutors.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Assim Jemal		
Proprietor	Mr Assim Jemal		
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell AI		
Dates of inspection	24–25 January 2008		