

St Albans Independent College

69 London Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1LN

Inspection dates

16–18 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for students	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and students

This is a good school

- The proprietor and the co-principal are uncompromising in their drive to maintain high standards. They have excellent relationships with staff and have high aspirations for all pupils.
- The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards are met but does not check the college's work rigorously against the standards.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- Teachers plan activities that engage and interest pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, leading to good outcomes.
- The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. They have positive attitudes to learning. They show respect to their peers and adults.
- Pupils get on well together in learning and social activities. This has a positive impact on their progress.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the college's work.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They learn about fundamental British values and can explain what these mean to them as young citizens.
- The college is inclusive. It welcomes pupils from different backgrounds and from other schools. It helps them to re-engage in learning.
- The college provides highly effective and personalised pathways for older students. This enables them to secure places at their chosen universities.
- Teachers do not consistently provide guidance that helps pupils improve their work.
- At times, teachers provide insufficient challenge for the most able pupils. Consequently, they do not make as much progress as they could.
- Some systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the college are not fully developed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of leadership by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders have a detailed understanding of the independent school standards
 - monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the work of the college rigorously.
- Enhance the system for tracking pupils' progress so that the information is used more effectively to identify and take action where progress is not leading to outstanding outcomes.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - pupils know the best ways to improve their work
 - the most able pupils are consistently provided with a greater level of challenge.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and co-principal have a clear vision and strong passion to provide an excellent education for their pupils.
- All members of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire agree that the college is very well led and managed. They are proud to be members of staff at the college. One teacher summed up the views of many, saying that 'the proprietor is someone who unfailingly puts all else to one side in the event of any difficulty concerning the feelings/welfare of either a student or staff member'.
- The proprietor, who is also the principal, provides an accurate and comprehensive account of the college's effectiveness. He provides good contextual examples of what the college does well and what it needs to do to improve.
- College leaders are successful in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff.
- Senior leaders monitor and evaluate accurately the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which provides teachers with comprehensive feedback to help them improve.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. A wide range of GCSEs and A levels are offered that meet the needs and interests of the pupils well. Leaders have successfully designed a curriculum that enables all pupils to succeed.
- The special educational needs coordinator has high expectations and provides strong leadership of this aspect of the school's work. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked, specific needs are quickly identified and additional support is swiftly put in place where required.
- Performance management is used effectively to improve staff performance. Staff are set clear and relevant targets linked to college improvement and pupils' progress.
- Staff appreciate the opportunities provided to take part in regular training, including opportunities to develop their qualifications and expertise. It is having a positive impact on their teaching and students' learning.
- Leaders ensure that the college embodies a total commitment to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. There is strong provision and pupils are provided with the skills and understanding to care for and help other people in a diverse society.
- This is a caring college which consistently promotes fundamental British values. In their everyday discussions, pupils reflect on the values of democracy, tolerance and respect.
- The college supplements pupils' learning in lessons with off-site visits to art galleries, field trips and conferences. This adds significantly to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- Leaders and teachers ensure that all pupils have equal access to all that the college provides.
- Leaders are not complacent and recognise that there is more to do. Leaders monitor the work of the college but some of the systems do not lead to rigorous evaluation of the college's overall performance.

- The college has rectified the shortcoming identified in the previous inspection. The temperature of the hot water at the handbasins does not pose a scalding risk. Hot water labels are also present to ensure the safety of pupils.

Governance

- The proprietor provided effective governance.
- The proprietor is highly qualified, knowledgeable and fully committed to the college and its pupils. The proprietor continually reflects on his decisions to ensure that they are in the pupils' best interests.
- The proprietor understands the importance of recruiting appropriate staff to ensure the continued success of the college, and is very successful in identifying talent and nurturing this through training and mentoring within the college.
- The proprietor does not have an in-depth knowledge of the independent school standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding policy meets current government requirements and is published on the college's website. Staff receive regular updates and training to ensure that they understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe.
- All of the appropriate checks are carried out when appointing new staff and recorded on the single central record. Some minor administrative errors were found in the recording of necessary employment checks on the single central record. These were rectified while inspectors were on site.
- The designated safeguarding lead is trained to an appropriate level. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are highly experienced and knowledgeable.
- All statutory policies are in place and are reviewed regularly by the proprietor.
- The college uses external providers to complete regular audits of the college and make suggestions for improvement, which are followed up quickly.
- Suitable risk assessments are carried out for activities inside the college and for off-site visits. The precautions for fire prevention are thorough. The college site is secure.
- Leaders have successfully built safeguarding into the curriculum. Pupils are taught about how to keep safe, including when using social media.
- Pupils say they feel safe in college and know they can approach any adult if they have a worry or a concern. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, indicate their children are happy and the college looks after them well. These views were strongly confirmed by the results of the college's own surveys.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good. Teachers show a strong desire to provide pupils with high-quality learning experiences.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Well-planned learning activities that cater for pupils' individual learning needs ensure that pupils enjoy college and make good progress.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and are able to enthuse pupils, who are keen to learn. Teachers develop pupils' skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics effectively while retaining their interest and motivation. Very positive attitudes were evident in every lesson visited by inspectors.
- Pupils receive consistent high-quality individual support so that they make strong progress. Teachers ask questions that prompt pupils to think hard about their answers and explanations. They question pupils skilfully to check their understanding and to tackle misconceptions.
- Teachers have very positive relationships with their pupils. They know their pupils extremely well.
- Teachers monitor pupils' work closely in lessons. Assessment procedures and checks on learning have been developed by teachers to track pupils' individual progress over time. The information is not yet used precisely enough to make sure that pupils achieve outstanding progress.
- Staff work well with pupils to develop resilience and perseverance in tackling tasks. The high staff-to-pupils ratio means that there is always someone to support when individuals struggle with learning.
- The provision for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. Pupils are given tailored guidance about how to improve and are integrated fully into their lessons, working cooperatively with their classmates.
- Homework is set regularly and is used to deepen and consolidate learning. Teachers ensure that there is sufficient practice in tackling exam-style questions.
- The vast majority of parents agree that their children make good progress at the college and receive appropriate homework for their age.
- Some teaching does not ensure that the most able pupils are challenged to extend their answers or improve the quality of their written work responses sufficiently.
- Pupils are not consistently challenged to think hard and deepen their learning. Where this has strong impact on progress, improvements are closely related to the learning activity rather than more general praise.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The college's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are extremely positive about their college experience and how they enjoy attending. They settle into the college quickly because of the excellent support and care they get.

- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They enjoy coming to college and they value their lessons. The atmosphere in classes is typically very positive, with a clear emphasis on making progress. Pupils show utmost respect for others' ideas and points of view when debating issues.
- The emotional well-being of pupils is a very high priority for all staff. Relationships between teachers and pupils are exceptional. Teachers and pupils have high expectations of each other.
- The college provides outstanding personal support to its pupils. They have a personal mentor who monitors their academic progress, personal development and welfare. The mentors meet frequently with pupils to discuss any issues arising.
- The many trips and visits build up pupils' self-confidence and their ability to be thoughtful, caring citizens.
- Leaders are strongly committed to ensuring that pupils are protected from extremism, radicalisation and any partisan political views. Pupils have a secure understanding of the need to protect themselves from these issues.
- Several members of staff have suitable and current first aid training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Inspectors saw exemplary behaviour across the college.
- Pupils' conduct is excellent. The pupils are extremely respectful of their peers, adults and visitors. They have impeccable manners. The atmosphere in college is an exceptionally positive and happy one, and pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence.
- The college environment is very calm and orderly. The rooms are well maintained and the pupils have great respect for their environment.
- College records demonstrate that there are no cases of serious misbehaviour or bullying. The college provides an extremely supportive environment in which students are not concerned or troubled by bullying.
- There are no exclusions. Overall attendance is in line with the national average. In the current year it has steadily increased. This has come about because leaders heightened their expectations. Leaders have introduced a number of strategies to improve attendance. Staff follow up absence promptly and diligently. For some pupils, due to medical reasons, attendance is sometimes sporadic.
- Some pupils have poor attendance records prior to starting at the college. However, their attendance quickly rises towards the national average after joining the college. Staff help and encourage pupils to understand the importance of good attendance. Parents report that this is in marked contrast to their children's attitude before they joined this college.

Outcomes for students

Good

- For those currently at the college, work in folders indicates that pupils make consistently strong progress in a wide range of subjects. This is as a result of effective teaching.

- Pupils say that they are learning and achieving well and parents agree. In conversation with the inspector, many pupils contrasted this with their previous experience of education.
- Planned checks on pupils' starting points, particularly in English and mathematics, mean that staff identify precise steps for continual improvement. Progress is assessed on a regular basis. As a result, students soon develop positive attitudes to learning and progress well.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. The vast majority are achieving in line with their individual target grades. This is because of the high-quality support they receive from their provision.
- Inspectors saw pupils read confidently in class with fluency and comprehension appropriate to their age.
- The very small proportion of students taking GCSEs makes comparison with national information unreliable. Nevertheless, last year, one third of the grades achieved by Year 11 students were A* to B and two thirds were A* to C.
- Students achieve particularly well in their A-level studies. This is because teaching is good and their motivation to succeed is high. In 2016, half the grades were A* to B and three quarters were in the A* to C range. The majority of students are successful when studying A-level retake courses.
- Students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. Leaders ensure that students are provided with impartial careers guidance. They have access to careers advice in college which is aspirational, impartial and tailored to their individual needs. The vast majority continue to university.
- The most able students do not make rapid progress in some learning activities.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The proprietor and the co-principal are effective in promoting high aspirations and self-esteem. This ensures that students succeed.
- The programmes of study offer sensible progression routes for students joining the college in Year 12. The admissions and induction programme ensures that students make the choices that are right for them.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. The majority of students make strong progress and achieve well. This is because teaching ensures that students do as well as possible and make enough progress to achieve their potential in their studies.
- Students' personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. Every student is assigned to a mentor. Regular meetings with the mentor help students to explore any issues related to their learning so that they are able to fulfil their academic potential.
- A variety of educational trips, visits and work experience give insight into the application of different subjects in real-life situations. They often help inform students' degree and career choices. For example, a visit to the Houses of Parliament enhanced learning for students studying government and politics.

- The college organises social events and trips, for example, go-karting. Students value the way in which teachers encourage them to take part in wider college life.
- Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education because of the opportunities to attend work placements and their competence in the core skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology.
- The exceptional careers advice, guidance and support enable students to make well-informed decisions about their future. This prepares them well for life after the college. In 2016, the vast majority of students who completed their A levels went on to university.

School details

Unique reference number	134087
DfE registration number	919/6243
Inspection number	10033603

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of students	14 to 19
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	82
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	67
Number of part-time students	5
Proprietor	Mr Assim Jemal
Headteacher	Mr Assim Jemal
Annual fees (day students)	£2,800–£15,300
Telephone number	01727 842348
Website	www.stalbanscollege.co.uk
Email address	office@stalbanscollege.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–13 March 2014

Information about this school

- St Albans Independent College expanded to a second campus in 2015 to accommodate the growing number of pupils attending the college.
- The college was previously named St Albans Tutors Independent Sixth Form College (St Albans Tutors).
- The college provides GCSE and A-level courses. All places are funded by parents.

- The college is registered for pupils aged 14 to 19 years. There are currently 82 students on roll aged between 15 and 19 years.
- Most students are over 16 years of age, and are studying A levels. These are provided as two-year, one-year, AS, A2 and retake courses.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 study GCSE courses, together with some additional subjects, full time over one or two years.
- Some pupils have additional needs, such as medical, emotional or educational needs.
- 31 pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some have emotional needs.
- St Albans Independent College aims to support, motivate and promote pupils' personal development so that they achieve their academic potential and, ultimately, attend university.
- The college does not have a governing body. Governance of the college rests with the proprietor, who is the principal of the college.
- The college does not use any alternative provision.
- The college was last inspected in March 2014.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector toured the college sites accompanied by the proprietor.
- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 16 lessons or parts of lessons, all of which were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- The inspector considered a number of documents provided by the college, including the college's self-evaluation document, college development plan, and the college's own pupils' progress information.
- The inspector scrutinised policies, procedures and records in order to check the college's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor, co-principal and other middle leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 12 responses to the questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 11 parents who completed the Ofsted questionnaire and nine text responses.

Inspection team

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Whear	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017